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## **PREFACE**

Welcome to this course on postcolonial literature, the material for which has been carefully selected and prepared to enable your study. This is a dynamic area, extremely relevant to the questions of identity, nationhood, location and power structures.

I take this opportunity to thank the writers, senior scholars all, who have spared their time to write the units for this course. My thanks are also due to Kshamata Choudhary for all the effort she has put into this.

We hope the readers/learners enjoy this as much as we have enjoyed writing and putting it together.

**Jasbir Jain**

## INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial is a term that is off-repeated and often talked about. More important than the term itself are the questions such as why the need for the term arose, why it became popular and what does it achieve when incorporated into literary theory. Finally, what is it that it leaves out and, in order to make up for the shortcomings, what are the likely strategies the writer and the reader can adopt.

It is a term which has been created with a retrospective framework in mind. Thus we extend its application to literatures that were being written much before the term came into use. It is at times used with a hyphen. Elleke Boehmer's views are that post-colonialism when used with a hyphen marks shift in time and is the period after the independence of colony, while postcolonialism without a hyphen indicates the response/resistance to colonialism from its very beginning (*Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p.3). T. Vijay Kumar similarly feels that the hyphen emphasizes the 'colonialism', it effectively separates the colonial past from the postcolonial present (Trivedi and Mukherjee, "Post-colonialism or Postcolonial?", pp.196-197).

One is however inclined to treat this more as a matter of attitude. As long as one feels constantly responsive to the colonial interaction one marks it with a hyphen, and once when one casts off the burden, it becomes a matter of the past. Vijay Kumar cites Ashis Nandy when he says "India is not non-West; it is India", that is we define ourselves through our own being and existence. Fairly increasingly, the term is now being used without a hyphen.

### **Why postcolonialism?**

It is important to engage with the writing and the theory behind it in order to (a) understand histories, (b) encounter the narratives of dislocation; (c) effect a rupture with hegemonic influences; (d) work out a relationship between indigenous aesthetics, subaltern histories, native concerns and writing on one hand and the western readings and interpretation of these.

For any scholar with any serious academic aspirations, it becomes necessary to engage with the above issues as, in the last fifty years or so, the nature of writing and its critical evaluation have changed making new demands on scholarship.

In the 60s there was a huge debate going on whether 'protest' literature could be considered good writing or not. Actually right from the thirties onwards, when ideology made a forceful entry into writing, the argument between 'commitment' and 'propaganda' surfaced. Later, works like *Things Fall Apart* were initially seen as 'protest' writing and thus falling outside the pattern of aesthetic judgment. Western criticism was unable to accommodate this kind of literature and critics began to debate whether new forms of evaluation and aesthetic yardsticks had to be worked out. This was a 'colonial' attitude, with those in power unwilling to accommodate difference.

When gradually centres of Commonwealth writing and later Postcolonial Literature were instituted, it was more as a concession to the writings from the erstwhile colonies than as an acknowledgment of their value. Arun Prabha Mukherjee sees it as a gesture of clubbing all the together literatures, from different historical and geographical backgrounds,

under a convenient umbrella of postcolonialism and in the process, ignoring their heterogeneity (1996 : 13-15). Arif Dirlik located the emergence of postcolonialism as a parallel to the "consciousness of global capitalism in the 1980s", which marked the arrival of the Third World intellectuals in the First World academia (329).

Postcolonialism has several plus points. Some of these are :

- (i) a marked shift in literary aesthetics;
- (ii) transformation from an 'object' position on part of the colonised to a new self-conscious awareness of a 'subject' position;
- (iii) a delving into one's own history, past and culture and interrogating it;
- (iv) legitimisation of protest as a subject matter of literature;
- (v) an increased consciousness of economic and ideological issues;
- (vi) analysis and theorisation of the concepts of identity and identity formation;
- (vii) increased visibility for the erstwhile colonies;
- (viii) compelling the 'other' into an act of self-reflection;
- (ix) enhancing the openness of narrative and linguistic structures as folk forms, ways of storytelling and languages make their entry into mainstream literature;
- (x) as power-structures are opened out, contested and resisted, a continuous process of change is initiated.

One could go on listing a number of shifts, several overlappings and merging into others, but it is important to recognize that neither the writing, nor the theory has stood still. It is constantly in a state of flux.

#### **Other Issues and Concerns :**

There are several minus points as well which scholars constantly question and resist. Some of these are :

- (i) its concern, especially in the first phase, with literatures written in English. It is only approximately from 1990 onwards that literatures in translation have made an entry into this area;
- (ii) it has increasingly become identified with the diaspora and its writing;
- (iii) theorisation from the erstwhile colonies is either limited, or has gone unrecognized, or has been formulated by diasporic critics. This has given an opportunity to western critics to say that the Third World continues to supply the raw material for theory formation by the west (Mitchell qtd. by Darshan Perushek, "Postcolonial Realities, Poststructuralist Diversions: An unamused Exchange", *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 29, 1994);
- (iv) the homogeneity which has been imposed on literatures emerging from the former colonies is also a limiting factor;
- (v) we have also to constantly go on re-evaluating all critical terms and positions as several of these are prejudicial to the interests of the Third World. Each term needs to be opened out, discussed and debated. We need to question them in order to resist hegemonic formations.
- (vi) Somewhere the whole notion of quality is still missing.

## **On-going Discourse**

Despite the above minus points, postcolonialism is a discourse that needs to be engaged in, as terms such as identity, nation, homeland, memory, nostalgia as well as hybridity and mimicry need to be questioned, re-viewed, re-presented and asserted over and over again.

In this course we have tried to address several of these problems. The units have been divided accordingly. We have two novels - one deals with Africa, the other with the partition; three short stories, each one of which opens out a new discourse and takes you to a different country, class or caste. One of them is about dalit identity, another about the impact of the country's division on the Muslim identity, the third on Sri Lankan strife.

The poetry section is divided along language, homeland and territory, women's positions and psychological expressions. Then you have a play about resistance and social change, a travelogue, a short political commentary woven into the diasporic condition and two very perceptive studies on 'imagining the nation' and on the liberation of the nation psyche. This is a journey of self-discovery. And travelling on this road will help you understand your position vis-à-vis the global issues. We travel through the different genres: fiction, poetry, autobiography, travelogue, drama, social and literary criticism and through different landscapes, histories and geographies. Some of the best minds in the country have prepared these for you. But please remember that the text is always important. You need to read it and encounter it first hand. Quality does not admit of short-cuts. These essays then help elucidate and annotate your prescribed texts. It is hoped your intellectual curiosity and desire to learn may send you to a good dictionary, the internet and some works from the "Suggested Reading" list. This phase of your life is a preparation for a meaningful future, no matter where you are located.

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# UNIT 1: CHINUA ACHEBE'S : *THINGS FALL APART*-I

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## STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Biographical Note About the Author
- 1.3 Main Characters, Relationships and Important Places.
- 1.4 Chapter-wise Summary of the Novel
- 1.5 Glossary of Igbo Words and Phrases
- 1.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objectives of this unit are :-

- i) to familiarize you with the text;
- ii) help you read it as a postcolonial novel;
- iii) introduce you to African culture;
- iv) discuss the use of language and its contribution to cultural expression;
- v) bring out the differences from the Indian situation;
- vi) discuss the use of proverbs and phrases as part of postcolonialism.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Published in 1958, *Things Fall Apart* is a 'classic' in every sense of the word and over the years has become the single best known African novel around the globe. This year (2008) is the fiftieth anniversary of its publication. It recounts the life of the warrior and village hero Okonkwo and describes the arrival of white missionaries to his Igbo village and their impact on African life and society at the end of the nineteenth century.

The most striking feature of the novel is the creation of a complex and sympathetic portrait of a traditional village culture in Africa. Achebe is trying not only to inform the outside world about Igbo cultural traditions, but to remind his own people of their past and to assert that it had contained much of value. He also fiercely resents the stereotype of Africa as an undifferentiated "primitive" land, the "Heart of Darkness", as Conrad had referred to it in his novel. Throughout the novel he shows how African cultures vary among themselves and how they change over time.

*Things Fall Apart* is not only a historical novel, reconstructing the recent past of the Igbo people from, 1880s onwards but also a political novel offering an

assessment and analysis of the conditions in the 1880s-1890s Igboland when it was not possible to rise collectively or to mobilise resources to thwart the advance of the more modern and well-organised European civilization. As with most African writers, the contact with the past history of his people came to the novelist as mediated through an older woman, retelling her people's collective history, orally and in her own native tongue, not English. Placed at what the writer has himself called the "crossroads of cultures", in *Things Fall Apart*, he retrospects back to both his community's and his family's past to show, through his narrative, exactly where and how the strains in the settled and conventional Igbo life were first felt in the 1880s with the arrival of the white man and the resultant clash of two diametrically different ways of life. As Chinua Achebe himself puts it in a lecture delivered in 1964 to the Nigerian Literary Association, "The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost".

The novel depicts various cultural tensions and conflicts arising out of a clash between tradition and modernity, the real and the occult and so on. But it is the conflict between the individual and the society and the way in which it is resolved that makes it a cultural expression. In the end, it is the society, the larger entity which emerges triumphant as against the individual who dissociates or de-links himself from the society to assert his pride and individuality. Here the question is not so much about the right or wrong of the individual's convictions or credentials as about the necessity of the people to adhere to the society with its roots in a traditional faith.

*Things Fall Apart* is a rich source of the Igbo customs, beliefs, myths, legends, rites and proverbs. These elements are used both explicitly and implicitly in the form and structure of the novel to show how they shape the life and consciousness of the people. The novel gets its life and source from the oral traditions of Africa which will be discussed in detail in the later units.

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## **1.2 CHINUA ACHEBE : A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

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Born in 1930, Chinua Achebe was brought up in a pioneer Christian family in the large village of Ogidi, an early centre of Anglican missionary work in Eastern Nigeria (and presumably a model for the fictional village of Umuofia). He attended a primary school run by the Church Missionary in Ogidi and was later chosen to attend the government college at Umuahia, considered among the best schools in West Africa. Recognized as an outstanding student, Achebe entered University College, Ibadan, in 1948, around the age of eighteen.

After studying literature at the University of Ibadan, he taught school for a year and then went to work for the Nigeria Broadcasting Company in Lagos. He had

begun writing and publishing short stories during his university years and followed those was the draft of a novel about the Nigerian encounter with colonialism seen through the lives of three generations within the same family. That long draft was ultimately divided into two parts and published as *Things Fall Apart* (in 1958) and *No Longer At Ease* (in 1960). These were followed by *Arrow of God* in 1964 and *A Man of the People* in 1966.

Achebe's radio career ended abruptly in 1966 during the political upheavals that led to the Biafran War. He narrowly escaped confrontation with armed soldiers who suspected him of having knowledge of the military coup in 1966 as his novel *A Man of the People* happened to have a similar plot.

His career as a university academician began in 1967 with his appointment as Senior Research Fellow at the University of Nigeria. He also taught at the University of Massachusetts and the University of Connecticut. Achebe has received numerous honours from different parts of the world, including over twenty honorary doctorates from Universities in Britain, USA, Canada and Nigeria. In 1987 he received Nigeria's highest award for intellectual achievement, the Nigeria National Merit Award.

In 1987 Achebe released his fifth novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*. In 1990 he met with a car accident and was paralysed from below the waist, forcing him to use a wheelchair. In October 2005, *Financial Times* reported that Achebe was writing a novella for the Canongate Myth Series of short novels in which ancient myths from myriad cultures are reimagined and rewritten by contemporary authors. This novella has not yet been scheduled for publication. In June 2007, Achebe was awarded the Man Booker International prize. Today Chinua Achebe lives in USA, teaching at Bard College in New York. He is married and has four children.

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### 1.3 MAIN CHARACTERS, RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPORTANT PLACES

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1. Okonkwo is the main protagonist of the novel *Things Fall Apart*.
2. Nwoye is Okonkwo's son.
3. Unoka is Okonkwo's father.
4. Ikemefuna is the boy who is brought from the neighbouring village Mbaino as a hostage.
5. Umuofia is the name of the village in which Okonkwo lives.
6. Agbala is the oracle of the Hills and the Caves. Chielo is his priestess.
7. Obierika is a close friend of Okonkwo who stays in the same village of Umuofia.
8. Uchendu is Okonkwo's maternal uncle who stays in the nearby village Mbanta.



9. Ekwefi is Okonkwo's second wife.
10. Ezinma is Ekwefi's tenth and only living child.
11. Mr. Kiaga is the white missionary's interpreter who also becomes the vicar of the church.
12. Mr. Brown and Mr. James Smith are the two white missionaries who stay in Umuofia.
13. The District Commissioner is a British officer who is placed at Umuofia.

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## **1.4 SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL**

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### **Chapter 1**

Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond for his personal achievements. He defeated Amalinze called the "Cat" when he was eighteen and after this his fame grew like a bushfire. He was tall and huge and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. He seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody and he did pounce on people quite often. He had no patience with unsuccessful men and so did not get along well with his father Unoka who always borrowed money to make his ends meet. People laughed at his father because he was a loafer and they swore never to lend him any more because he never paid back. Okonkwo was ashamed of his father.

### **Chapter 2**

The town crier calls the people of Umuofia to gather at the market place. There is a tone of tragedy which can be sensed in the announcement. People had forebodings for such news which filled them with fear. Even darkness is considered to be something sinister by them. Okonkwo wondered if the emergency was that of a war with a neighbouring clan but he is not afraid of wars and in Umuofia's latest war he was the first to bring home a human head.

The reason for the meeting is the murder of a daughter of Umuofia in their neighbouring village Mbaino and an ultimatum was immediately dispatched asking them to choose between war or give a young man and a virgin as compensation. Okonkwo went as an emissary of war and returned with a lad Ikemefuna and a young virgin. Ikemefuna though belonged to the whole clan, stayed in Okonkwo's house. Okonkwo had three wives and eight children each one of his wives had her own hut. His eldest son Nwoye was a cause of anxiety for him as he was not as strong and hardworking as his father.

### **Chapter 3**

People of Umuofia consulted the Oracle of the Hills and Caves who was called Agbala to find out about their fate and to consult the spirits of their departed fathers. Nobody had seen Agbala except his priestess. Unoka a man from the

village also went to the cave complaining of his ill fortune but was accused by the priestess for being weak and lazy and the gods would not help such a person.

Okonkwo did not inherit a barn or a title from his father rather he had to support his father's family. He started his life by working as a share-cropper and he borrowed Yam seeds from his rich neighbour Nwakibie to begin independently. Okonkwo thus rose to eminence and social respectability through his own hard work. He fought against the ills of weather and gradually achieved success and power.

#### **Chapter 4**

Gradually Okonkwo rose to be one of the lords of the clan. People respected him for his industry and success. Igbo people said that his *chi* or personal god was kind to him but they had a proverb that when a man says yes his *chi* says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly, so his *chi* agreed. And not only his *chi* but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands. This was an expression of positive will.

Ikemefuna the boy claimed as compensation, who stayed with Okonkwo was miserable and ill as he missed his mother and youngest sister who were back home but gradually he got attached to Nwoye and his mother and to the other children of the household. Okonkwo himself became very fond of the boy but did not show any emotion openly unless it be the emotion of anger.

Okonkwo during the observation of the Week of Peace, broke the rule and got angry on his wife and beat her. Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess, Ani called on him and commanded him to give the penalty. The next day he took to the shrine of Ani one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth, a hundred cowries and a pot of palm wine in way of penance.

After the Week of Peace every man and his family began to clear the bush to make new farms. Yam seeds were prepared for sowing and for the next three or four months everyone worked hard on their fields tending the new crop.

#### **Chapter 5**

The Feast of the New Yam is celebrated which is an occasion of joy. Huts are decorated, friends and relatives are invited. On the village ground on the second day of the new year there is a wrestling match which people watch with great excitement.

All the three wives cook their food separately and each sends a share to her husband before serving it to the family. When the children take the food to their father, they also take the opportunity of talking to their father. Okonkwo was specially fond of Ezinma, his second wife's daughter and wished she were a boy.

## **Chapter 6**

Everyone assembles at Ilo, the village playground to view the match. The elders and grandees sit on their stools, some who come early sit on the stands while others stand and view. It is also the time for the villagers to socialise with each other. Ekwefi, Okonkwo's second wife is very fond of watching wrestling. When the matches are played, the drummers keep beating their drums and the crowd watches with excitement.

There are two teams with twelve men on each side and the challenge went from one side to the other. Five matches ended in this way and the last match was between the leaders of the teams. They were among the best wrestlers in all the nine villages.

Ikezue and Okafo were the final contestants who were almost equal in strength and tricks but in the end Okafo wins.

## **Chapter 7**

Ikemefuna and Nwoye grow up as young men and Okonkwo is pleased to see his son's development and wants him to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father's household and prosperous enough to feed the ancestors with regular sacrifices. Okonkwo tells them masculine stories to educate them with the customs of the clan. They are the stories of violence and bloodshed but Nwoye preferred the tales which his mother used to tell about the animals and the landscape.

Swarm of locusts descended on Umuofia and in the night people caught them and next morning the rare food was roasted and eaten with solid palm oil. This had not happened for many a long year. The elders said locusts came once in a generation.

Ikemefuna had been in Umuofia for three years and he was now to be killed as the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves had pronounced it. Okonkwo with other men take him to the forest and kill him. As soon as his father walked in that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna had been killed and something seemed to give way inside him.

## **Chapter 8**

Okonkwo did not taste food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna and felt weak, remembering him though he did not want to show this as it was a woman's quality. He did not sleep at night, tried not to think about Ikemefuna but the more he tried the more he thought about him. On the third day he asked his second wife to roast plantains and Ezinma brought the food for him. He admired his little daughter who ran errands for the father.

To divert himself, Okonkwo visits his friend Obierika who tells him that his daughter's suitor was coming to fix the matter of bride price. With the means of sticks, the men settled the bride price at twenty bags of cowries.

## **Chapter 9**

Ezinma is suddenly taken ill by high fever which Okonkwo diagnosis as iba. Ekwefi, the mother of Ezinma had borne ten children and nine of them had died in infancy. Several medicine men were called to find the cause but none succeeded every one thought it was a stubborn evil spirit who came again and again to trouble the mother but Ezinma survives through this.

## **Chapter 10**

The village hearing of Mgbafo and Uzowulu's case begins like a drama in which the elders come disguised as spirits and give their judgement. They are called egwugwus and the village crowd stands around as onlookers and participate in the proceedings as one does in a theatre. Okonkwo is one of the nine egwugwus who is recognised by his family even behind his mask but nobody can say anything, lest the spirits get offended.

## **Chapter 11**

Telling stories is a regular feature in each hut. Mothers tell stories to their children. Ekwefi tells the story of the clever and greedy tortoise and her daughter Ezinma also begins relating a story when Chielo, Agbala's prophetess arrives stating that he wants to see his daughter Ezinma and nobody can refuse the Oracle. Chielo carries Ezinma on her back and Ekwefi shadows her and waits outside the cave. Okonkwo also reaches there and Ekwefi is deeply moved to see him there and is reminded of their love in youth.

## **Chapter 12**

Okonkwo's friend Obierika celebrates the marriage of his daughter. Children and women from each house go with food stuff and help in cooking. Two goats are slaughtered to make soup but the fattest was kept to be presented to the in-laws who brought pots of wine to the girl's house. The whole compound was as busy as an anthill. Pots of palm wine arrive from the girl's house. The quantity brought is the symbol of their status and when fifty pots arrive, everyone approves of it. Kola nuts are presented to the boy's family by Obierika. Dancing and singing follows after eating and drinking till late in the night when the guests finally take the bride to spend seven market weeks with her suitor's family.

## **Chapter 13**

The sound of the canon indicates that somebody is dead. Ekwe - the messenger makes announcement in the nine villages that Ezeudu, who was one of the oldest man of his village, is dead. Everyone gathered for the funeral and in an accident Ezeudu's grandson is killed by a shot from Okonkwo's gun and the punishment for this crime is to flee the clan for seven years along with his family.

That night he collected his most valuable belongings into head loads. His wives and children wept and friends came to help and console him. Before the cock crowed Okonkwo and his family left for his motherland. Later clansmen stormed his compound in garbs of war, set fire to his house and destroyed his barn so as to cleanse the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman.

#### **Chapter 14**

Okonkwo was well received by his mother's kinsmen in Mbanta. His mother's younger brother Uchendu was the oldest surviving member of that family. Okonkwo was given a plot of ground on which to build his compound and two or three pieces of land on which to farm during the coming planting season. An 'Obi' was built for him and three huts for his wives but he was sad because he had always aspired to be one of the lords of the clan and this punishment came in his way.

Uchendu's youngest son Amikwu is married with different ceremonies than that of Umuofia. Uchendu calls all his family together after the marriage and comforts Okonkwo giving the argument that when there is sorrow and bitterness a child always finds refuge in his mother and as his mother is buried here he should accept that the mother is supreme and should live his life without sadness.

#### **Chapter 15**

Obierika comes to visit his friend Okonkwo where Uchendu offers them kola nut and wine and Obierika tells them that the clan of Abame is no more as it has been wiped out. He tells how a white man came on his iron horse and the people consulted the oracle who told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction. So they killed the white man and tied his lion horse to their sacred tree. After sometime on a market day three white men came and shot all clansmen except the old and the sick. They doubt the intentions of the white men who were not like the albinos of their land and spoke a strange language through their noses. Obierika brought money in two bags for his friend who had left yam seeds with him before leaving.

#### **Chapter 16**

The missionaries had come to Umuofia and had built a church there and had won converts. They had even been to Mbanta and told people that their Gods of stone and wood were false and there was only one true God who was the creator of all the world and all creatures. They even promised to get iron horses for the people and in the end sang gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism which touched several hearts. They spoke about the son of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Trinity. Okonkwo's oldest son Nwoye who was disturbed by the killing of Ikemefuna and of the twins when born in the clan, got attracted by the hymns and the songs of the new religion and adopted the new faith.

## **Chapter 17**

The missionaries asked the people of Mbanta to give them a piece of land to build their church and houses and Uchendu and his peers agreed to give them the evil forest as they believed that whosoever would go there would die but they built the church and invited everyone to come there on the seventh day. Mr. Kiaga, the interpreter, was in charge of the congregation at Mbanta while the headquarters of the missionaries was Umuofia where they taught young Christians to read and write. Nwoye went there and left his father feeling very sad and dejected. Okonkwo blamed his 'Chi' for his great misfortunes.

## **Chapter 18**

The church rescued the twins left to die in the evil forest and admitted the outcasts of the clan called *Osu* for which there was great resentment even amongst the converts but Mr. Kiaga convinced them that all men are the creations of the same God. The outcasts were made to shave off their long tangled hair, a mark of their heathen belief and given equal treatment. They became the strongest adherents of the new faith. But when one of them killed a python who is considered sacred by the clan there was greater fury for the church and its followers. The clan did not let the christian women fill their water pots or take red earth but when Okoli who had killed the python died a natural death there was peace once again.

## **Chapter 19**

Okonkwo's seven years of exile were about to come to an end. He sent money to his friend Obierika to build him huts in his old compound. He gave a grand feast and invited everyone as he wanted to thank his mother's people before going back to his clan. The women harvested cassava tubers and ferment them to cook and three goats were slaughtered. A variety of food is prepared by his family and palm wine is served to all.

Uchendu the oldest man addressed everyone and stressed the bond of kinship as it was needed more than ever now as an abominable religion of outsiders had settled amongst them.

## **Chapter 20**

Okonkwo wanted to regain the place he had lost in these seven years at Umuofia. He had made plans to return with a flourish and impress his people as he wanted to take the highest title in the land. He had beautiful grown up daughters who would marry the strong and rich man of Umuofia and would add to his power. But the situation in his land had changed. The Christian missionaries and their church had become very important. They had even established their government and punished those who committed a crime. As more and more people had joined the new faith the white men had become powerful. They had begun to create a rift among the natives and thus they were falling apart.

## **Chapter 21**

Mr. Brown, a missionary was much respected by the Christians as well as by the people of the clan. He had built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia. He mixed well with the people and had made friends with some of the important men of the clan also. The local people had presented him a carved elephant tusk which was a sign of dignity and rank. He went round the villages begging people to send their children to his school and so religion and education went hand in hand. The new religion and government and the trading stores were the centre of attraction for everyone. The whole clan was breaking up and had divided loyalties.

## **Chapter 22**

Mr. Brown's successor was James Smith who saw the world as a battle field in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness. The over-zealous converts like Enoch created trouble by provoking the clansmen and their faith. He unmasked the spirits of the earth who were called egwugwu in public which was considered one of the greatest crime and so there was a lot of anger in all the villages. Egwugwu's from Umuofia and from neighbouring villages assembled in the market place and the whole place was thrown into confusion. The angry band of egwugwu destroyed not only Enoch's hut but also the church made of red earth was turned into a pile of earth and ashes.

## **Chapter 23**

When the District Commissioner came back he invited the six leaders to meet him at the headquarters and handcuffed them by deceit. They were ill treated and their clansmen were asked to give two hundred and fifty bags of cowries as a penalty. Okonkwo who was one of the captivated leaders felt choked with hate for the white men.

## **Chapter 24**

Okonkwo and his fellow prisoners were set free after the fine was paid but their hearts burnt with vengeance as their backs bore the stripes of the warder's whip. The next day a meeting was called at the market place. Lots of men gathered but five court messengers' came with the order to stop the meeting. Okonkwo in a flash drew his machete and the messenger's head lay beside his uniformed body. The crowd let the other messengers escape.

## **Chapter 25**

The District commissioner arrived at Okonkwo's compound with a band of armed soldiers and court messengers to arrest him but found him hanging from a tree at the back of his hut. Obierika requested the commissioner's men to take down the body of Okonkwo from the bush and bury him as it was against their custom to touch a man who takes his own life as it is a offence against the Earth. The body of such a man becomes evil and can be touched only by strangers.

The commissioner went back thinking about the book he planned to write in which he would write a chapter about the man who hanged himself. There was so much else to include in his book. He had already chosen the title after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

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## 1.5 GLOSSARY OF IGBO WORDS AND PHRASES

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*agadi – nwayi* : old woman.

*agbala* : woman ; also used of a man who has taken no title.

*chi* : personal god.

*etulefu* : worthless man.

*egwugwu* : a masquerader who impersonates one of the ancestral spirits of the village.

*ekwe* : a musical instrument; a type of drum made from wood.

*eneke – nti – oba* : a kind of bird.

*eze - agadi - nwayi* : the teeth of an old woman.

*iba* : fever.

*ilo* : the village green, where assemblies for sports, discussions, etc, take place.

*inyanga* : showing off, bragging.

*isa - ifi* : a ceremony. If a wife had been separated from her husband for some time and were then to be re-united with him, this ceremony would be held to ascertain that she had not been unfaithful to him during the time of their separation.

*tyi – uwa* : a special kind of stone which forms the link between an ogbanje and the spirit world. Only if the *iyi-uwa* were discovered and destroyed would the child not die.

*tigida* : a string of waist beads.

*kotma* : court messenger. The word is not of Ibo origin but is a corruption of “court messenger.”

*kwenu* : a shout of approval and greeting.

*ndichie* : elders.

*nna ayl* : our father.

*nno* : welcome.

*nso – ani* : a religious offence of a kind abhorred by everyone, literally earth’s taboo.

*nza* : a very small bird.

*obi* : the large living quarters of the head of the family.

*obodo dike* : the land of the brave.

*ochu* : murder or manslaughter.



*ogbanje* : a changeling; a child who repeatedly dies and returns to its mother to be reborn. It is almost impossible to bring up an *ogbanje* child without it dying, unless its *iyi - uwa* is first found and destroyed.

*ogene* : a musical instrument; a kind of gong.

*oji odu achu - ijiji-o*: (cow i.e., the one that uses its tail to drive flies away).

*osu* : outcast. Having been dedicated to a god, the *osu* was taboo and was not allowed to mix with the freeborn in any way.

*Oye* : the name of one of the four market days.

*ozo* : the name of one of the titles or ranks.

*tufia* : a curse or oath.

*udu* : a musical instrument; a type of drum made from pottery.

*uli* : a dye used by women for drawing patterns on the skin.

*umuada* : a family gathering of daughters, for which the female kinsfolk return to their village of origin.

*umunna* : a wide group of kinsmen (the masculine form of the word *umuada*).

*Uri* : part of the betrothal ceremony when the dowry is paid.

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## 1.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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- i) In which year was the novel *Things Fall Apart* published?
- ii) What were the names of Okonkwo's father and son?
- iii) What mattered most to Okonkwo in life?
- iv) What is it that Okonkwo hates most?
- v) Why were the people asked to gather at the marketplace in the beginning of the novel?
- vi) Whom did the people consult to know about their fate?
- vii) Name the boy who was brought as hostage to Umuofia.
- viii) The feast of which crop is celebrated by the people?
- ix) Name the playground and the sport for which people assembled?
- x) Why did people welcome the coming of swarm of locusts?
- xi) What are the names of Okonkwo's second wife and her daughter?
- xii) Where did Okonkwo go for exile and who is the oldest surviving member of that family?
- xiii) What was the purpose of the white missionaries?
- xiv) What was the title which the deputy commissioner had chosen for his book?

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## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you have been introduced –

- 1 to the novel *Things Fall Apart*.
- 2 to the biography of Chinua Achebe.
- 3 to the making of *Things Fall Apart*.
- 4 to the main characters of the novel.
- 5 to the chapter wise summary of the novel.
- 6 to the glossary of Igbo words and phrases.

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## UNIT 2: CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*-II

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### STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 The Making of *Things Fall Apart*.
- 2.2 The Relevance of the Title.
- 2.3 *Things Fall Apart* as a Postcolonial Novel
- 2.4 The Novel as a Reflection of Igbo Traditions
- 2.5 Use of Language as a Cultural Assertion
- 2.6 *Things Fall Apart* as a Community Narrative
- 2.7 Main Characters and their Role
- 2.8 Development of Plot and the Narrative Approach
- 2.9 Self Assessment Questions
- 2.10 Let us Sum up
- 2.11 Unit End Questions
- 2.12 Suggested Readings

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objectives of this unit are to :

- i) establish the context and justification of the title *Things Fall Apart*;
- ii) understand the novel as a postcolonial text;
- iii) mark the reflection of African culture in *Things Fall Apart*;
- iv) delineate the use of language as a means of resistance;
- v) judge the role of community and its impact on individual life;
- vi) examine the characteristics and role of the protagonist and other characters;
- vii) study the development of plot and the narrative technique applied.

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### 2.1 THE MAKING OF *THINGS FALL APART*

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Chinua Achebe's motivation in undertaking to write *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is chiefly, as he himself suggested in an interview in 1964, to change the negative images or misrepresentations of Africa as done in works like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939) or Edgar Rice Burrough's *Tarzan*. In all these stories Africa may be said to be no more than only a backdrop to the testing of the character or heroism of their individualized white protagonists under various kinds of stress or unfamiliar surrounding.

It was Chinua Achebe's intention in *Things Fall Apart* not merely to repudiate the western stereotypes of Africa and Africans but also to place at the centre of his narrative, an African living and breathing in an African landscape or environment where even the weather and the cold wind, the 'harmattan' are indigenous and culture specific, just as are the night sounds Okonkwo hears at the beginning of the novel's second chapter. Again, Igbo proverbs, words, social intercourse, rituals, Igbo planting and sowing practices all give a specific African reality to the novel. The white missionaries and the administrator gradually begin to question and destroy the traditional life of the villages from within by eroding its value system firstly through piece-meal religious conversions to christianity and secondly by imposing an alien legal, administrative and political system in place of the traditional Igbo one. Achebe has creatively reconstructed the lost past of his people without glamourising or romanticising it.

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## 2.2 THE TITLE: *THINGS FALL APART*

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The title of Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart* has been taken from William Butler Yeats's poem "The Second Coming". The epigraph taken as the title occurs in the first few lines of the visionary poem.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer.  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold,  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world . . . .

Yeats's poem which comes from the Irish poet's 1921 collection of poems, *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, speaks of the breakdown of the "old" order and its displacement by a "new" order that rouses mixed feelings of revulsion and fascination. Chinua Achebe's novel too is about a forcible break-up of an older and settled order. Focussing on the life of Okonkwo he has assessed and analysed the various reasons for the break up of the older and settled way of life. The protagonist is brave, hardworking and honest but egoistic and reckless. His own pride and the turn of events both contribute to the fall of things. An accidental shot from his gun leads to the killing of a young boy of the clan and as per the norms of the tribe the only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman and he could return to the clan after seven years only. This event happens in the last chapter of part one of the novel and marks the beginning of the things falling apart. Dislocation leads to the subversion of power and Okonkwo had to begin life anew because of the tragic events in life. Part two and three of the novel highlight that the things fall apart because of the discontent, dissent and discord sown amongst the people of Ibo land by the new Christian religion, which the white missionaries brought with them setting son against father.

People start doubting the age old traditions and customs which they have been following without question since birth. Obierika while explaining the loss of faith of the people in the old authority says “The white man is very clever ..... He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart” (162). Even Okonkwo’s son Nwoye gets attracted by the new dispensation and leaves his family thus breaking the norm of following the patriarchal customs. The centre does not succeed in holding and a gradual disintegration begins in the accepted patterns of the society.

After the act of suicide Okonkwo is treated as a “Thing” that has ‘Fallen Apart’ rather than as a human being who had brought much credit to his village. As it is an abomination for a man to take his own life and is an offense against the Earth, his body cannot even be touched and buried by his clansmen as it becomes evil. Okonkwo meets a tragic end but the novel is not only a personal but also a collective tragedy. The title thus is apt and justifies how things fall apart in Igbo land in the 1890’s.

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### **2.3 THINGS FALL APART AS A POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL**

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Postcolonialism in the larger sense represents not only a period but also a conflict within one’s own self as there is an effort to step outside one’s colonial self and to approach the past reality from a new perspective. Jasbir Jain in her essay, “Postcoloniality, Literature and Politics” in the anthology *Contesting Postcolonialism* has focussed on Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* as a major postcolonial text and pointed out the close association between history, literature and theory. In broad terms, postcolonial can be said to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. When a nation start conceiving and constructing ideas and practices to resist colonialism, its ways, ideologies and legacies. The seeds of postcolonialism can be traced. To the resistance and opposition that a nation or a people put up to the impositions of the imperial forces. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* falls clearly in the category of a postcolonial novel.

The strain and tension of the colonised are reflected through the character of Okonkwo, who symbolises the position of the African under pressure in a rapidly changing social situation. Through him Achebe builds a controlled tension between the general and the particular by maintaining a balance between the social and individual perspectives. At the societal level, Okonkwo symbolises the traditional Igbo past which the community wants to preserve. Okonkwo’s inflexibility, his insistence on manliness and his rigid resistance to change are as much individual traits as the traits of his culture. The novel can also be termed as a resistance novel without being overtly political, it draws attention to the cultural imperialism of the white men and portrays how a community falls apart because of the collision between the imperialist powers and the local inhabitants.

Rather than simply being the writing which came after Empire, *Things Fall Apart* is a novel which critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship and sets out to exhibit in one way or another the resistance to colonial perspectives. The novel traces the beginning of colonisation, presents conflict and generates multiple voices which makes it a multi-layered novel.

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#### **2.4 THINGS FALL APART : A REFLECTION OF IGBO TRADITIONS**

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Achebe's novels focus on the traditions of Igbo society. His style relies heavily on the Igbo oral tradition and combines straight forward narration with representations of folk stories, proverbs and oratory. Storytelling was a mainstay of the Igbo tradition and an integral part of the community. Chinua's mother and sister Zinobia Uzoma told him many stories as a child. In his work we find the weaving of folk tales within the fabric of the main story. Each story illuminates community values in both the context and the form of storytelling. The tale about the Earth and Sky in *Things Fall Apart* for example emphasises the interdependency of the masculine and the feminine. Although Nwoye enjoys hearing the tales his mother tells, he pretends to dislike such "women's stories" in order to avoid beatings from his father.

Achebe devotes more than half the text to portray the Igbo society with all its myths, legends, beliefs, customs, superstitions and taboos which are deeply rooted in the consciousness of the people. It is as if he wants to bring back an entire society into the folds of history. The central character of the novel, Oknokwo is a kind of an African everyman, a staunch champion of the Igbo tradition. In his tragic fall we witness the disintegration and fall of an ancient society.

Depending for their subsistence on land, the African people live closely and in harmony with nature. They respect seasonal changes with an almost religious fervour, preparing themselves for the best and the worst. The myths and beliefs associated with season compel them to perform certain rites and rituals which shape their consciousness and their daily lives. They even have their own judicial system – a village council to settle disputes and punish offenders. The daily life of these people is governed by the belief in gods and goddesses whose "omnipotence" they dare not challenge lest they incur their wrath. Ancestral worship as also respect for old people are as deeply ingrained in their psyche as the need for the worship of the deities. The novel's appeal lies primarily in Achebe's portrayal of the communal life of the Igbos. He also brings to attention the weaknesses of these people, the ruthless laws of a tribal society, its treatment of women and children and the custom of discarding new-born twins. Such subtle practices observed by the society are deftly woven into the fabric of the text to lend them the legitimacy of a tribal way of life.

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## 2.5 USE OF LANGUAGE AS CULTURAL ASSERTION IN *THINGS FALL APART*

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Language has a dual character, it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Chinua Achebe has used language as a technique for cultural inferences which were orally transmitted through generations. Though much of colonial writing is written in English but what marks the work of African writers is their conscientious use of the English language in depiction of the society to which they belong. Achebe has appropriated the English language for the purpose of expressing his native culture for a non-African reader. Through conscious manipulation he has successfully conveyed the larger meanings, of those little remnants like myths, rituals and proverbs so as to translate and transfer the cultural perceptions. The novel is set in tribal society and the narrative itself is studded with proverbs and similes which help to evoke the cultural milieu in which the action takes place. Achebe selects the type of imagery appropriate to the time, place and people he is trying to picture and it is his sensitive use of appropriate language that lends an air of historical authenticity to the novel. As when the author talks about the personal god or *Chi* in his novel, he says, “The Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his *Chi* says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly, so his *Chi* agreed. And not only his *Chi* but his clan too”(29).

More than folk tales and myths, the central or core part of the oral literature in most African societies is embodied in proverbs which are drawn from experience and from observing the behaviour of human beings: their feelings, emotions thought process, habits, beliefs, values, the prevalent folk stories and the surrounding world of plants, animals and natural happenings. Their attributive quality is the aptness with which they convey the meaning effectively in a very concise and pointed manner, symbolically bringing home that which has to be said. Thus, the proverb is an important part of the expressive mechanism of the African speech and this has been amply expressed by Achebe in his work.

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## 2.6 *THINGS FALL APART* : A COMMUNITY NARRATIVE

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There is a direct involvement of the local community in the narration of the novel from the very beginning. The novel opens with the sentence “Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond”(7). Thus establishing the fact that a man’s success in life depends on community approval and also makes it clear to the reader that the nine villages situated closeby share a close-knit kinship and bonding. Not only an individual’s rejection and acceptance by the community of importance but matters of collective importance are also decided in the presence of all. For such occasions the town crier goes around the town informing everyone to collect at one definite time and place. When one of Umuofia’s daughter was killed at Mbaino, ten thousand people collected at the market place on the information of the town crier to avenge the death and a decision was taken

with common consensus. Similarly the local disputes are also decided on the village *ilo* by the *egwugwu*.

The individual and community are inseparable. The community participation on occasions of death, birth, and marriage is strong. When Okankwo's friend Obieriba celebrates the marriage of his daughter, the whole village gathers and helps. Children and women from each house go with food stuff and also help in cooking. "The whole compound was as busy as an anthill"(106). Dancing and singing follows after eating and drinking in which everyone participates. Similarly a death in the clan is announced by the sound of the cannon and beating of the *ekwe*. When Ezeudu the oldest man of the village died everyone gathered for the funeral rites and there is a lot of frenzy around.

The Feast of the New Yam is celebrated every year with great joy by the people. Huts are decorated, friends and relatives are invited. Every year on the second day of the new year there is a wrestling match on the village grounds for which men, women and children all gather, Bonding amongst the kinsmen is strong on all occasions. When Okonkwo has to leave clan as a punishment his mother's kinsmen in Mbanta receive him well and support him. The interdependence of the individual and community is strong and the novel derives its force from collective articulation.

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## 2.7 MAIN CHARACTERS AND THEIR ROLE

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- i) **Okonkwo** - Okonkwo whose nickname in *Things Fall Apart* is "The Roaring Flame" in all ways justifies that tab. He is a disciplined and hardworking man who earns a name for himself because of his own personal qualities. "Tall and huge, his bushy eyebrows and wide Afric nose give him a very severe look"(7). Harsh in words as well as in deeds, he mercilessly drives himself hard to achievement. He dreads and fears failure in life as he had experienced the pain of being the son of an unsuccessful father. And so Onokwo was ruled by one passion - "To hate everything that his father Unoka had loved"(17) and one of those things was gentleness and another was idleness.

Onokwo is both dominant and domineering. The women and children live in perpetual fear of his fiery temper. He believes in ruling his household with a heavy hand. His anger stems perhaps from an impatience with both himself and his environment for not measuring up to his heroic self-conception. He is comfortable with the masculine occupations of war or toiling on his farms but in discomfiture with domestic life and idle time as when he has really nothing to do at the Yam New Year festival time when seasons change and one has to wait to sow seeds, for the new crop.

Okonkwo had not inherited anything from his father but at a young age has learnt to fend for himself. A hard and disciplined worker he became a successful farmer with his own compound of three huts and a main *obi* for himself in which he lives



with his three wives and children. He has two barns full of Yams and earns two titles. He is the war ambassador of Umuofia and in the last war he was the first to bring home a human head.

The author has presented the figure of a common, honest man with human aspirations and passions in the character of Okonkwo. But his fear of vulnerability and his over-assertion of strength ironically render him vulnerable to the winds of change, the most catastrophic of which for him is the dual advent of christianity and colonisation. The final act of lonely and isolated defiance comes in his act of beheading the white men's messenger and then hanging himself from a tree in his own compound. Okonkwo, as a human character also symbolises the burden of an Aristotelian tragic hero. He is a man of stature who exhibits signs of hubris (tragic pride) and hamartia (tragic flaw).

- ii) **Nwoye** - Nwoye is the eldest son of Okonkwo who ironically turns out to be the very opposite of what his father wishes and wants him to be. Okonkwo feels that his son has taken more after his grandfather who had not succeeded in attaining a status in the society. Nwoye finds the narrow and masculine world of his father too stifling, domineering and restrictive. He would rather prefer the women's huts where the clan's world of folktales and myths is foregrounded. Nwoye finds a friend and companion in Ikemefuna, the boy who was brought from Mbaino as a hostage. Ikemefuna is like an elder brother to Nwoye, whose development he influences and guides. This is why after Ikemefuna's untimely and sacrificial death in the forest, Nwoye looks for comfort, for the "hidden poetry in things" (137), not inside his father's compound but elsewhere. Okonkwo has time for work and thoughts to attain the greatest title of the clan for himself but has no time and concern for his vulnerable and sensitive son, Nwoye, which leaves the boy distracted and dissatisfied from a young age.

Soon after the church has been built in the Evil Forest, Nwoye begins to hang around it, absorbing not only the sermons and the hymns recited by Mr. Kiaga but also taking in the songs and their accompaniment of music as a relief for his inner dissonance. He looks to christianity for a wholeness he can neither find in himself, his family or in his community. Nwoye looks forward to a future when having learnt the white man's knowledge he would return to his father's house' not to live there but to rescue and redeem his mother as well as his younger brothers and sisters.

- iii) **Unoka** - Unoka, Okonkwo's father has been presented as a man with a weak constitution and gentle displacement. He was tall, thin and had a slight stoop. Unoko's absorption in his flute- playing which is quite unworldly and ecstatic contrasts radically with his son Okonkwo's worldly ambitions - whether it be at wrestling, winning the titles available in the clan or just being rich and famous. The diametrically opposite portrayals of the father, Unoka and his son, Okonkwo are

not merely a matter of individuals or personalities, their differences also measure generational changes already taking place in Umuofia even prior to the arrival of the new dispensation.

If Unoka's idleness makes him womanly, his gentleness evidenced in his gracious hospitality to Okoye, his lender, shows him as a man fully immersed in the clan's traditional culture. Even the Oracle pronounces, Unoka as a good clansman although it does also chide him for the weakness of his machet and his hoe. Unoka's spirit is stronger and more alive in his grandson Nwoye than in his own son Okonkwo.

iv) **Ikemefuna** - Although not a biological son of Okonkwo, Ikemefuna who has been forcibly separated from his own biological parents in Mbaino and brought as a hostage, is like a family member of the family for three years. His stay, however ends abruptly when Okonkwo and the other leaders of the clan lure him to the forest and offer him as a human sacrifice of him by slaying him to appease the oracle. Ikemefuna is an imaginative lad who retells utopian stories about the ant sitting on the throne and the sands dancing forever. He who is repelled by acts of bloodshed and violence, dies a violent and bloody death in the forest at the hands of the elders of Umuofia. He calls Okonkwo "father" and yet could not get protection from him, rather it is by Okonkwo's blow only that he is killed. His killing becomes symbolic of the death of innocence and faith in Umuofia and it is after his death that things start falling apart both at the individual and social level. All the important motifs of the novel - exile, rejection of the father, alienation from him, women's stories, reticence are all poignantly associated with this doomed lad who was not allowed to grow up to become a man.

v) **Obierika** - Obierika, Okonkwo's friend, guide, advisor and trustee is true to him not only in his life but even after the latter's untimely and violent death. During Okonkwo's seven years exile in Mbanta, it is Obierika who manages things in Umuofia for him like a trustee. Okonkwo's death leaves him very sad and he could not help accusing the Commissioner "That man was one of the greatest man in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself, and now he will be buried like a dog" (191).

Obierika is though firmly rooted in the time honoured way of life but he questions the draconian nature of some of the clan's customs. He even cautions Okonkwo not to participate in the killing of Ikemefuna as the boy called him father. He is a mature man who believes in thinking before implementing and because of his good nature is a widely respected person of the clan. Everyone participates with enthusiasm in his daughter's marriage. At times, in the novel, Obierika appears to be the mouthpiece of the authorial voice.

vii) **Uchendu** - Okonkwo's maternal uncle and the grand old man of his family at Mbanta, Uchendu is presented as a far sighted, flexible man who stands as a pillar

for his clan and family. In a tribal system of organisation he precisely knows his duties towards his refuge seeking nephew and fulfills them with great responsibility. He is a sensitive man and tries to help Okonkwo overcome his despair by talking to him after his youngest son Amikwu's bride's *isa-ifi* ceremony. He manages the household in a wise, authoritative and sympathetic manner, maintaining the dignity of his age and status. Uchendu's character conveys to us the resilience and continuity of the tribal system of organisation in which there is an assigned role and responsibility for everyone.

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## 2.8 DEVELOPMENT OF PLOT AND THE NARRATIVE APPROACH

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The plot of the novel *Things Fall Apart* develops through the moments of crises, which mark the various phases of the novel from the beginning to the end. Okonkwo begins his life with a struggle to fend for himself and his family as his father was a failure. "He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat. People laughed at him because he was a loafer and they swore never to lend him any more money because he never paid back" (9). It is with this lack of money and power that Okonkwo begins his life and gradually works his way from the margins of society towards personal fame, wealth and power. In twenty years he gains a status in the nine surrounding villages and beyond. Part one of the novel highlights the kind of life he is leading with his three wives and children and its end marks the beginning of the downfall of Okonkwo.

A major feature of the novel is Achebe's concern with the crisis of identity, a particular community experiences because its culture is being gradually and systematically denigrated and a supposedly superior cultural model imposed. Although the community that Achebe portrays has not undergone an actual geographical displacement or was not entirely subjugated it is beginning to experience a sense of linguistic alienation because through its educational system, the Empire has sought to impose on the colonized an alien language. Hence the need for writers like Achebe to transform the language of the masters and mould it in such a way that it becomes an apt vehicle for expressing the geographical or physical conditions of their land as also their socio-cultural practices.

The novel depicts various cultural tensions and conflicts arising out of a clash between tradition and modernity, the real and the occult and so on. But it is the conflict between the individual and the society and the way in which it is resolved that seems to lend a typical flavour to the novel. In the end, it is the society, the larger entity which emerges triumphant as against the individual who dissociates or delinks himself from the society to assert his pride and individuality. Here the question is not so much about the right or wrong of the individual's convictions or credentials as about the necessity of the people to adhere to the society with its roots in a traditional faith.

Okonkwo's exile is the turning point in the novel. With his downfall begins the disjunction of Umuofia. During his stay in Mbanta his friend Obierika brings news that Abame has been wiped out. He tells Okonkwo, "He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (162). Rather than accept the white man's slavery he decides to take away his life. Achebe has thus dealt in the novel not only with an individual's life but with the tragedy of the whole African tribe which bore the brunt of colonization.

The novel is in third person narration and is episodic in nature. The plot is not linear or chronological but develops through shifts in time and space. Myths, legends, storytelling and the use of proverbs lead to the growth of the story which encompasses the whole community and its beliefs and customs (the reader can especially refer to the units on language and community narrative).

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## 2.9 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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- 1 What lends a typical African flavour to the novel *Things Fall Apart*?
- 2 From which poem of W.B. Yeats is the title *Things Fall Apart* taken?
- 3 Which work of Gandhi can be treated as a postcolonial text?
- 4 What does the story about the Earth and Sky emphasise?
- 5 How many villages were situated close by? Name any two.
- 6 What is the nickname of Okonkwo in the novel?
- 7 Who is the first one to become a christian in Okonkwo's family?
- 8 What were the two main drawbacks of Unoka's character?
- 9 Name the friend who supports Okonkwo throughout.
- 10 What is the form of narration adopted in the novel?

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## 2.10 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit the subtle nuances of the novel *Things Fall Apart* have been elaborated upon. We have examined how Achebe has meticulously explored the cultural and social patterns of the Igbo society and portrayed the myths, legends, beliefs, customs, superstitions and taboos which are deep rooted in the consciousness of the people. These elements are used both explicitly and implicitly in the form and structure of the novel. Language is used as a technique to create a texture and tone which in itself defines certain themes and meanings. Proverbs are woven into speech and dialogue which express the beliefs and stories woven in them and at the same time they express the resistance to authority.

The unit also throws light on the cultural tensions and conflicts experienced both at the individual and community level. An attempt has also been made to analyse the text as a postcolonial writing, throwing light on the various issues taken up by Achebe leading to the climatic development of the plot and portrayal of the characters so as to move towards the growth of the novel.

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**2.11 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

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- 1 Discuss the relevance of the title *Things Fall Apart*?
- 2 Briefly trace the use of language as a means of resistance.
- 3 Delineate the character of Okonkwo.
- 4 Point out the gradual spreading of the white men's power in the Igbo society.
- 5 Analyse the role of the community in the novel.
- 6 Consider *Things Fall Apart* as a story of a proud clansman's tragic downfall.
- 7 Discuss *Things Fall Apart* as a reflection of Igbo society and its culture.
- 8 Comment on Achebe's style of writing and the technique adopted in the writing of *Things Fall Apart*.
- 9 In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe presents the colonial experience without romanticizing it. Discuss.

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**2.12 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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1. Cook, David. *African Literature : A Critical View*. London : Longman, 1977.
2. Lindfors, Bernth. *Folklore in Nigerian Literature*. New York : African Publishing Company, 1973.
3. Nwogo, Donatus. *Language and Culture*. London : O.U.P. 1975.
4. Rand Bishop eds. *African Culture, African Critics*. New York : Greenwood Press, 1988.
5. Palaver. *Interviews with Five African Writers in Texas*. The University of Texas, 1972.

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- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London : Windmill Series, 1989.
- Jain, Jasbir. "Postcoloniality, Literature and Politics" in *Contesting Postcolonialisms*. eds. Jasbir Jain and Veena Singh. Jaipur : Rawat, 2000.

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## UNIT 3: *ICE-CANDY-MAN* - I

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### STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

- 3.0 Objective
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 About the Author
- 3.3 About the Age
- 3.4 Introduction of the Text
- 3.5 Summary to the Text
- 3.6 Self Assessment Questions

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this part of the Unit, we look at Bapsi Sidhwa's novel, *Ice-Candy-Man*, as a work that falls within the sub-genre of Partition Literature. Born out of the upheaval and turmoil that resulted in India's Partition in 1947, this genre of literature invariably deals with multiple shades of violence—the brutalization and mutilation of the human body, the body politic, and the topography of nations. Once you have gone through all the sections of this Unit, you will be in a position to understand and respond to the text which is a fine blend of fiction, history and autobiography.

The edition of the text that you should preferably read is the *Ice-Candy-Man* published by Penguin India (1989).

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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In order to give our study of *Ice-Candy-Man* a proper sequence, the study material is divided into sections that focus on information about the author, about the age in which it is set, about the textual content, and also the critical analysis of issues that are foregrounded in the novel. At the end of the Unit, there is a glossary, a summing-up, suggested readings, and unit-end questions.

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### 3.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Bapsi Sidhwa is an internationally renowned diasporic writer who was born in Pakistan in 1938. She is a Parsee who, as a young girl, witnessed and lived through the bloody Partition of India in 1947. An attack of polio in early childhood resulted in surgery and she was tutored at home till the age of fifteen. Due to her disability and lack of an extended family, Bapsi spent much time with the domestics in her household. To allay a lonely childhood, she took to voraciously reading whatever she could lay her hands on. At the age of thirteen, she appeared at her Matriculation examination as a private candidate. After that, she went on to do her graduation from Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore.

At the age of nineteen Bapsi got married in Bombay. This marriage took her away from the stern, orthodox atmosphere of her home in Pakistan and exposed her to the liberal, fun-loving Parsee community of Bombay. After five years of living in Bombay, Bapsi went through a divorce. She returned to Pakistan and later remarried. Her second marriage was to Noshir Sidhwa, a Parsee businessman of Lahore. In an interview, the writer describes herself as a “Punjabi-Pakistani-Parsee” woman because all three societies have exerted great influence on her life and imagination. This medley of identities is often reflected in her works. The strongest undercurrents in her works, however, are those which reflect her Parsee/Zoroastrian roots.

Bapsi Sidhwa acquired US citizenship in 1992.

International recognition has frequently come Sidhwa’s way. She represented Pakistan in the Asian Women’s Congress of 1975. In 1991, she was awarded Pakistan’s highest honour in the arts, the *Sitara-e Imtiaz*. In 1993, she received the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Award which has a \$100,000 grant for literary pursuit. In 1994, she was also given the US National Endowment for the Arts grant. In 2002, Bapsi Sidhwa was inducted into the Zoroastrian Hall of Fame during the Millennium Celebrations. She has been a Writer-in-Residence and professor of English at a number of places in the US.

Some of Bapsi Sidhwa’s well-known novels besides *Ice-Candy-Man* are *The Bride* (also published as *The Pakistani Bride*), *The Crow Eaters*, and *An American Brat* (1993). Sidhwa heard the story of a young Pakistani girl who ran away from an intolerable marriage and was killed in the Hindukush Mountains by her tribal husband. Sidhwa’s obsession with this story grew into her first novel, *The Bride*. *The Crow Eaters* is a comedy named after a derogatory slang reference to the loud and continuous chatter that Parsees are seen to indulge in. It is a comedy that tells of the life of a Parsee family in Lahore. *An American Brat* (1994) is a novel of cultural clashes, adjustments and compromises required of a young Pakistani Parsee woman who decides to settle in the US. Many of her works have been translated into Russian, French and German.

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### 3.3 ABOUT THE AGE

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India’s Partition in 1947 can best be understood through a quick glance at the British colonial enterprise in Asia. The first British outpost in India was established in Surat in 1619, subsequent to Emperor Jahangir granting a *firman* allowing the British to establish factories in his Empire. For the next two hundred and thirty years, the British resorted to all kinds of guile and machinations to ostensibly strengthen their trading interests. In reality, they slowly but surely took control of the crumbling administrative structure of the country. India came to be the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. In 1857, as the Mughal Empire lay crumbling and the intrigues of the colonial masters became apparent, there was an uprising

against British control but it was brutally repressed. It was at this juncture, that the British Parliament decided to take away political power from the East India Company and transfer it to the British Crown in 1858. To reiterate that control, Queen Victoria was declared Empress of India in 1877.

The spirit of the 1857 Uprising, however, lived on and manifested itself very strongly in the opening decades of the twentieth century. It was self-assertion that inspired the various forms of protest and resistance during these decades. Thus there emerged the Home Rule League, the Khilafat and Civil Disobedience Movements, the Dandi March, all of which eventually found their final manifestation in the call given by the Quit India Movement in 1942 when Gandhi transformed the Indian National Congress into a mass movement against colonial rule.

Within Indian ranks, however, there was dissension. Sections of Hindus and Muslims perceived that coexistence seemed undesirable and unrealistic. The seeds of this divisiveness were forcefully sown and grew into a plant that no one could uproot. Muslim organisations, like the All India Muslim League, were suspicious of the mainstream, secular, Hindu-majority Indian National Congress. Hindu organisations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha, also perceived a chasm between Hindus and Muslims.

By 1930, M. A. Jinnah had begun to despair of the fate of minority communities in a united India and begun to argue that mainstream parties such as the Congress (of which he was once a member) were insensitive to Muslim interests. The 1932 Communal Award threatened the position of Muslims in Hindu-majority provinces and catalyzed the resurgence of the Muslim League with Jinnah as its leader. In 1937, at a session of the Hindu Mahasabha, Veer Savarkar asserted in his presidential address that India could not be assumed to be a unitarian and homogeneous nation; that there were essentially two nations—the Hindu and the Muslim. The Indian National Congress and Muslim political parties, like the *Khaksar Tehrik* of Allama Mashriqi and the *Ahrar* Party of Maulana Habibur Rehman Ludhianvi, opposed this dichotomy of communities which had lived in harmony in the past. These two parties were secularist and resolutely opposed the division of India on the lines of religion. Gandhi opposed dichotomy and partition by asserting that his soul rebelled against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represented two antagonistic cultures and doctrines which for him were a denial of God.

For a long time, Gandhi and other Congressmen strived to keep Muslims within the fold of the Congress Party but, in the 1930s, many Muslim activists left the party. Their move incensed both Hindu and Muslim nationalists. Sadly, politicians and community leaders on both sides whipped up mutual suspicion and fear which eventually lead to dreadful violence. Politics and politicians played their murky role and the colonial masters fed the fires of divisiveness by making Pakistan



topographically possible. They planned, executed and oversaw the division of India according to the Mountbatten Plan under which the Radcliffe Line was drawn to demarcate India and Pakistan.

So, 1947 saw the Partition of India effected by the British. In its wake occurred massive population migrations. The times were marked by a complete breakdown of law and order. Horrendous rioting and massacres ensued as fiery rabble rousers aroused and encouraged retribution on the sections of population migrating from their ancestral lands. Half a million people perished in riots and massacres or simply from the hardships of their flight to safety. 72, 26,000 Muslims went to Pakistan from India while 72, 49,000 Hindus and Sikhs moved to India from Pakistan.

The Partition of India emphatically declared that the sun was setting on the British Indian Empire. It led to the creation of Pakistan on August 14, 1947, and the independence of India at the stroke of the midnight hour on the night of August 14-15, 1947. Thus were born the sovereign states of the Union of India (later Republic of India) and the Dominion of Pakistan.

The term 'partition' refers not only to an ill-conceived division of the land and its people but also of their assets, including the British Indian Army, the Indian Civil Service and other administrative services, the railways, and the central treasury. The travails of this unnatural division has haunted the subcontinent ever since. Gandhi was assassinated soon after Partition by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist, who believed that the Mahatma was appeasing Muslims at the cost of Hindus.

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### 3.4 INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

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*Ice-Candy-Man* combines a growing child's perceptions with the collective anguish of a newly-created nation carved out from an undivided India. It is a story that intertwines the doomed romance of Ayah, the fictionalized canvas of history, and the autobiographical undertones of the narrative. Sidhwa creates Lenny, a narrator who is young enough to be free from the prejudice of religion and its concomitant Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Parsee biases. Through her narrator, the novelist presages the dehumanizing effects of communalism that haunt the subcontinent till this day.

*Ice-Candy-Man* is Sidhwa's third novel. It is a work that sensitively portrays events and their enmeshed memories in the mind of a young Parsee girl, Lenny Sethi, during the cataclysmic events of India's Partition. In a deft and delicate handling, Sidhwa weaves her story around the events and the mindset that foreshadowed and then brought about Partition. Lenny moves in a world of contradictions—the love and attention that people give interspersed with the hatred and the violence that Partition engenders. As a Parsee, the young Lenny is both an observer and an unwitting participant in the violence that both precedes and

succeeds Partition. It is her faith that saves her and her family from becoming embroiled in the Hindu-Muslim divide that is reflective of Partition from the phase of its political planning to its bloody culmination. The historical sense of the Partition is well integrated into the novel which encompasses the stark realities of turbulent times along with the innate compassion of human beings. Sidhwa is able to maintain her religious distance from as a member of the Parsi/Zoroastrian community which held a religiously and politically neutral position.

The novelist maintains that *Ice-Candy-Man* is an attempt to re-create the bitter truths of Partition. It is a novel that weaves together the reality of the times with the realism of narration which reflects that reality, underlining all along how close evil always is to human nature. In normal circumstances, people are quite gentle and harmless but once the environment turns volatile, the mob mentality overwhelms them and evil invariably surfaces.

This novel has also been published with another title—*Cracking India*. This was the title when it was published in England by Heinemann in 1988, in Germany in 1990 and by Milkweed Editions in the US in 1991. The *New York Times* declared it the “Notable Book of the Year.”

*Cracking India* was a title specially favoured in the US. Given the country’s top priority to the fight against drugs, American publishers feared that its original title was a misnomer that might make readers mistake the title—*Ice-Candy-Man*—to be the name of a drug pusher. The new title was chosen in order to pinpoint the thrust of a narrative that is steeped in the realities of history and psyche that make up the India of today. “Cracking” seems to point to cracking open the realities that embody the entire Asian subcontinent. *Cracking India* also points to many recollections—the pain and trauma of the narrator, of the writer herself, and of the cracked, open wounds of people’s memories that are rooted in 1947. The amended title also calls to mind the image of India as a riddle of many cultures. Cracking this riddle requires putting one’s hand on the social, political and spiritual pulse of the country which is what *Ice-Candy-Man* aspires to do.

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### 3.5 SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

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#### Chapter 1

Lenny Sethi is a four-year old polio-ridden child when the novel opens. She lives on the “affluent fringes” of pre-Partition Lahore with her parents, Mr and Mrs Sethi. Near Lenny’s home live her energetic Electric-aunt and her adenoidal son, Cousin, her Godmother and Godmother’s docile spouse, Oldhusband, and Godmother’s youngest sibling, Slavesister. The novel starts with Lenny and her Ayah encountering an Englishman who insists that the child walk on her own feet instead of being pushed in a pram by Ayah. Ayah, we are told, has a magnetic charm that attracts beggars, holy men, hawkers, cart-drivers, cooks, coolies,

cyclists, soldiers alike. She is chocolate-brown, short, eighteen years old, has full-blown cheeks, a pouting mouth, smooth forehead, and a bouncy walk which never fails to draw the attention of any man in her vicinity.

Mayo Hospital's Colonel Bharucha is Lenny's physician. After Lenny's surgery, Lahore's small Parsee community descends on the Sethi household to enquire about Lenny's condition. Lenny's Mother nurtures a constant guilt for having left her daughter at the mercy of ayahs whose carelessness resulted in the child contracting polio. A month after surgery, Ayah takes Lenny in a stroller to visit the zoo where the caged lion terrifies the child while Ayah is entertained by Sher Singh, the zoo attendant.

## **Chapter 2**

Lenny's parents share a warm marital relationship and she thrives emotionally in its security. Lenny's household has a surfeit of domestics which underlines the affluence and social superiority of the master and the mistress.

Adult conversations make Lenny understand that "the Parsees have been careful to adopt a discreet and politically naïve profile." These perceptions have been fired by Col. Bharucha's assertion that the Parsees "must hunt with the hounds and run with the hare" in the complex run-up to the Partition. Lenny remembers these words as her "first personal involvement with Indian politics: the Quit India sentiment that has fired the imagination of a subject people and will soon sweep away the Raj!"

## **Chapter 3**

Ayah and Lenny watch a march-past outside Godmother's gate. It represents all the pomp and ceremony that has symbolized the might of the British Empire. Lenny is taken to the park opposite the Assembly Chambers by Ayah. This is Ayah's favourite haunt and space for socializing and here congregate her various admirers. This park is a metaphorical arena in which a "little" India gathers—that is, conversations here mirror the diverse opinions of the common masses whose destiny is decided in the portals of power elsewhere. Ayah's admirers include the Falettis Hotel cook, the Government house gardener, the elegant, muscled Masseur, and the lanky Ice-candy-man selling popsicles. Under cover of twilight, and when circumstance allows, Ayah is vigorously wooed by Masseur and Ice-candy-man. Masseur's caressing is welcomed by her while Ice-candy-man's overtures are pushed away with impartial nonchalance.

Having witnessed wooing, Lenny is initiated into an awareness of sexuality that belies her young age. As the child readily accommodates Ayah's social circle, she is also taken along to places that Ayah's admirers take Ayah to—fairs, restaurants, slaughter-houses. Lenny "learns about human needs, frailties, cruelties, and joys ... [and] the tyranny magnets exercise over metals," the latter implying Ayah's

mesmerizing attraction that draws her admirers. Another source of Lenny's sexual awareness is her Cousin. At this juncture in her life, Lenny has frightening nightmares which sensitise her and help her connect with the pain of others.

#### **Chapter 4**

We are introduced to Lenny's younger brother Adi, a year and a half younger than her. He is fair and angelic, and Ayah likes to show him off as a specimen of babyhood so unlike the vapid British children playing in the exclusive Lawrence Gardens of Lahore.

During winters, when Ice-candy-man's popsicles do not sell and his fortunes plummet, he transforms himself into a seller of birds and goes about with cages overcrowded with sparrows and parrots. It's the season when he adopts a selling strategy that reveals a bloodcurdling side to his nature. The strategy is to accuse his captive birds of creating an intolerable babble of noise and flourish a barber's razor, threatening to dismember their throats. Ayah, Adi and Lenny loudly spur him on and all this invariably ends with the gullible Englishwomen buying all his birds and releasing them from their cages. With such quick, lucrative sales, Ice-candy-man often treats his three accomplices at Ayah's favourite wayside restaurant in the Mozang Chungi locality. The only price that he extracts is from Ayah, who has to heroically struggle with Ice-candy-man's exploring toe as she eats in the restaurant. Each time Ice-candy-man is faced with the inevitability of bidding goodbye, he plays his trump card. Being an "absorbing gossip and raconteur," he comes out with a flow of news and gossip that the poor maid cannot resist, and he usually succeeds in stealing a few extra moments with Ayah. Significant occurrences outside the cocooned world of Ayah and Lenny are often revealed by Ice-candy-man—the German v-bomb that would turn the British to powdered ash; the drifting of Subas Chandra Bose, a Hindu, to the side of Japan; quotations from Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah.

#### **Chapter 5**

It is 1944. While on a holiday in the Murree Hills, news come that the War is over, that victory lies with the Allies, that the "defector" Bose and the Japanese have been routed. The family holiday is cut short as Lenny's family returns to Lahore to join a "Jashan" prayer celebrating the British victory. The event has been organized by the Parsees of Lahore. In the searing summer heat within the Fire Temple, tempers soar as Col. Bharucha addresses the gathering after the prayers. The dilemmas of a minority community—in this case, the Parsees—are brought to the forefront by the voices that express and seek to answer their dilemmas in the post-War scenario. They remember their ancestors' arrival in India centuries back and try to evolve a way of adapting to the new realities that seem to be emerging in the undivided India of 1944. It is a lengthy discourse within the community that

the Colonel presides over and manages to convince—Parsee safety lies in abiding by the rules of the land in which they choose to live.

### **Chapter 6**

Lenny's feelings are overwhelmed by Mother's chiselled beauty, her innocence, her motherliness but there also lurks a jealousy within Lenny as "Mother's motherliness has a universal reach" which cannot be shared with any other. This chapter also provides comic relief after the starkness and plain-speaking of Col. Bharucha in the preceding one. We are introduced to the newly-married Shankars who have come to live as tenants in the rear portion of Lenny's house, and their aura of night-long ecstasies are "very like the dark fragrance of Masseur's skilful fingers beneath Ayah's sari." In lighter vein, the author also describes the favourite game of the domestics in Lenny's house which consists of playfully trying to pull away the gardener, Hari's dhoti. The only discordant note in the "good natured romp" is set by Muchho, the sweeper's wife, who cannot abide her daughter, Pappoo, enjoying the spectacle and fells her to the ground.

### **Chapter 7**

Through Lenny's eyes, we get a glimpse into the life and persona of the cook, Imam Din. Three times widowed and four times wed, Imam Din is a sixty-five year old man whose roving fingers get him the appellation "Catcher-in-the-kitchen." Lenny, with able assistance from Ayah, is able to prevail upon Imam Din to take them to his village of Pir Pindo where his grandson, Dost Mohammad, lives. Pir Pindo introduces Lenny to rural Punjab and the issues that disturb village folk in the wake of the hostilities of World War II.

Lenny runs wild and free in the village, striking camaraderie with Ranna, Imam Din's grandson. Pir Pindo's inhabitants "dwell close to the earth" rooted, as they are, to the soil on which they toil and attuned, as they are, to the ground realities that are fast changing. In the evening, when bearded Sikh peasants from the neighbouring village of Dera Tek Singh visit Pir Pindo, there is talk of "trouble in the cities" which the *Sarkar* or British government cannot contain. It is a gathering of rustics—Muslims and Sikhs—who try to sound an optimistic note by reiterating their bonds of brotherhood which cannot be broken by the murderous violence that threatens to engulf the cities. Though the Muslim hosts and their Sikh guests swear to protect each other, their interaction prophesies the future when a whirlwind of violence shall overtake the region as a reaction to India's Partition.

### **Chapter 8**

A tableau of perspectives and perceptions on the Raj is given through the ambience of a dinner hosted by Lenny's parents. Each of the guests represent a segment of society as well as a slice of opinion that points to the contradictions inherent in the scheme to partition India along lines of religion. There is Mr. Singh, a turbaned

and bearded Sikh, his American wife, “green-eyed, very white, placid and other-worldly,” Inspector General of Police Rogers, “tall, colourless, hefty-moustached, pale-eyebrowed,” his wife, Mrs. Rogers, “soft, plump, pretty and submissive.” Hidden beneath the table are Adi and Lenny who enjoy the suspense of their precarious hideout. What starts off as a mundane meal suddenly turns into an arena of conflicting opinions and insidious conflict that reflects a microcosm of perceptions which contributed to the bloodbath and destruction in the 1947 Partition. Mr. Singh’s opinions reflect not only the divergent aspirations and compulsions of the Indian Congress and the Muslim League of undivided India but also point to the rifts and differences between faiths and communities that eventually led to the massacres of the Partition. Lenny also remembers it as the time when her family acquired a Morris Minor car.

### **Chapter 9**

This chapter describes a mosaic of Lenny’s memories. She remembers the compound wall which served as the neighbourhood children’s rendezvous point where they gathered to “discuss world affairs [and] human relationships,” passing on to each other their perceptions of the adult world and its behaviour. She also remembers it as the time when Ayah acquired two new admirers—a Chinaman and the Pathan, Sharbat Khan. This was a period inscribed in Lenny’s memory as one in which Sharbat Khan brought news of the Hindu-Muslim “trouble,” the Congress-Muslim League dichotomies, and the Jinnah-Nehru differences. It is a chapter that underlines the passage of time, especially in the context of Lenny—“as the years advance, my sense of inadequacy and unworth advance.”

### **Chapter 10**

Lenny’s sense of inadequacy and unworth intensify as she is sent to the boredom of Mrs. Pen’s school and gets to hear relatives making snide comparisons with Adi—“It’s a pity Adi’s fair and Lenny so dark. He’s a boy. Anyone will marry him.” Lenny seeks refuge in telling tales and stealing. The small glass jars she steals from the Singh household are discovered by Slavesister. Lenny is made to acknowledge her misdemeanour by Godmother who says, “I’m afraid a life of crime is not for you. . . .you are not suited to it.”

Lenny is taken by Mother to meet Gandhiji who is on a visit to Lahore. The child is overwhelmed by his aura—“The pure shaft of humour, compassion, tolerance, and understanding he directs at me fuses me to everything that is feminine, funny, gentle, loving. He is a man who loves women. And lame children. And the untouchable sweeper.” This encounter marks the rebirth of Lenny who emerges with greater self-confidence and assertion.

### **Chapter 11**

It’s a warm April as Ayah takes Lenny to the jam-packed Queen’s Park. Both

Ice-candy-man and Masseur are raking in profits at their respective trades. Ayah's admirers immediately throng around her. The conversation inevitably turns to the political situation and the storm clouds gathering on that front. That the break-up of India is imminent is reflected in the way Sidhwa describes the times—"One day everybody is themselves – and the next day they are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. People shrink, dwindling into symbols." The Jumha (Friday) prayers set aside the Muslims; the caste marks "dehumanize" the Hindus; the white Englishmen look down upon the Anglo-Indians who look down upon Indian-Christians who, in turn, look down upon all non-Christians; and the Parsees are "reduced to irrelevant nomenclatures." The now seven-year old Lenny is able to see through the hearts and minds of people but "their exteriors superimpose a new set of distracting impressions." Ice-candy-man appears in a frightening new avatar, a "noisy and lunatic holyman – in striking attire," which reinforces his image as a man given to trickery and deceit. Even humour has been partitioned along religious lines.

## Chapter 12

It is April again. Lenny and her playmates become aware of a black box that is mysteriously found and then, just as mysteriously, disappears from her parent's bathroom. The children's speculations about it underline the uncertainty and fears that beset the adult world.

Lenny once again visits Pir Pindo with Imam Din but finds its environment remarkably changed from the last visit. She is taken to Dera Tek Singh where fear and suspicion stalk the air even though it is the festival of *Baisakhi* which marks the birth of Sikhism, the winter wheat harvest, and the season's fair. Sidhwa writes of a "chill spread by the presence of strangers: their unexpected faces harsh and cold." These are the blue-turbanned Akalis whom even the old Sikh *granthi* or priest looks upon with suspicion as they perform the *Ghadka* or martial dance with staves and swords. The Sikhs of the Dera escort back their Muslim guests halfway to Pir Pindo.

In the evening, everyone crowds round the only radio in Pir Pindo and hears warnings issued both by Congress and Muslim League asking people not to pay heed to mischievous rumours. On their return to Lahore, news filters in of attacks on Muslims in Amritsar and Jullunder. The accounts are so brutal and bizarre that few lend them credence, and they are dismissed as Akali propaganda.

A fortnight after Lenny's return, an army truck disgorges a family of villagers outside the gates of her home. She recognizes them as faces from Pir Pindo and learns that these are indeed landless, poor people from there who have chosen to be evacuated as nothing binds them to Pir Pindo. The other inhabitants of this village have chosen to stay behind as their land, their harvest, and their cattle cannot be evacuated. This is the first pointer in the novel to the tortuous dilemma in the

minds of people and the mass migration of religious communities that took place in the wake of the subcontinent's Partition.

### **Chapter 13**

It is winter again and Inspector General Roger's murdered, mutilated body is discovered in a gutter. It presages the violence that shall spare no one. The young Lenny is overcome by horrific visions when she hears the news of the murder along with Slavesister's comments on the British role in creating an impossible situation. As the desultory conversation gets derailed and proceeds to the final rites of passage as practiced by people of different faiths, it is Godmother's common sense that restores Lenny's equanimity. Even the good natured romp that once had all the domestics trying to whip away Hari's dhoti turns into a sinister game that falls flat and ends when Ice-candy-man emerges from the shadows and walks on to the lawn.

### **Chapter 14**

Lenny's known world is expanding as she is taken by Ayah to various places at which the latter meets her admirers—Emperor Jahangir's tomb, Shahjehan's Shalimar Gardens, the slaughter house and the banks of the Ravi in low flood. Ayah is also seeing more of Masseur; it is his signature tune that is frequently on her lips. Sidhwa writes of an uncomfortable love triangle that is emerging—“Where Masseur is, Ayah is. And where Ayah is, is Ice-candy-man.” It is matters of the heart that have brought Ayah and Masseur close; it is Ayah's penchant for gossip that brings Ice-candy-man to her. When the gossip turns to the Bhagwandas, the tailor, running off with the Mission padre's wife, Ice-candy-man's pent up jealousy surfaces with all its venom, and he castigates all masseurs “with their cunning fingers taking liberties.”

### **Chapter 15**

The periphery of Lenny's world expands further. As the British prepare to leave, Lenny, Ayah and her band of admirers and acquaintances relocate to the Wrestler's restaurant. Everybody seems to be in a combative mood as they boisterously quarrel. Ayah's motley band that once shared a close camaraderie in the public gardens of Lahore, is falling apart. The heated conversation in the restaurant points once again to the seething agitation and anger within the common masses regarding the politics and the breakup of the land along religious lines. Lenny's instinct makes her count the voices at the table. There are thirteen—Ice-candy-man, Masseur, the Government House gardener, butcher, Sher Singh, the sepoy from the barracks, the wrestler, the Falettis Hotel cook, Yousaf, Hari, Adi, Ayah, and Lenny herself. It's a symbolic pointer to Christ's Last Supper before Judas Iscariot betrayed him to the Romans for thirty pieces of silver. Lenny's sense of unease is exacerbated by the echo of sirens and the chant of slogans that reverberate in the Lahore at this time.



## Chapter 16

The politician appears as the rabble-rouser—Master Tara Singh makes an appearance outside the Assembly Chambers. In the midst of a milling crowd, his oratory—“We will see how the Muslim swine get Pakistan!”—inspires only hatred and revenge as the Muslim crowd roars —“We’ll play Holi with their blood!” The battle-lines, which had long ago been drawn between people of different religious persuasions, give way to pitched battles and brutality. Lenny and Ayah witness it all when they are taken by Ice-candy-man to his tenement in Lahore’s Bhatti Gate area. They see a mob waving a speared child like a flag, a *banya* or tradesperson being run over by a vehicle, To the shaken Ayah and the whimpering Lenny, Ice-candy-man has only stark advice and macabre comment to offer—“You must make your hearts stout. . . .The fucking bastards! They thought they’d drive us out of Bhatti! We’ve shown them!” The orgy of violence in the adult world is transferred to Lenny’s consciousness and later she rips apart one of her dolls with Adi’s assistance. In Lahore, the cycle of hellish fires and monstrous mobs remains unbroken as the Shankars and the Daulatrams flee from the city.

## Chapter 17

The Partition of India has been has become a reality. With ironic impersonality, Sidhwa describes the scenario—“Playing British gods . . . the Radcliffe Commission deals out Indian cities like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan, Amritsar to India. Sialkot to Pakistan, Pathankot to India”—and sudden awareness dawns on Lenny—“I am a Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that.” Lenny’s eighth birthday falls on the day of Pakistan’s creation.

At Godmother’s, preparations are on for the arrival of Dr Manek Mody who is married to Godmother’s middle sister. Slavesister ironically remarks that a celebration is also due for another “new arrival” as “We’ve all produced a new baby . . . We’ve given birth to new nation. Pakistan!” On the radio comes Jinnah’s voice, “You are free. You are free to go your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other place of worship in the state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed, that has nothing to do with the business of state. . . .” In a masterstroke, these words of Jinnah sweep away religion, the very basis of Pakistan’s creation, to the periphery.

## Chapter 18

Things have “become topsy-turvy.” The Hindus have quietly fled from Lahore—the Shankars and the Daulatrams have been followed by the Mehtas, the Malhotras, and the Guptas. Old relationships and camaraderie have been shaken to such an extent that there is “dissension in the ranks” of Ayah’s admirers. Their gatherings in the Queen’s Gardens have stopped altogether; in twos, or threes, or singly, they come to the rear patch of lawn in Lenny’s house. These men now talk of the

“uncontrollable butchering in Gurdaspur” and agree that they live in the age of “Kali-*yuga*,” the worst of times. Sharbat Khan does brisk business as the entire Lahore seems to have taken out its knives, choppers, daggers, axes, staves and scythes for him to sharpen. It’s only the sharp edge of fear that makes folks sharpen their weapons. Ice-candy-man brings the terrible news that “A train from Gurdaspur has just come in. Everyone in it is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim.” He has been shaken to the core as his relatives were on that train.

## Chapter 19

The mysterious black box makes a return. This time it is found in the bathroom of the Shankars’ empty rooms. When Lenny and Adi prise it open, they are aghast to find that it contains a double-barrel gun. Father catches the two red-handed with the weapon, which just as mysteriously and quickly disappears. Ice-candy-man is a changed person, having “acquired an unpleasant swagger and a strange way of looking at Hari and Moti,” the two Hindu domestics in the Sethi household. Presenting Ayah a golden guinea, he reveals it is one of the nine hundred that he extracted from a Hindu moneylender’s hiding place. He also narrates how Sher Singh got a dose of his own medicine when his former tenants turned up and misbehaved with the women in Sher Singh’s family. One of Sher Singh’s brothers-in-law even died in the scuffle that followed.

Lenny perceives a terrible change in the Ice-candy-man after the Gurdaspur train massacre—he seems to have lost his senses and is ready to kill for revenge. Non-Muslims in Lahore either think of leaving—as the Government House gardener and Ayah, who speaks of going to relatives in Amritsar—or adopt another faith—as Moti is planning to do by becoming a Christian. While Masseur reassures Ayah about her safety, Lenny sobs bitterly at the thought of her beloved Ayah going away.

## Chapter 20

In this section of the novel, Sidhwa allows historical facts and assessment to creep into her narrative.

Familiar faces in Lahore have gone. They have been replaced by Muslim refugees flooding into the city. On one hand, she refers to the mass migration of twelve million people between India and Pakistan; she talks of “the Hindus being favoured over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj” which chooses to grant Nehru Kashmir as he was Kashmiri; she contrasts Nehru—with his “aura of power and presence . . . presumed to be Lady Mountbatten’s lover”—with Jinnah—being “past the prime of his elegant manhood . . . sallow, uncompromising.”

On the other hand, Sidhwa weaves into her narrative the largely unknown threads of Jinnah’s life—that he married an eighteen-year old Parsee girl who was twenty-two years younger than him, and died at the age of twenty-nine; that he is

“caricatured and portrayed as a monster” by British and Indian scholars when the poetess Sarojini Naidu, the “nightingale of India,” perceived behind his hauteur “a naïve and eager humanity, an intuition as quick and tender as a woman, a humour gay and winning as a child.”

### **Chapter 21**

Change is the byword in the newly-created Pakistan. Hari has become a Muslim—Himat Ali—shaved the *bodhi* on his head, been circumcised, and replaced his dhoti with a draw-string shalwar. The innocent Lenny gets a peep into male sexuality without really understanding what Cousin was doing while masturbating before her. The light-hearted banter and leg pulling at Godmother’s tea party for four students of the King Edward Medical College provides comic relief after the tautness of the narrative that described the traumatic events of Partition.

### **Chapter 22**

An air of “busy secrecy” makes Mother preoccupied and remote. Cousin, Adi and Lenny are all mystified by her and Electric-aunt’s comings and goings in the Morris Minor. It is Ayah who reveals that petrol is brought in the car for storage in the godown next to her quarters. This leaves the children aghast as they know that petrol is being rationed and it is an offence to store it. They are horrified by Ayah’s revelation and convinced that these adults are arsonists “setting fire to Lahore!”

There is yet another climactic incident. As Lenny is escorted by Himat Ali to her school, they find a foul smell emanating from a bursting sack lying on the way. A closer inspection of it has Masseur’s mutilated body falling out of it. Ayah’s heartthrob “has been reduced to a body, a thing,” which has lost all its vitality and become only a numerical statistic in post-Partition killings.

### **Chapter 23**

Killings are followed by the looting and plunder of the palatial bungalows left behind by the Hindus who have fled to India. These homes resemble empty shells, “pining” for their inhabitants, “haunted” by their past. Some are occupied by refugees from India who are learning to “cope with grief over dead kin and kidnapped womenfolk.” They are metaphors for Ayah’s empty shell of existence, pining and haunted as she is by the memories of Masseur. She has stopped receiving any visitors and nurses “a great empty ache” within her. She takes to revisiting their trysting places and hums his favourite lines. While Masseur’s voice haunts Ayah, Ice-candy-man takes to following Ayah and Lenny wherever they go. Lenny is now old enough and sensitive enough to understand Ayah’s suffering by comparing her own future with that of the older woman’s—“I know at least that my lover lives somewhere in the distant and possible future: I have hope.”

Ayah is dragged away from Lenny’s home by a fanatical crowd after Lenny truthfully reveals her hiding place to Ice-candy-man. As he “uncoils his lank frame into an

upright position,” the young girl knows that she has betrayed her beloved Ayah. Lenny realizes that Ice-candy-man played on her innocence to extract information about Ayah and then exact retribution on a woman who spurned his advances in favour of another. A terrified Ayah simply disappears in the tumult of a Muslim crowd that takes her away despite all efforts by Mother and the household domestics to protect her.

#### **Chapter 24**

Lenny is stricken by the terrible guilt of giving Ayah away to her persecutors. This guilt makes her resort to acts of self-inflicted torture to purge herself. Amidst the despair of Ayah’s disappearance, the wedding of Papoo comes up. It is a rather subdued affair as Lenny realizes that a drugged eleven-year old Papoo is to marry a dark, middle-aged, pockmarked dwarf who has an air of cruelty about him. Lenny can only be shocked when imagining the “grotesque possibilities” that await the bride in her marital life.

#### **Chapter 25**

In Lenny’s neighbourhood, the Hindu doctor’s vacant house is getting filled with mysterious female inhabitants. A fierce, burly Sikh stands guard outside. Cousin, Adi and Lenny are all agog and imagine that it is a women’s jail that has sprung up. The “eerie desolation of their pallid faces” stands testimony to the suffering of these women. One of these women—Hamida—is brought to Mother as a possible replacement for Ayah, for whom everyone is the lookout—Mother, Electric-aunt, Himat Ali, Sharbat Khan, Imam Din, Yousaf, and Lenny herself.

Then come Imam Din’s “guests” from Pir Pindo—his kin who have survived, by the skin of their teeth, the massacres perpetrated by the Sikhs and Hindus. Despite granthi Jagjeet Singh’s advice, most of Pir Pindo’s Muslim villagers were not able to get away in time and met a grisly end trying to remain on their ancestral lands. One survivor who makes it to Lahore is Ranna and he has a horrific tale to tell of his escapade. He is the only survivor from the “brutally altered” Pir Pindo; his family tragically “has ceased to exist.” Ranna’s tale is the sub-plot of the novel.

#### **Chapter 26**

Cousin’s cook hints that Ayah is in Lahore. Lenny becomes aware of Godmother’s “network” which gives the old lady random knowledge and immense power; it helps get Ranna a place as a boarder in Convent of Jesus and Mary, and convinces Lenny that Godmother is on Ayah’s track.

In the mean time, the mystery of women housed in the Hindu doctor’s vacant premises deepens—their wails and cries verge on the inhuman. The restrained voices of Lenny’s parents fighting it out in the bedroom add to the young girl’s unease. It is Hamida who clears the mystery of the wailing women. They are there in a camp for “fallen” women who were kidnapped and taken away from their

families which will not take them back as the men “can’t stand their women being touched by other men.” Lenny’s world, however, is “athrob” with men as she is entering teenage and she imagines being swept off her feet by all kinds of daring admirers.

### **Chapter 27**

Lenny and Hamida take to observing these wretched women from the servant quarters’ roof. Lenny prays that their husbands and families take them back. Hamida, as one of the fallen sisterhood, can only curse her kismet in the hands of which she is a puppet. To prove her faith in destiny, she narrates to Lenny a depressing story in which a sixteen-year old prince is eaten alive by a tiger despite all the care and protection that his father’s soldiers could provide. Lenny’s response—that the story is not as unreal as it is unfair—reveals the sensitivity of the girl. Lenny is sad as the hunt for Ayah seems to have been called off.

### **Chapter 28**

Cousin has taken to avoiding Lenny who becomes more and more frustrated at his indifference. The more distant he is, the more she thinks about him. But all is forgotten when Cousin rushes into her room and, bolting the door, announces that he has seen Ayah, all made up, in a taxi at Charing Cross. Knowing that the news will soften Lenny, he tries to feel her body but a new confident Lenny violently pushes him away. We see a mature Lenny making him understand that his advances are unwelcome, and they should wait to see how they feel about each other after a few years before indulging in physical intimacies.

### **Chapter 29**

Lenny herself catches a glimpse of Ayah in a taxi, squashed between two thin poets. That evening, Mother announces that Godmother wants Adi and Lenny to spend the night with her. When Hamida and Lenny go to Queens Garden that evening, they find it a changed place. Beneath the marble canopy, the Queen’s bust has gone and the place has “depressingly altered.” Muslim families now monopolise the garden and the world seems to have changed forever.

When Lenny breaks the news to Godmother that she has seen Ayah, the old lady speaks to Lenny as one would to an adult. She reveals that Mother and Electric-aunt have been involved in rescuing kidnapped women, either sending them back to their families or arranging for them to be housed in the Recovered Women’s Camps. They have also been smuggling rationed petrol to help their Hindu and Sikh friends escape from the frenzy of Muslim mobs in Pakistan. One of the women Mother arranged for was Ayah, who was sent back to her relatives in Amritsar. But Cousin’s news contradicts Godmother’s claims. He reveals to Lenny that Ayah is going around all made up as “she has converted her profession” and become a dancing-girl at Hira Mandi, Lahore’s red-light district.

Godmother then confirms that Ayah is indeed in Lahore, that she is a married woman, not a dancing-girl, and that her husband is coming to visit Godmother that evening. Time drags till evening when Ayah's husband makes an appearance. A surprised Lenny realizes that the husband is Ice-candy-man who "has changed from chest-thrusting *paan*-spitting and strutting *goonda* into a spitless poet. . . . His stream of brash talk has been replaced by a canny silence." Ice-candy-man reveals that he lives in Hira Mandi as he is descended from the dancing-girls of the *kotha*. He talks of Ayah, now his wife, as one who has been accepted by his people, who has "the voice of an angel and the grace and rhythm of a goddess," that he is her slave who worships her. Ice-candy-man's assertions infuriate Godmother into lashing out at him—"You permit her to be raped by butchers, drunks, and goondas and say she has come to no harm? . . . She was lifted in February and you married her in May? What were you doing all that time?" His silence only reiterates the torture Ayah was made to go through so as to ensure that no man would claim her and she could then be possessed by Ice-candy-man.

Godmother's severe castigation of Ice-candy-man marks the end of Lenny's age of innocence and her transition into experience. Lenny's innocence is "laid waste that evening by the emotional storm that raged. The confrontation between Ice-candy-man and Godmother opened her eyes "to the wisdom of righteous indignation over compassion."

### **Chapter 30**

Lenny considers Godmother as a ministering angel in a person's hour of need. The old lady decides to visit Ayah in Hira Mandi as "as she (Ayah) is ashamed to face us." Lenny can now understand Ayah's pain—"I know Ayah is deeply, irrevocably shamed. They have shamed her. Not the men in the carts . . . but Sharbat Khan and Ice-candy-man and Imam Din and Cousin's cook and the butcher and the other men she counted among her friends and admirers." When Godmother and Lenny set their eyes on Ayah in her Hira Mandi house, she is dressed as a "rouged and lipsticked" bride with lowered eyes. It is only when she raises her eyes that her tragedy is writ large on her face—the "radiance and animation has gone . . . the soul has been extracted from its living body." She has been given a new name—Mumtaz, the name of a Moghul queen—and she is desperate to go back to her own people in Amritsar. Though Godmother tries to impress upon her that her family might not want to take her back and enquires whether Ice-candy-man mistreats her, Ayah is clear that she can never forget what happened and wants to get away from her husband. Seeing that Ayah has become a shadow of her former self, Lenny perceives that "Ayah is haunted by her past . . . she must get away from the monster who has killed her spirit and mutilated her 'angel's' voice." Lenny comes to understand that Hira Mandi is both the cultural pulse as well as forbidden fruit of Lahore; it simultaneously evokes disguised interest and veiled contempt.

### Chapter 31

The German Dr Selzer has replaced Col. Bharucha as the Sethis' family physician. As he and the Phailbuses socialize with Mother on the veranda, there is a sudden commotion in the neighbouring compound. As everyone rushes to the scene of commotion, they find the burly Sikh guard wrestling with someone and bellowing abuses. When the two men are pulled apart, it is found that it is Ice-candy-man who was in the fray with the Sikh. It turns out that Godmother has used her resources and had Ayah spirited away from Hira Mandi by the police. Ayah is brought to the Women's Camp to be registered by the Ministry for the Rehabilitation of Recovered Women before being sent across the border to Amritsar. When pleading and threats could not hold her back, Ice-candy-man and his cronies appeared in three galloping carts and tried to take her away but the Sikh guard's fierce resistance foiled this attempt.

### Chapter 32

With his arm broken, Ice-candy-man has taken to haunting Warris Road where Ayah lives in the Recovered Women's Camp. He often recites romantic verses and has acquired "a new aspect – that of a moonstruck fakir who has renounced the world for his beloved." The Sikh guard's aggression has given way to tolerance as far as Ice-candy-man is concerned. Whenever Ayah has to be taken to Mr Phailbus for homeopathic treatment, Ice-candy-man tries to waylay her and recite poetry to her. But for Ayah he is invisible and inaudible. Each day, he flings fragrant petals over Lenny's garden wall and the courtyard of the Recovered Women's Camp; each day they are swept aside as if they were "goat droppings." Then one day there are no petals. Lenny is told that Ayah has at last gone to her family in Amritsar and Ice-candy-man has also disappeared across the Wagah border into India.

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#### 3.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. What is Mother's overpowering guilt concerning Lenny?
2. What is the difference in treatment that Ayah reserves for Ice-candy-man and Masseur?
3. What is Lenny's response to Gandhiji?
4. How does Sher Singh get a dose of his own medicine after his handling of tenants?
5. Why are some women sent to the Fallen Women's camp?

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## UNIT 4: *ICE-CANDY-MAN* - II

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### STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

#### 4.0 Objective

#### 4.1 Critical Analysis

- 4.1.1 Themes
- 4.1.2 Style and Tone of the Novel
- 4.1.3 Characterization
- 4.1.4 Novel's Locale
- 4.1.5 Metaphorical Undertones
- 4.1.6 Configurations of love

#### 4.2 Glossary

#### 4.3 Let Us Sum Up

#### 4.4 Unit End Questions

#### 4.5 Suggested Readings

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this second part of the Unit, we identify and analyse some of the important issues and perspectives in *Ice-Candy-Man*. All of them invariably have to do with the extremes of reality and its transmutation into a narrative marked by realism. It is also a novel that has strong undercurrents of postcolonialism and its manifestations.

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### 4.1 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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#### 4.1.1 THEMES

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##### Autobiography

*Ice-Candy-Man* is a novel that imaginatively tells the story of a young Parsee girl's growing up against the backdrop of the events that led up to and succeeded the Partition of India in 1947. Assessed on the microcosmic level, *Ice-Candy-Man* focuses on the events in the personal life of Lenny growing up in Lahore. In more ways than one, Lenny resembles Sidhwa whose own childhood was spent in Lahore in the years preceding the Partition. Like the writer herself, Lenny's is a cocooned world comprising her Mother, Father, Godmother, Ayah, and the contingent of domestics employed by her affluent parents. On one level, Sidhwa's focus is on Lenny's identity as a young handicapped girl *vis-à-vis* these people who surround and emotionally sustain her.

##### History

Much beyond this small world of the child lies the macrocosm of the larger world of the country with its diverse communities, faiths and allegiances. The novel



portrays situations in which identity is sought to be defined through the lens of religion. Revealed in the process are the ironies and dangers of allowing religious identities to prevail over social and personal ones. It is this outlook in peoples' minds which caused the bloodbath of Partition. *Ice-Candy-Man* captures a defining moment in South Asian history which changed the map of the world. Its repercussions are still being felt in the communal divides that beset our subcontinent.

### **Identity**

Bapsi Sidhwa's heritage allowed her to witness the Partition from a safe distance, since Parsees held a religiously and politically neutral position. This perspective is conveyed in the novel through the calculated responses of Parsee characters like Colonel Bharucha and others congregating at community gatherings.

Written from the perspective of Lenny, the novel grapples with the issues of identity on both microcosmic and the macrocosmic levels. On the microcosmic level, the novel's prominent characters evolve into personae dominated by their religious personality. From individuals who once coalesced on the social and the emotional levels, these folks are forced by circumstance and politics to re-create themselves as adherents to their specific faiths. In the bargain, they lose their humanitarian edge and mechanically evolve into dehumanized stereotypical zealots. On the macrocosmic level, the novel embodies the voice of an author who herself represents minority existence, first as a Parsee and then as a diasporic voice which speaks from another continent but voices concerns that have relevance and significance even today.

One of the strongest indictments by Sidhwa is contained in the symbolic desecration of women. In an interview, Sidhwa had remarked that during Partition a woman's body became the arena both for vengeance and celebration that transcended all limits of human decency. In the novel, Ayah is the woman whose body is used, abused and misused by men who participate in the premeditated orgy of violence and retribution that runs through the text.

Another aspect of identity within the novel is linked to the concept of power. On one hand is the notion of political power and machinations. This gets voiced through fictional characters and fictionalized historical personae, all of whom represent and speak for various segments of society and ideology. On the other hand is the notion of sexual power which is conveyed through the complex character of Lenny. The novel begins with her portrayal as a child who then evolves through teenage, adolescence and young adulthood. Very early in her life, Lenny is inadvertently initiated into sexual awareness by the very people who are expected to exercise restraint and protect her. Her first initiation comes through her parents' relationship; then it is Ayah's interaction with admirers, specifically Masseur and Ice-candy-man; and finally, it is Cousin who introduces her to physical intimacy and response. Throughout the novel, sexuality is an obsessive part of Lenny's life and

consciousness. This facet, perhaps, reflects the fact that the novel emanates from a milieu in which there is much sexual repression and Sidhwa imaginatively weaves this reality of her homeland into her narrative.

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#### **4.1.2 STYLE AND TONE OF THE NOVEL**

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Sidhwa writes in a style characterised by fluency and colloquialism. The story is narrated in present tense as events unfold before Lenny's eyes. All through the narrative we are always aware of an adult Lenny looking back at and interpreting the experiences of her past. The narrative has a linear progression, that is, it follows a chronological sequence of events, beginning with Lenny and Ayah's close association in Lahore a few years before 1947, and culminating in Ayah's departure from the city after Partition.

From a literary perspective, the novel reflects an ironic humour. This subtle irony dispenses with grandiloquence yet it is a telling tale of the postcolonial realities that dogged and continue to dog the erstwhile territories of the British Empire. It is through her forte of understatement that Sidhwa delicately weaves her tale round the romance of Ayah in a world torn asunder by people ostensibly fighting for their faiths.

The novel's tone interweaves grimness and hilarity. Elements of starkness are laced with sharp ironic humour and ribaldry. There is a synthesis of tones of compassion with the notes of indictment and sudden bursts of hilarity. All these combine to evoke both anger and sympathy within us, purging our anger and aspiring to restore faith in basic human goodness.

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#### **4.1.3 CHARATERIZATION**

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Sidhwa's characters are chiselled with an understated delicacy that conveys the sensibilities and the sensitivities of her creations. The most significant characters are:

- 1 the narrator, Lenny, a sharp, precocious child who enjoys the privilege of detachment even when in the thick of company. Her narrative voice is one of retrospect and hindsight as she weaves the story of her childhood. Through her, Sidhwa is able to sensitively convey the angst and outrage of an India being partitioned due to the one-upmanship of politicians. Sidhwa is sometimes criticized for creating Lenny as a character far too intelligent for her age.
- 2 Shanta, Lenny's Ayah, who is pivot around whom events in the novel unfold. In her equations with other people, this attractive young girl is the foil created by the novelist to counter the depths of brutality and suffering that other characters have to undergo. Her suffering at the climax, despite her good-heartedness, underlines the pangs of India's Partition.

- 3 Ice-candy-man, Ayah's obsessive admirer, who initiates the climactic flurry of events, and himself becomes an unwitting victim of Partition. Drawn like many other men by the magnetic beauty of Ayah, Ice-candy-man appears in the roles of ice cream vendor, bird seller, cosmic connector to Allah via telephone, and pimp. The nature of his love is constantly changing and he is a slippery character. In many ways, he symbolises the multifarious dimensions of India through his persona which journeys through the extremes of passion, spirituality and cruelty.
- 4 Colonel Bharucha, the critical commentator on the machinations of the colonial power and advocate of Parsee self-preservation in the troubled times of Partition.
- 5 Masseur, Ayah's lover and beloved, whose presence drove Ice-candy-man to insane retribution. Masseur is elegant, compactly muscled, reserved, competent, assured, kneading knotty shoulders and soothing aching limbs, an oasis of calm in a violent, dehumanized world in which he became the sacrificial victim.
- 6 Lenny's Mother and Father, who were the voices of sanity and humanity in a world gone mad.
- 7 Godmother Rodabai who emotionally sustained Lenny in times of the young girl's alienation and trauma. She is a mother figure, a woman imbued with an intensity of tenderness, love, humour, and courage of conviction not perceived in any other character. She is the epitome of compassion in a brutalized world.

Besides these figures so central to the train of events, Sidhwa creates a multitude of other characters who serve as a chorus commentating both on events within the novel as also on events and personalities that shaped the events preceding Partition. The novelist appropriately brings them together as admirers of Ayah who all congregate in Lahore's public gardens to vie for her attention when she takes Lenny there in the evenings. These choric voices represent a whole spectrum of contemporary opinion ranging from the corridors of power—represented by people like the Government House gardener and the Falletis Hotel cook—to humble dwellings of the common masses—symbolized by folk like the zoo attendant, the cook and the wayside restaurant owner. Juxtaposed in between the votaries and opponents of Partition are Lenny's and Ayah's perceptions of the event. In addition to these different perspectives is the peculiar intersection of faith and politics. Sidhwa insinuates this by writing that “the madder the mystic, the greater his power” to damage the social fabric.

Sidhwa's chorus of characters is an example of history that is fictionalized. Through shades of opinion that get expressed by her protagonists, she succeeds in capturing

and conveying the sensitivities of various classes of society that were caught in the complexity and perplexities of Partition.

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#### 4.1.4 NOVEL'S LOCALE

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The novel's canvas combines the realities of everyday existence with the abstractions of politics. The world and times of Partition are packed in the microcosm of Lenny's memories. *Ice-Candy-Man* portrays a child's world asserting itself in the assorted company of adults when it reflects the complexities of racial, ethnic and religious violence. Set in the city of Lahore in undivided Punjab, and then in the new nation of Pakistan, there are carnivalesque scenes in which characters commentate as a chorus on the events in which they are enmeshed. These scenes that Sidhwa describes occur in a variety of places. When occurring in Lenny's parental home, they symbolize an island of emotional security that is brutally breached. In Godmother's house, the inhabitants' interaction stands for a haven of compassion and refuge for tormented souls. In the public gardens of Lahore, they symbolize urbane perceptions; when they occur in Pir Pindo, they represent rural perceptions. Parsee gatherings are occasions that reverberate with the strategies of survival of a minuscule minority.

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#### 4.1.5 METAPHORICAL UNDERTONES

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The text is interspersed with Urdu poetry. This reflects not only the literary milieu which shaped the writer's creative imagination but also stands as cryptic elliptical observation on textual events.

The epigraph at the opening of the novel is a translation of the opening lines of "Shikwa," a famous long poem of Urdu poet, Mohammad Iqbal. "Shikwa" voices Man's lamentation of God's dispensation; in the textual context, the quoted lines emphasize the helplessness of man in the face of the vagaries of fate—a reality that the novel consistently underlines. In another quote from Iqbal, this time at the beginning of Chapter 13, Sidhwa asserts the changing equations in a world witnessing the erosion of European/white man's colonial rule as the centre cannot hold and horrors are perpetrated on the colonized. In the concluding chapter of the novel, Sidhwa again quotes from "Shikwa" to highlight Ice-candy-man's plight in love after Ayah has been rescued from his clutches.

At other occasions in the novel, translations of Urdu verses are quoted to reinforce feelings of characters caught in adverse circumstances. In Chapter 29, Urdu poet, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, belonging to the Progressive Writers Movement, is quoted to underline Ice-candy-man's innate guilt that kept him away from Lenny's family after he had Ayah abducted. By talking of the impatient wait of a lover, Ayah's obsessive lover hopes to deflect uncomfortable questions about her whereabouts. Lines of Faiz are again brought up to suggest that there is yet another anguish besides rejection in love. A little later, Ice-candy-man quotes from another Urdu

poet, Wali Deccani, to reiterate his love for Ayah whom he has grievously wronged. When Godmother visits the red-light district of Hira Mandi to see for herself how Ayah fares after marriage, Ice-candy-man tries to flatter Godmother with Ghalib's famous couplet that describes the joy of a lover at the mistress' unexpected arrival. Ghalib's plaintive appeal on being turned away from the threshold of the beloved is Ice-candy-man's refrain whenever Ayah is taken for homeopathic treatment after being brought to Recovered Women's Camp. Mir Taqi Mir's couplet is quoted to reiterate how Ice-candy-man is ever-willing to put up with the tyrannical ways of his mistress. Zauq's words are feebly echoed to announce his beloved's refusal to let him enter the domain of her heart and later to emphasize his mystical, obsessive madness for, and eventual union with her.

Besides incorporating verses from renowned Urdu poets, Sidhwa takes recourse to poetry herself to give expression to Masseur's passion for Ayah. His oft-sung special song for her is a highly romanticized outpouring steeped in natural imagery. In their romantic moments, with Lenny as the usual presence, this song is not without a sinister edge—"the bee stole the rose's youth." For having physically surrendered herself to Masseur, Ayah has to face the jealous tyranny and terrible vengeance exacted by the rejected lover, Ice-candy-man. He first shadows the lovers, knowing that he does not have a place in Ayah's heart, then savagely abducts her, making sure that she is sullied to such an extent that no man will claim her, and finally he marries her, treating her like a caged bird in retribution for her giving her affections elsewhere. At the climax of the novel, he takes to throwing flowers into the Recovered Women's Camp where Ayah lives before being sent to her relatives in India. Accompanying this action is always a song on his lips that reiterates his unforgettable memories of her. But it is these very memories that she is desperate to forget and so crosses over to India.

The poetry in the text is often a symbolic summation of characters' feelings as they subtly point to events.

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#### **4.1.6 CONFIGURATIONS OF LOVE**

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*Ice-Candy-Man* is a novel that highlights the depths of human relationships against the backdrop of Partition. These are relationships marked by different shades of love and lust that permeate the narrative. We become aware of both the destructive and the sustaining aspects of these different kinds of love and lust.

The sustaining, unconditional love between Lenny and Godmother is the purest form of love between human beings. To a slightly lesser degree, is the caring and intense affection between Lenny and Ayah. Lenny's household domestics and Ayah's friends represent another front of human bondage. Then there is the caring, nurturing love between Lenny and her parents. Sibling love, with its constant bickering, is reflected in the Lenny-Adi and Godmother-Slavesister relationships.

Love grounded in the cause of humanitarian concerns is seen in the covert actions of Mother and Electric-aunt. The two women display remarkable courage by smuggling petrol to help Lahore's Hindus and Sikhs escape lynch mobs and to help kidnapped women like Ayah cross the border to their relatives in India.

The cruel, pitiless, obsessive face of human love is exhibited in the Ayah-Ice-candy-man relationship. Initially besotted with her, he becomes an avenger when he finds a rival. He then ensures that the good-natured woman is physically defiled before he forces her into an asphyxiating marriage from which she is rescued and sent to relatives in India.

Love and lust for power is underlined in the movement for Indian independence. The demand for Home Rule, says Col. Bharucha, "is a struggle for power" in which the major communities "jockey." This is apparent in the machinations of the various classes of power that the novel's chorus refers to. These include bureaucrats like Inspector General of Police Rogers who insinuatingly plays off one community against the other; the British establishment which seeks to prop up an Empire on its last legs by juggling with Viceroys like Wavell and Mountbatten, and leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Patel; politicians like Master Tara Singh and Jinnah who try to carve out as large a slice of power and territory as is possible in the chaotic circumstances of Partition; and political parties like the Congress, the Akalis and the Muslim League "who won't agree on a single issue" to assert their contempt not only for each other but also for human life.

Love of ancestral lands and rootedness to one's soil is portrayed through the village folk of Pir Pindo who cannot conceive leaving behind the lands of their forefathers to migrate to an unknown land simply for the sake of religion. A politicised love for one's religion is portrayed as the underlying discourse on Partition, especially the venom spouted by characters belonging to different faiths. The tragedy of communalisation pervades the novel as voices of fiction commentate as politicised angles of perception that resulted in the tragedy of Partition.

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## 4.2 GLOSSARY

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### *Diaspora*

This term has a Greek origin which means "a scattering or sowing of seeds." It refers to a movement of people from a nation or community away from their own country. This movement could be forced or voluntary. These migrants share common ethnic identity with the place they have left behind.

### *Parsees*

They are descendants of Zoroastrians from Persia who migrated to the Indian subcontinent over a thousand years ago. Today Parsees living away from the subcontinent identify either India or Pakistan as their home country to which they

trace their ancestral origin. They worship fire in the Agiary or the fire temple. Theirs is a rapidly diminishing population all over the globe.

### ***Partition Literature***

A subgenre of literature which depicts the Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 along religious lines. Most of it is fiction that portrays the pathos and suffering emanating from the migration of peoples either into India or to Pakistan. Bloodletting, rape, trauma, and displacement are some of the outstanding themes of Partition literature. This kind of writing has primarily been done in Urdu, Hindi or English.

### ***Postcolonial Literature***

Refers to a body of writing that emanates from the cultural, political and economic heritage of an empire and its downfall. Some major issues that it is concerned with are man's relationship with history, myth, identity, difference. It also relates to matters arising out of multiculturalism, diaspora and ethnicity.

### ***Realism***

It was an artistic movement that began in France in 1850. Its practitioners depicted the realities of life without any embellishment or interpretation. The attempt was to portray truth even if ugly or sordid. In literature, realism is the faithful portrayal of life without idealisation or exaggeration.

### ***Reality***

The state of things as they are even if not observable or comprehensible. In this sense, reality includes the states of being and of nothingness. It is a philosophical category where there are levels or gradations to the nature and conception of reality. Reality includes perceptions from the most subjective to the most fantastic.

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## **4.3 LET US SUM UP**

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*Ice-Candy-Man* is a novel that fictionalises a historical event marked by the ill judgement of individuals and establishments in the first half of the twentieth century. From a sociological perspective, this work is significant and crucial to an understanding of political, cultural and religious complexities that fused to bring about the division of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. Bapsi Sidhwa is able to strike a fine balance between grim historical realities and compassionate emotional sensitivities that give the novel its startling qualities of reality and realism. By interweaving family, community and religion, the novelist succeeds in bringing out the extreme realities of Partition—its horrific and its humane aspects. Yet the novel should not be taken as a work of historical accuracy as facts have been turned about to suit the thread and tenor of the narrative.

*Ice-Candy-Man* has been made into a film—*1947 Earth*. Given the fact that it focuses on rifts and fragmentations that have since times immemorial caused some

of the most cataclysmic events of human history, the film is one of the most powerful celluloid renditions on India's partition. It stars Aamir Khan as Ice-candy-man, Nandita Das as Ayah, Rahul Khanna as Masseur, Arif Zakaria as Father, Kittu Gidwani as Mother, and Maaia Sethna as the impressionable Lenny.

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#### 4.4 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Describe Ice-candy-man's behaviour when Ayah is lodged in the Women's Camp.
2. Discuss the significance of the title of the novel, Ice-Candy-Man.
3. The Sethi's dinner party symbolises the conflicts and the politics of Partition. Discuss.
4. Write a note on the Ayah-Maneur Ice-Candy Man relationship.
5. Comment on the significance of the sub-plot of the novel.
6. Write a note on the choric voices in the novel.
7. Comment on Lenny's role as the narrator of Ice-Candy Man.

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#### 4.5 SUGGESTED READING

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1. Dhawan, R. K. and Novy Kapadia eds. *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1996.
2. Didur, Jill. *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.
3. Goodyear, Sara Suleri. *Bapsi Sidhwa Omnibus*. OUP, 2001.
4. Jain, Jasbir ed. *Reading Partition/Living Partition*. Jaipur: Rawat, 2007.
5. Kaul, Suvir. *The Partition of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.
6. Rahman, Tariq. *A History of Pakistani Literature in English*. Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1991.

If you are interested in other writings on Partition, you would find it interesting to read Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, Sadat Hasan Manto's *Kingdom's End*. Some Partition films that you can watch are *Garam Hawa*, *Pinjar*, and *Khamosh Pani*.



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## **UNIT 5 : "THE JOURNEY" by JEAN ARASANAYAGAM in *ALL IS BURNING***

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 5.0 Objectives**
- 5.1 Introduction**
- 5.2 About the Author**
- 5.3 About the Age**
- 5.4 Introduction to the Text**
  - 5.4.1 Summary**
  - 5.4.2 Critical Analysis of the Text**
  - 5.4.3 Memory**
  - 5.4.4 Narrator**
  - 5.4.5 Identity**
  - 5.4.6 The Last Leg of the Journey**
  - 5.4.7 Style**
  - 5.4.8 Glossary**
- 5.5 Self Assessment Questions**
- 5.6 Let us Sum up**
- 5.7 Unit End Questions**
- 5.8 Suggested Readings**

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### **5.0 OBJECTIVES**

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This unit falls under the rubric Postcolonial studies. The term is a vast umbrella term and it is one that includes trajectories of continents as diverse and varied as Asia, Africa, Australia as well as nation states of Canada and islands of the Caribbean. However, as the process of colonisation itself was so widely different in each of the above-mentioned areas, postcoloniality itself took on multiple manifestations. While the trend was towards the formation of nation states of what were former colonies of the British, needless to say nation formation was widely different in settler colonies such as Canada and Australia than in the other nations. Focussing on the trajectory of electoral democracy in South Asia, this unit studies the current trends in postcolonial literature through an analysis of a short story "The Journey" by Jean Arasanayagam . The story is part of a collection entitled All is Burning.

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### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Our focus in this unit is the geographical space of Sri Lanka in South Asia. We

study a particular dimension in the trajectory of the postcolonial Sri Lankan nation state which is the phenomenon of militant nationalism and the manner in which it has affected the public space of Sri Lankan civic society. Arasanayagam's collection of stories *All is Burning* gives us a coherent picture of Sri Lankan society in the throes of protracted war. The collection narrates the conflict from the points-of view of soldiers, mothers, militants, students and teachers, i.e a wide cross section of humanity affected by the conflict though not necessarily connected to it ideologically. This brings us to the oft used term Militant nationalism, often theorised as a means of articulation employed by the communities marginalised by the state sponsored agenda of progress. However, militant nationalism more often than not translates into an euphemism for terrorism. Arasanayagam's short story shows the cultural and political dimensions of the problem.

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## 5.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jean Arasanayagam, a writer of international fame is one of the leading writers of Sri Lanka. She was born into a Dutch Burgher family that had inhabited the island for three generations. The nomenclature 'Burgher' is a Dutch word used to denote the offspring of the colonising Portuguese, Dutch and British who had entered into marriage alliances with other indigenous communities on the island. The Burghers often occupied positions of clerks and junior superintendents in the offices of the colonial administration. It was with the independence of Ceylon and its adoption of the mantle of a Sinhala-Buddhist state that the status of the Burgher community radically altered. Owing to the racial intermixing associated with the community, the term- Burgher, is synonymous with hybridity and in being so is also synecdochal for the island of Ceylon itself –home to diverse communities and nationalities. Jean's mother, Charlotte Camilla Grenier Jansz was a great storyteller while her father Harry Daniel Solomons worked as an engine driver with the colonial railways. It was marriage to Arasan that brought her into close contact with the Tamil Hindu fraction of Sri Lanka and gave her the name the pen name of Jean Arasanayagam. She lives in Kandy with her husband and two daughters – Devi and Parvathi.

Jean's tertiary studies led her to England and Scotland where she obtained an MLitt in Literary Linguistics from the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow. Her work includes poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction and plays. She is also a painter and has exhibited her work in the island as well as abroad, at the Paris Biennale, the Commonwealth Exhibitions in England, the Smithsonian Institute U.S.A and Singapore. She has won local and international awards for her writing and has been widely published in Sri Lanka (*New Ceylon Writing*, *Phoenix*, *Navasilu*, *New Lankan Review*, *Channels Options*, *Voice of Women*, *Nivedini*, *Satyn*) and abroad in *Kunapipi*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Wasafiri*, *Ariel*, *Cross Currents* and the *Indian Literary Journal*, *Journal of Humanities* (Nagasaki). Her work has been translated into German, French, Danish, Swedish, Japanese.

The two dominant strains of Arasanayagam's writings focus on issues of identity and gender. On a personal level, for Arasanayagam, identity has always been a matter of concern, anxiety and anguish. The fact that Jean and her family chooses not to leave Ceylon during the mass exodus of the Burgher community following President Bandaranaike's 'Sinhala Only' Act of 1956 spoke of their strong sense of solidarity with the land and its culture. However following decolonisation, the task of nation building saw communal constructions run rampant and it was during this time that the Burghers came under censure regarding notions of purity and impurity. The hybridity of the Burgher race, especially Burgher woman was used to extol the purity of the Sinhalese race and women, who now were seen as the rightful inhabitants of the island. With Arasanayagam, the gender issue is further nuanced by her marriage to Arasanayagam and the close contact that this entailed with her husband's family. Jean's poetry, especially the Nallur Quartet speaks about the elaborate rituals performed by her mother-in-law during Hindu festivals and other auspicious occasions. This cultural/religious enactment, once again, serves to heighten Jean's feelings of alienation and of not-belonging. Time and again she raises the issue of identity – as a woman and as a citizen of a free nation. In her case, as we have seen, both issues acquire unique nuances. It is this sense of alienation from the mainstream after having being the mainstream itself that forces Jean to confront searching questions regarding the nature of her status in a land that for her is synonymous with home and motherland. Is she a refugee, an asylum seeker, one who lives off the goodwill of a state that does not even accord her the status of a full-fledged citizenship?

However, with the rise of ethnic separatism in post independent Sri Lanka, the personal questions that Jean's writings have been preoccupied with take on wider political overtones. Identity became the burning issue of the day, especially after the anti Tamil riots of '83. Now along with being a woman and a Burgher, Jean's writings bear testimony to what it means to be a Tamilian in a majoritarian Sinhalese-Buddhist state. The Tamil insurgency is a direct outcome of this very clash of ethnicities. Arasanayagam's writings, especially in volumes such as *All is Burning*, *Into the Garden Secretly* and *The Cry of the Kite* focus on facets of insurgency – how it takes root in a society and on the effects of political violence on a civilian population. Her writings now acquire the added significance of topicality as an entire society is caught in the violence of insurgency and counter-insurgency.

Another point to be noted in our study of the author Jean Arasanayagam's is her application of the term 'refugee'. The meanings that she imparts to this official terminology while being numerous are immensely empowering. While the next section gives us a clearer picture of the origins of the term and its application in South Asian bureaucratic parlance, what we need to understand here is how for Arasanayagam the word is a significant marker. Not only does she personally identify with the term but with in her writings, it emerges as a metaphor for the

human condition itself.

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### 5.3 ABOUT THE AGE

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Jean Arasanayagam's stories are set in contemporary Sri Lanka. Her autobiographical novels, such as *Inheritance*, *A Nice Burgher Girl* give us an insight into the period of late colonisation. This was the social and cultural space that nurtured her and the age in which she grew up. Arasanayagam early work and her strong sense of identification with the Burgher community exemplifies this rare cusp of history often referred to as the moment of colonisation, i.e the contact between the civilizations of the East and the West. The Burghers, as we have read in the previous section were a community originating directly from that contact. Arasanayagam's fiction moves voyeuristically over the different phases of decolonisation leading up to a present day scenario of conflict in the independent nation.

The age that we need to discuss here, is the decolonised South Asian subcontinent with a focus on the island-nation of Sri Lanka. To understand the present age in its complexity, it is necessary to move a little further back into the past so as to recognise how the past was instrumental in shaping the present. Concomitant with decolonisation were the national liberation movements striving to break the yolk of imperialism. While in Ceylon, often referred to as the 'model British colony', the transfer of power was conducted on a peaceful note, in India on the contrary the freedom struggle is legendary. With the end of imperialism one saw the beginning of a new phase – the modern nation states, in what were formerly the colonies of the British Empire. The efficacy of the nation state, largely viewed as a western concept, on a land mass with the cultural and linguistic diversity of South Asia been a matter of much debate and discussion. Needless to say, nation building in South Asia was a complex process. While Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities*, draws on the importance of print nationalism for the establishment of the western nation-states, for the nascent South Asian nations it was more the common mythological base as well as cultural constructs regarding gender that set into motion the idea of nation as community rather than the budding culture of printing that Anderson emphasises. The repercussions of nationalism on the women of the Burgher community in Sri Lanka have been briefly dealt with in the previous section. In India, the establishment of a national language, national symbols and the wars waged between the nascent nation-states - India, Pakistan and Bangladesh did set in place the idea of the nation as an imagined construct/community.

As the trajectory of the nation-state in South Asia, moves to a contemporary phase, it locks in into the relationship between the majority and minority communities or that between the centre and the peripheries. It is on this count that one sees the development of a contemporary phase of breakaway nationalism, often referred to as militant nationalism. The word militant in this context refers to the violence used in the articulation of demands regarding marginalization or oppression.

However what appears paradoxical is the fact that the sections of the nation that wish to break away from the mainstream, base this demand on the grounds of establishing yet another nation. This they claim will protect their culture, traditions and economic interests. This has been the case with the Indian North-East as also of the Khalistan movement in Punjab and the demand for Eelam in the Jaffna peninsula of Sri Lanka. It is the last that forms a matter of immediate concern for us.

The point established so far is the manner by which militant nationalism has become the dominant phase of the south Asian nation states today. However despite a common history of colonisation and imperialism, the manifestations of militancy itself are diverse and deeply rooted in the multifarious cultures of the nations where militant politics hold sway. Perhaps this best explains why terrorism takes on such varied manifestations within South Asia itself. Sri Lankan terrorism is widely different from the one seen or experienced in Kashmir, while both ostensibly demand the carving out of a new national space.

When we speak about the present age therefore, it is in terms of the specificity of terrorism that haunts Sri Lanka. An important historical marker in this regard has been the Anti-Tamil riots in Colombo in 1983. This was seen as a pogrom by the state against the Tamil community, in retaliation for the soldiers who lost their lives at the hands of militants in Jaffna. After '83, Tamil militancy vociferously took up the cry for Eelam or a separate homeland. Subsequently, Sri Lankan Tamils also migrated in large numbers to foreign shores.

Our focus in this unit is on Sri Lankan terrorism and the repercussions of this phenomenon on civil society in Sri Lanka. Jean Arasanayagam's text under study draws forth one significant and disturbing development in Sri Lanka. This is the Refugee Question. The term has meanings that could extend into the Diasporic debate as well, for the conflict has engendered a vast body of expatriate Sri Lankans living in different corners of the globe but maintaining extensive contacts with the mother country. However, we study refugees with regard to the context of the displacement caused by violence. The next section would engage in explicating this term and usage with more clarity.

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#### **5.4 INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT**

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Before we embark on an in-depth analysis of the text, it is important to get our bearings right regarding the particular and specific use of certain types of nomenclature which the narrative draws our attention to and forces us to think anew. The terms 'Refugee' and 'Asylum seekers' occur time and again during the course of the story and as terms they are often used in a manner that suggests that one can be easily substituted for the other. Moreover, the fact that in the story they function as identity markers, strongly points to the politically charged nature of the context. Keeping in mind, the wider context of a South Asian history, the

term refugee first appeared in official nomenclature with the Partition of India. We need to first understand the historical ramifications of the term, within a South Asian context, before we embark upon an analysis regarding the present implication of the terms refugee and asylum seekers and debate on how different or similar to each other they may be.

The meaning associated with the term 'Refugee' extends beyond definitions of refugees as a displaced population seeking shelter or asylum. In South Asia, the Partition of India saw an influx of a 'refugee population' from erstwhile Pakistan into North India. Refugee camps were set up and the settlement of refugees into the new nation was a question of paramount importance for the nascent Indian state. A few years later, the creation of another nation-state -Bangladesh added another dimension to the Refugee discourse in South Asia as a fresh influx of population poured into the territory of West Bengal. The Indian nation concomitantly acquired the status of 'Big Brother', in the subcontinent. The impersonal machinery of the state gained credence as it slipped into the role of being the protector for this homeless and economically deprived population in need of settlement. Refugee settlement became as pertinent a question as the crucial wars with China and Pakistan which had helped bolster a united national imaginary regarding the cultural distinctiveness of Indians as opposed to Pakistanis or Bangladeshis. Moreover, the Indian state acquired the image of an objective, benevolent and willing provider for its citizens as well as those who sought refuge within its boundaries.

The fact that this discourse carried deep overtones of a colonial ideology and was the manner by which imperial administration had exemplified the task of carrying the white man's burden was largely ignored. Discourses of progress, modernity and emancipation that had been the slogan of the imperial government now became the catchwords of the state. In a post-independence period the state thus assumed the role of being the overseer to its population/citizens and in this manner by gaining in goodwill and credence it could make possible the shift from feudalism and monarchy.

The term refugee acquired additional overtones of meaning towards the nineteen eighties and these new attributes largely originated from the changing Sri Lankan political context regarding the nation-state. With the onset of insurgency and counter-insurgency between the Tamil militants demanding a homeland and the anti-secessionist policies of the state, the stage was set for upheaval en masse. Population had to be often dislocated –sometimes at the behest of the state or else entire villages were evacuated by militants at gunpoint. The eviction of population from villages in the Jaffna peninsula is a case in point. Now it was the state that was arguably, responsible for creating refugees. Henceforth, the terminology acquired new overtones prompting the creation of a new term - 'Internally Displaced People' (IDP). For while the conventional use of the term

refugee, implied a section of population moving across borders, with IDP's the movement was inevitably from the evacuated village to a safer territory within the nation itself. However, given the strong resonance of the term to signify a traumatised population, IDP's often chose to make the refugee camp their home. Studies on IDP's highlight the psychological scars of violence, victimisation and trauma. This fosters in them a great degree of dependence on state resources along with feelings of passivity regarding resettlement agendas. The point here has been to illustrate the difference between earlier case studies of Indian refugee settlements and the present day associations with the term. The creation of IDP's moreover has been voiced as instrumental for the spread of militancy, as the displaced youth have inevitably turned to the law of the gun in order to justify the 'wrongs' inflicted on them.

IDP's usually belong to the Tamil section of the population and this brings us to the burning issue of the day – ethnic separatism. An ethnic identity is often seen as the racial or religious identity with which a person is born. This gives a sense of belonging to a particular community and of partaking of its cultural values and historical lineage. However, the contemporary age has seen ethnic differences develop into rigid fundamentalist discourses. Ethnic separatism arises when a community sees itself as threatened by a majoritarian community and the protracted war in Sri Lanka has often been attributed to similar such discourses. However when we talk of Tamil refugees it renders problematic the notion of ethnic separatism. It signals to the fact that not all fractions of Tamil society can be viewed as demanding a separate state and renders suspect the militant fraction that claims to articulate the sentiments of 'the Tamil people'.

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#### **5.4.1 SUMMARY**

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This short story by Jean Arasanayagam is deeply inundated with the political history of the postcolonial Sri Lanka nation state. It needs thereof to be placed within the context of the insurgency and counter-insurgency that has formed an integral part of civic life in Sri Lanka since the past two decades. Fictionalising a harsh reality, Arasanayagam, through the medium of the story poses searching questions regarding identity, ethnic separatism, the class divide in Sri Lanka and the ethics of neutrality in times of crisis. The story exemplifies the value of compassion in human life.

The manner in which the protracted war in Sri Lanka has seeped into and altered various facets of life has formed the subject of much recent debate and analysis in the social sciences. Arasanayagam's story, "The Journey", takes into account one such factor – a journey of immigration from Sri Lanka to another relatively safer part of the world. It is the frequent and recurring nature of such journeys that have led to the creation of a Sri Lankan Diaspora in different parts of the globe. The émigrés in this story seek political asylum but the immediacy of their need to

escape the motherland forces them to resort to illegal channels. Their journey thereof must be conducted under cover and in utter secrecy, for detection would mean deportment to Sri Lanka which could be akin to a death sentence. Once in the foreign land however, political asylum can be sought, but for now secrecy and silence is the order of the day.

The fact that such illegal and harrowing journeys have been a significant part of a contemporary Sri Lankan reality draws to the fore the trauma that war can wreck on a civilian population and the pressing need for change. The decision to migrate, despite the inhuman conditions that "The Journey" entails, is in itself a signifier of deep-rooted resistance and opposition to the power structures in the country that engender violence and death. Reflecting on this line of thought, the title of the story "The Journey" prompts multiple interpretations. While a journey can be a pilgrimage, this journey, to begin with is certainly not so. The narrator is emphatic about the illegality that informs it all. We know that the travellers have traded in their life's savings so as to acquire the necessary documents -passports and visas – needed for migration. The narrator emphatically informs us that these travellers are not 'tourists' sojourning in a foreign land but people who desire to escape - an act that signifies a move to a safer and economically more secure future and in being so, is a rejection and resistance to the brutality of war. In thus holding the possibility of new beginnings, "The Journey" with all its incumbent hardships signifies a cleansing or a redemption from the sins committed in the past. It thus, symbolically acquires the status of a purgatorial fire, an act that is akin to a cleansing. Only after this crucial step can the pilgrims, symbolically be re-born into a new life and make a new beginning, albeit in the foreign land. The symbolism of rebirth is reinforced in the last leg of their journey when the travellers wash off the mud and slush of "The Journey", in the fountain, at the heart of the 'old city' - a symbolic cleansing off of the past. In this sense, the distinctions between the present illegal status conferred on "The Journey" and the concept of "The Journey" as a pilgrimage are blurred and even erased. These journeys in all respects are pilgrimages for the émigrés.

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#### 5.4.2 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Arasanayagam's use of the epigraph from the Dhammapada reinforces the wider ramifications of the concept of journey. The quotation from the Buddhist text of the Dhammapada refers to all of humanity as refugees traversing a particular time and space. However, the teaching of the Buddha elevate the status accorded to the term refugee by pointing out that the only refuge one should expect to find during the course of this human life is the self or as the teachings of the Buddha explicate - the controlled self, attained by the discipline of one's senses:

Oneself is one's own protector (refuge); what other protector (refuge)



can there be? With oneself fully controlled, one obtains a protection (refuge) which is hard to gain — The Dhammapada

Reverberating with multiple layers of meanings, a constant backdrop for the narrative is the biblical story of the sacred journey of the Magi. The birth of Christ signalled the beginning of a new order. The narrator's thoughts impart another context to "The Journey" –this time a historical one. He places it within the framework of Sri Lankan history. He recalls another journey that he has in all probability learnt from historical sources – "The Journey" undertaken nearly two hundred years ago by the plantation workers. Travelling incognito from South India to the north of Sri Lanka, to seek work on the plantations, the travails of this group are well recorded in the annals of Sri Lankan history:

so many died on the way of cholera, dysentery, malaria. Many were left behind to be attacked by wild bear, leopards or to grow weak and weaker and die, leaving their skeletons as new landmarks on that journey" (4).

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### 5.4.3 MEMORY

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Reference to this collective memory helps the narrator, as traveller, come to terms with the harsh reality of "The Journey" he has chosen to undertake - a journey where the unheated room in Moscow forms one of the many halts they must make before reaching their final destination – Berlin. Reinforcing the biblical context of nativity, Arasanyagam's narrative has at its centre a mother and child. They are the only ones in the group that acquire a degree of individuality, even though their names are never disclosed to us. The narrator, through whose consciousness the story unfolds, informs us that she is the only woman in an otherwise exclusively male group, yet she demands no special treatment rather her womanly tenderness is evident only in her interaction with the boy: "she's prepared for any hardship. Tough woman. Only tender towards the child..."(2).

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### 5.4.4 NARRATOR

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A significant facet is the subjectivity of the unnamed narrator, who also bears the distinction of being the only Sinhalese in this exclusively Tamil group. Perhaps, he has been a member of the anti-state revolutions and is fleeing state persecution. However, as his thoughts unfold, in the stream-of-consciousness technique, we learn that he has never partaken of any revolutionary or insurgent activity whatsoever or for that matter even taken up the battle cry against the erosion of tradition caused by the influx of the Multi Nationals. He indeed has been most neutral! Belonging to a family of comparative wealth and privilege, the narrator has been educated in a public school and one wonders why he had to flee the country at all? The fact that he is well-educated prepares us for the informed nature of his narrative. As his thoughts bear upon the situation at hand he is able to draw from a fund of similar such incidents from Sri Lankan history as well as from

contemporary political happenings in the world at large.

As they move away from Sri Lanka into alien territory, the politics of separatism too appear to fade away. The narrator muses how those very same warring ethnic identities – the Tamil and the Sinhalese – can meet as brethren on an alien soil. Ethnic denominations over which so much blood has been spilt in the land of his birth are of no consequence in these foreign lands. As the narrator’s mind flits through details of the past, present and future, the reader is familiarised with the violation of human rights that Sri Lankan Tamilians have been subjected to.

Armies of occupation in their soil. Their sons and daughters too, martial women who have their own regiments, have gone against all traditions of their society, joining the militant movements. . . for them seeking political asylum is often a matter of life and death.(7)

Refuting popular perception of state sponsored crimes, the narrator highlights other brutalities that the Tamil segment of the population has had to suffer, such as the atrocities committed by The Indian Peace Keeping Force which he refers to as the ‘army of occupation’. Moreover the breakup of families is perhaps one of the greatest casualties of war. This is perhaps cause for greater grief and mourning - the forced enlisting by militant groups of Tamil youth and perhaps the even more harrowing recruitment of young women as cadres to fight for the cause of Tamil Eelam. Perhaps the mother in this story is fleeing because she needs to convey her boy to safety. This leads the narrator, as a member of the Sinhalese community, to question his role in what he knows have been blatant crimes against humanity. But does he have the right to exculpate himself by saying that he never partook of any of the acts and his parents gave shelter to Tamil families during the anti-Tamil riots of ’83? This is an issue that Arasanayagam grapples with, time and again, in her stories. She questions the stance of neutrality and the ethics of complacency often adopted by the middle classes. Does not neutrality too imply a degree of guilt?

The empathy that the narrator experiences with his fellow travellers, he is aware may not have been possible in Sri Lanka where the two communities regard each other with deadly and unremitting suspicion. The Sinhalese sees the Tamil segments of the population as terrorists while the Tamils view them as oppressors. So while the narrator admits: “identity isn’t important here, at this juncture”, he is well aware that “identity is still the burning question of the day in our part of the world”, where it is “identity that separates and divides” (3). Once again he drives home the relative insignificance of this issue as the territory changes and this prompts questions regarding the efficacy of the ethnic divide itself. As the thoughts flit through his mind, he is reminded of the mythical story of the Sinhalese Princess Kuveni who chooses Prince Vijaya from the Tamil community as a consort. Out of the war zone, ethnic constructions appear politicised and utterly baseless and what emerges

is the compassion that they feel for their fellow travellers. For instance, on seeing the little boy shiver with the biting, icy Siberian breeze, the narrator lends him an extra sweater. He is reminded of his younger brother back home and muses: "What is there to divide us at this moment? Nothing. Even the lack of a shared language is no barrier to our communication." (13). The redeeming factor about "The Journey" is this liberation from the bloody ties of communal identity. The narrator's acts of kindness bear fruit and a bond of trust develops between him and the woman. It is a strange, unspoken bond, a trust that does not need to know names or dwell on past histories. His compassionate gestures towards her boy during the course of "The Journey", prompt similar such compassion in her and finally when for all ostensible purposes "The Journey" is over and they are bereft of any guides, she is the one who offers him refuge, at least for the interim period that he is trying to establish contact with 'his people'. Compassion begets compassion and both the beings in question have been able to transcend the narrow confines of their ethnic identities by reaching out to a common humanity that they both partake of. The weight of Arasanayagam's story rests on the ennobling quality of compassion that is forever present between human beings.

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#### 5.4.5 IDENTITY

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However identity is a fraught term and in the duration of one's life, each individual may be conferred with different and entirely new identities. With the erasure of the past, earlier identities of: "terrorists, militants, subversives, misguided youth", have for all practical purposes been left behind (6). It is in this sense that "The Journey" acquires the redeeming force of a pilgrimage. It is in effect a journey to the Promised Land. The past must be literally effaced and all records – passports, visas, diaries – must be meticulously torn and destroyed. As their guide specifies: "From now on, no identity. No identity. You understand that? From now on, no names. Nothing!" (12).

Identities however cannot be wished away so easily and once they are in the new territory a fresh status, a new identity denomination shall be accorded to them – that of refugees or asylum seekers and at worst illegal detainees.

The narrator's thoughts focus on the harrowing aspects of "The Journey". The reader is left unacquainted with the past histories of the other members of the group - who are these people, what has been the manner of their suffering - did they bear witness to the massacre of their families and perhaps worse their villages or were they members of death squads that roam the countryside? Are they escaping demonic memories or fleeing state persecution? And why is the narrator, a Sinhalese part of this group? While the story prompts these questions no attempt is made towards answering them. While this may appear coincidental, it is a gesture that indicates the necessity to erase a gory and traumatised past, especially if new beginnings are to be enacted. During the course of "The Journey" the travellers

are crammed into crates, fitted into cargo trucks, herded through dense, snow-covered forests and made to crawl through mud and slush. Asked to refrain from conversation, communication has whittled down to gestures or hushed whispers. The narrator is excluded from even this hushed exchange owing to his inability to communicate fluently in the Tamil language. As "The Journey" progresses, he cognises how he and his fellow travellers are being stripped off, of the very last vestiges of humanity. For their frequently changing guides, they are mere numbers. A headcount of sixteen suffices to signify this group: "we are not human beings to them. With names. Personal Lives. Habits. Feelings or emotions." (4). At times he feels they could well be 'frozen meat.' (15). With an ironic twist the narrator decides that if life must boil down to the economic denomination of a 'dollar' then that must be his new name, it is after all the currency that gave him a new beginning. As thoughts randomly flit through the narrators mind, he recounts reports in newspapers of émigrés such as themselves. One such incident explicated the discovery of a body "wedged into the compartment of an air-conditioning unit in a container. Suffocated. Chilled to death. What a slow, long drawn out and agonising end.", or for that matter the group left to die by the wayside, no better than slaughtered animals. (10). Would they meet a similar end, he wonders? But then he is amply aware that the mere successful completion of "The Journey" certainly does not imply the end of all dukhaa, which the teachings of the Buddha clarify, is an inherent part of the human condition. The narrator is aware that the passage to the west is one that is equally ridden with prejudices and racism. Neo-Nazi racism is rampant in Germany: "Skinheads and Rightists. Everywhere the minorities will face such dangers." (15). Just recently an article in the newspaper reported the torching of the home of a Turkish woman and her two granddaughters. He remembers their names as reported in the newspaper –Bahide Arslan and Gelize and Ayse. Even though they had lived in that area for a long time, it did nothing to stop the hatred and prejudice from welled up and destroying the innocent.

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#### **5.4.6 THE LAST LEG OF "THE JOURNEY"**

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On the last leg of their journey, the suspense thickens and in a dramatic twist to the tale, the guide who is to convey them to the final checkpoint never turns up. Left to fend for themselves, the group are wandering around rather aimlessly when they are apprehended by the local Police. They now face the fear that has dodged them ever since they started on "The Journey" – the danger of deportation. At this point, it is the ingenuity of the narrator that saves the day. Just as they have hitherto used dollars to buy their escape now the same dollars are instrumental in buying their freedom, from the Police and from the Taxi driver. Convincing the local police to let them take a taxi to their embassy, the narrator and the other travellers put together a sizeable amount of money with which to bribe the taxi driver who lets them stage an escape.

"The Journey" of this group of travellers ends successfully. The narrator is aware that there are many more formalities to be completed; the formalities of the 'red tape' that separates nations from one another must be completed, for now the travellers must officially apply to the government for asylum. During the course of the interviews that would be conducted to decide whether the demand for political asylum is justified, numerous questions will be asked. The narrator decides that he will answer these with the simple 'truth'.

Symbolically, "The Journey" ends in the city of Berlin – a city that has just pulled down the wall separating the East from the West. It is a city that has known defeat: "the defeat of two world wars" and like the group of sixteen refugees, the city too appears to be "seeking a new identity" (18). This identity however will not be framed on monolith communal lines but shall be on that would encompass a great deal of hybridity. It will be one made up of: "many nationalities and races, not just pure Aryan alone". The narrator is convinced that for the group of sixteen too: "it will provide a new identity." (18).

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#### 5.4.7 STYLE

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Arasanyagam narrates the story using a style that has come to be known as the stream- of consciousness technique. This was made popular or rather associated with the British writer Virginia Woolf. The act of narration is carried out not by direct conversation but rather through unconscious modes of thought. Woolf used it to signify the disjunction between the mental or inner life of her character as opposed to the outer reality or environment that the character ostensibly inhabits. However, with Arasanayagam the technique acquires a new dimension. For unlike Woolf who uses it for full-length novels, Arasanayagam deploys it in short stories. "The Journey", for instance is a short story where the narrative comprises entirely of the random thoughts of the main character –the narrator. The fact that he is never named is in itself a narrative ploy. His thoughts flit furiously between the past, present and future possibilities as also through a catalogue of knowledge he may have acquired through history books, newspapers and journals.

This mode of narration is apt for the context of a story such as "The Journey" for it intensifies the tense atmosphere, the fear of detection and the urgency in the need to cross into neutral territory. The secrecy of the mission demands utter silence, hence mental thoughts produce desired results but in a characteristic Arasanayagam twist the thoughts that convey the details belong to a person from the Sinhala community. Once again we may infer that this is an apt move, for it adds the much needed element of drama and objectivity.

The context that Arasanayagam's stories explicate arises out of the world she inhabits, a world that most of us can scarcely imagine, one torn by war and death

as much as by perpetual mourning and grief. Arasanayagam's stories may well be called fictionalised anthropological accounts. Thus, her stories, as is the case with narratives that articulate violence, are realistic in nature. The narrative is suffused with realistic and true- to-life contemporary details, such as the naming of the cities of Berlin and Moscow or the use of a contemporary Russian airliner – Aerofloat. Realistic details add the factual information needed to ground the story in a contemporary reality thus prompting in the reader the willingness to believe or rather to suspend all modes of disbelief.

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#### 5.4.8 GLOSSARY AND ANNOTATION

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<i>political asylum</i>	– An official term used by the host country for immigrants who have been granted refuge on grounds of the danger they face in their countries owing to political violence.
<i>diaspora</i>	- A term designating a body of people who have migrated from another country and are not native to the host country.
<i>mai baap</i>	– A vernacular term, popular in the social sciences to designate the Role often adopted by a bureaucratic state.
<i>emigrés</i>	-Persons seeking immigration.
<i>nativity</i>	– Biblical stories referring to the birth of Christ.
<i>anti-state revolution</i>	– In the Sri Lanka context this refers to the JVP insurrections.
<i>stream-of-consciousness</i>	– A technique of writing where the narrative comprises of random thoughts flitting in and out of the narrators mind.
<i>Eelam</i>	– This term refers to the movement for the Tamil Homeland carried out in the Jaffna peninsula of Sri Lanka.
<i>dukhaa</i>	– Buddhist word referring to unhappiness or sadness.
<i>riots of '83</i>	– Progam against Tamilians in Colombo wherein Tamil homes and businesses were systematically attacked and destroyed.
<i>Princess Kuveni and Prince Vijaya</i>	– Mythical story from the chronicles of the

Mahavamasa.

*Skinheads and Rightists*

– Political groups in the west that target violence against non-whites.

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## 5.5 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. What is the ethnic denomination of the travellers undertaking this journey? To which country do they belong and what is the immediate requirement for "The Journey"?
2. Does the narrator belong to the same ethnic group as the others? What do you perceive may be his reasons for undertaking "The Journey"?
3. How do we know from the narrative that Tamil militant groups are equally responsible for terrorising the ordinary rung of humanity?
4. How is the term refugee used in the epigraph from the Dhammapada?
5. What is the difference between the term refugee as employed in official vocabulary and in the Buddhist religious context?
6. What makes the narrator question the ethnic divide? Who does the boy remind him of?
7. Explain the symbolic significance of the act of washing off the mud and slush at the fountain in the heart of the old city.
8. How does the narrators ingenuity save the group from being deported to Sri Lanka?

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## 5.6 LET US SUM UP

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This section presents an overview of our discussion and analysis. I will mention some salient points that you must keep in mind before you embark on a individual analysis and critique of the story.

### **POLITICAL**

1. The ethnic conflict between the Sinhala-Buddhist state and the Tamil fractions.
2. The demand for Eelam in the Jaffna peninsula which is the North and the East of Sri Lanka.
3. The atrocities listed by the narrator regarding the suffering of the Tamil people.
4. The fresh dimension added by the narrator regarding the ethnic conflict – is it only the agency of the state that is responsible for traumatising the civilian population. Recall how the narrator places the blame equally, if not more, on the shoulders of the Tamil militants.
5. Finally what does this story tell you about terrorism – this is a point you must

explicate with inferences drawn from the text.

## **TEXTUAL**

- 1 This journey is very different from journeys that we have undertaken. We must understand and draw the connections between the need for political asylum and politically motivated ethnic violence in a contemporary Sri Lankan context.
- 2 Arasanayagam broadens the implications of the word journey. She draws forth meanings from the Buddhist context. These must be put in proper perspective.
- 3 We have studied the story in terms of a purgatory or a ritualistic cleansing mandatory for making a new beginning.
- 4 The narrator draws on examples of racial prejudice in various parts of the world. This helps to situate the story in a globalised context of communication networking.
- 5 The story has deep-rooted metaphoric overtones.
- 6 The aptness of the stream-of-consciousness technique.

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## **5.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

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1. Mention the atrocities that the narrator lists regarding Sri Lankan Tamilians. Is it surprising that he mentions brutalities by agencies other than the state, why?
2. Why are we not acquainted with the names or the past histories of any of the travellers? Write a brief note.
3. Explain in brief the three meanings of the term journey that emerge from the story.
4. How is the metaphor of a pilgrimage relevant for this journey?
5. Explain in brief some of the hardships faced by the travellers during the course of "The Journey".
6. Arasanayagam adds certain realist details to the narrative. What purpose do they serve?
7. "The weight of Arasanayagam's story rests on the ennobling quality of compassion that is forever present between human beings". Elucidate the statement with reference to the story.

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## **5.8 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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Arasanayagam, Jean. *All is Burning*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1995.

————— *Into the Garden Secretly*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2000.

————— *A Nice Burgher Girl*. Colombo: Social Scientists Association, 2006.

————— *Inheritance*. Colombo: S.Godage and Brothers, 2001.

Benedict, Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.



- Ghosh, ParthaS. *Ethnicity versus Nationalism*. New Delhi: Sage, 2003.
- Mel, Neloufer De. *Women and the Nations Narrative*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2001.
- *Militarizing Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2007.
- Salgado, Minoli. *Writing Sri Lanka*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Silva, Neluka. *The Hybrid Island: Cultural Crossings and Interventions of Identity in Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Social Scientists Association, 2004.

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## **UNIT - 6 : A LETTER FROM INDIA BY INTEZAR HUSSAIN**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 6.0 Objectives**
- 6.1 About the Author : His Work and Art**
- 6.2 Background of the Story**
  - 6.2.1 Summary of the Story**
  - 6.2.2 Critical Analysis**
  - 6.2.3 Glossary**
- 6.3 Self Assessment Questions**
- 6.4 Let Us Sum Up**
- 6.5 Unit End Questions**
- 6.6 Suggested Readings**

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### **6.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The objective of this lesson is to help you understand Intezar Hussain's short story entitled "A Letter from India", originally written in Urdu. As this story has a definite historical background with reference to the Partition of India and the massive migration of people that followed, you have been provided adequate material to understand the writer, his style of writing, the background to the story, along with its summary and its critical reading. In order to facilitate your understanding of the story, a glossary of culture-specific and faith-specific words has also been provided. Subjective and objective type questions have been given at the end for you to attempt their answers. Along with the questions, you also have a list of books under the heading of Suggested Reading that would help you develop a comprehensive perspective with regard to the story and the conditions that account for the writing of such a story.

You may read this story in English translation from any of the two sources mentioned under Suggested Readings.

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### **6.1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: HIS WORK AND ART**

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Intezar Hussain (1923- ) is one of the most significant Urdu fiction writers of Pakistan. Born in Dibai, a small town in the district of Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh (India), he migrated to Pakistan in 1947 in the wake of India's Partition. He has continued producing fiction of remarkable worth ever since and has distinguished himself as one who has fictionalized history or historicized fiction, underlining the traumatic experience of India's Partition and its aftermath.

With his academic training in Urdu and English literatures, Hussain has been a prolific writer and is now considered a part of the Urdu literary canon. He is a fiction writer, a playwright, a columnist, a translator, and a writer of miscellaneous pieces on literature, culture and society. Collections of his short stories include *Gali Kuchey* (1952), *Kankari* (1955), *Aakhari Aadmi* (1967), *Shahr-e-Afsos* (1972), *Kachhuwey* (1981), *Kheemey se Door* (1986), and *Khali Pinjara* (1993). His stories have been collected in two volumes *Janam Kahaniyan* and *Qissa Kahaniyan*. His novels and novelettes are entitled *Chand Gahan* (1953), *Din aur Dastaan* (1959), *Basti* (1980), *Tazkira* (1987) and *Aagey Samandar Hai* (1995). He has also published a travelogue, three plays, nine volumes of miscellaneous writings, and five translations of longer fiction from English, apart from scores of journalistic writings and columns in *Mashriq* (Urdu) and *Dawn* (English).

The three central references of postcolonial literature(s)—*History*, *Memory* and *Myth*—also happen to be the three seminal refrains in the writings of Hussain. It must, however, be said that while he draws upon all these, he clearly distinguishes himself from all postcolonial writers writing in any language, including English. He does this by resorting to nostalgia to create his own myths of belonging, or the loss of it, with reference to a land or a community. In this process, Hussain develops a narrative that acquires its strength from a prose style marked by a romantic resilience of a rare kind.

Intezar Hussain draws upon a variety of literary and extra literary sources and influences that include the Islamic history, traditional narratives of ancient India (the *Jataka Tales*, *Betal Pachisi*, *Kathasaritsagar*, *Tota Maina ki Kahani*, Persian family genealogies etc.) as also Lord Buddha and Markandaya Rishi. He creates narratives of loss and longing in the forms of fables and parables by evolving styles and traditions that constitute the finest fictional harvest on Partition in the Urdu language.

Hijrat, or migration, is the central metaphor in the fiction of Intezar Hussain. In other words, much of his fictional writings revolve round the stories of mohajirs or migrants who seek their roots in times gone by and spaces left behind. They suffer as they fail in their quest and yet remain lying as if in a limbo of lamentations. He writes the stories of a people who are displaced, trapped, abandoned and left in a lurch. Consequently, they suffer on account of situational hostilities and personal inaccessibilities. His long and short fictional narratives bear these qualities of his writing only too well.

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## 6.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STORY

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The independence of India in 1947 which led to its partition has been a momentous event in the history of the subcontinent. As Pakistan was wrenched out of India

along religious lines, it resulted in multitudinous migrations of Muslims from India to the newly-created country called Pakistan, and also the Hindus from Pakistan to India. Both Partition and Migration have had a tremendous impact on the psyche of the people. As this impact has been felt on both the sides of the border, it has also resulted in major transformations in the way people have lived and regulated their lives, negotiated with the socio-political institutions, and ultimately emerged as nation states. An equally remarkable point is that the shadows of Partition have lingered on and this is the reason why a remarkable body of literature has emerged which we now recognize under the subgenre of Partition Literature.

Partition literature has come to us in various forms. Some of the stories/novels that revolve round 1947 represent the bloodshed, the suffering and the pathos of that consequential event. Others foreground issues concerning place and displacement. They are built around the notion of home that remains at best an abstraction, a lost space, an unfulfilled desire, or a dream. Intezar Hussain's "A Letter from India" falls in the second category where the central character revisits his personal, familial and communal history and laments the losses that time and destiny have caused.

Fictional narratives, directly or indirectly relating to Partition, are available in Urdu, Hindi, Bangla, Sindhi, Punjabi and English as those who spoke or wrote in these languages were the ones primarily affected by the onslaughts of Partition. Among notable writers, mention may be made of Saadat Hasan Manto, Qudratullah Shahab, Abdullah Hussain, Qurratulain Hyder, and Intezar Hussain in Urdu, Yashpal, Bhishm Sahni, Rahi Masoom Raza, Krishna Sobti in Hindi, and Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Salman Rushdie, and some others in English. Undoubtedly, Intezar Hussain occupies a very unique place in the genre of Partition literature in the Urdu language. It is equally important to note that the best partition fiction has come from those writers in Urdu who migrated to Pakistan in the wake of Partition and Intezar Hussain has been the foremost of them all.

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### **6.2.1 SUMMARY OF THE STORY**

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"A Letter From India" is a story in the form of a letter written by an old uncle called Qurban Ali to his nephew called Kamran. Qurban Ali chooses to stay back in India, even though the fever of migration had sent millions of Muslims from India to the newly-created country called Pakistan. The letter is written, significantly, on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the holy month of Ramazan, 1394 hijri, that is, October 15, 1974.

Qurban Ali writes to Kamran that all his efforts to send him letters in the past have failed as none of those whom he gave the letters to forward to Pakistan, confirmed whether they really forwarded the letters to the given destinations. He tells him how Imran Miyan, quite unexpectedly, appeared at his doorstep one night and how he had failed to recognize him initially, because he had changed so much. He is unhappy at this change in Imran and comments surely it was not for this that

he had left India. Soon after he realizes that instead of making complaints, he should, like a man of good faith, better be thankful to God for sending him back even though only for three days. Imran Miyan hardly talked or laughed as he seemed to be lost in thoughts. He expresses his desire to visit the grave of Miyanjani. He is advised by Qurban Ali to visit the graveyard in the night to avoid the risk of being recognized in the daytime. He laughs bitterly saying that he had passed through the village before reaching him and even the soil did not recognize him. Imran visits the graveyard with Qurban Ali and is overtaken by emotions. He is shown how things have changed beyond recognition in the last twenty seven years; even the harsinghar tree had withered away and other trees had died down even though the garden was still there. Ironically enough, Qurban Ali says that the garden should now be taken as an extension of the graveyard. After spending the night beside Miyanjani's grave with Qurban Ali, Imran Miyan leaves next morning.

On being asked why he wants to leave once he has returned, Imran Miyan says he wants to do so because no one recognizes him here any longer. He is already a stranger and has lost his right to the land. Although he is advised that his safety lies in not being recognized but this logic does not convince him. He, thus, leaves even though he does not have a clear destination before him. As Qurban Ali is much too anxious and worried about his being found out and about his safety, he ties an amulet around his arm and bids him farewell with a heavy heart. Qurban Ali never receives any message from him even though he had implored that Imran Miyan should send him a word after crossing the border.

Qurban Ali is concerned about what is happening in Pakistan. He narrates what he had heard about the rising prices, the popularity of the socialists, and the declaration that Mirzais were actually not Muslims. He tells how he was himself living among the infidels and how happy he was to hear from one Sheikh Sahib that Imran was doing well in life. He tells about the crumbling haveli, the court cases regarding it, and is worried about what would happen to it after he is no more. He speaks about his deep rooted despair and laments that his son, called Akhtar, has now taken the pseudonym of "Premi". He works in the radio station and pitifully enough, Khalida, his younger brother's daughter, is married to a Hindu who is a lawyer by profession. She wears a saree and puts a bindi on her forehead. Qurban Ali is also worried about the news that his sister in Pakistan does not wear a veil, moves in her son's car, and shamelessly bargains in the shops. It is equally disturbing that her daughter is married to a man of her own choice who happens to be a Wahabi. Qurban Ali considers himself to be an unfortunate witness to all these sad developments. He laments that the members of his family are now scattered all over and his world has really disintegrated. He envies his elder brother who had migrated to Dhaka instead of Pakistan and is no longer alive to witness all this.

Qurban Ali feels duty-bound to narrate his woe of suffering to Kamran as he is the

eldest member of the family after him. He does this because he wants the familial history and memory to be preserved. Torn between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, he feels that his family and its history are lost for good. Even though he relates his lineage to Hazrat Imam Musa Karzan, he laments that his faith has been corrupted as he lives among infidels.

While relating his lineage, Qurban Ali also recounts how in the past the history of his family had been passed from father to the son, generation after generation. Speaking of his genealogy, he refers to his roots in Ispahan. He says that his ancestor, Meer Mansur Mohammad who lies buried in Akbarabad, was an ocean of learning and was greatly revered as a pillar of his faith. He tells that his descendants later settled in Shahjahanabad. In his letter, Qurban Ali recounts that Partition did not result in hijrat or in uprooting people only at this point of time; people had experienced this trauma in the past as well (during the reign of Shahjahan) and its specter kept haunting them all along the course of history (1857). Interestingly, the letter writer relates the story of an ancestor who, while migrating, had been attacked by the dacoits and he had lost all his papers relating to the family history. It was only his good luck that a page that contained the family tree was saved from this attack which led to the retrieval of his individual and familial history.

Qurban Ali's letter is a bag full of familial events and characters, and stories of loss and suffering. He even recounts those who took to devious ways, watched bioscope, madly loved films and film actors, and lost their lives in pursuing those wild dreams. He recounts the names and numbers of those who lost their lives in the riots of 1947. He also maintains a record of those who are alive and are pursuing their professions and living a life which is not of quite acceptable standards, both religiously and culturally.

As Qurban Ali is overtaken by a sense of futility and loss, he asks his nephew, Kamran, to maintain a record of his family members, whether they are alive or dead, and also to keep a track of their movement. He is convinced that his family history has already been lost yet he tries and persuades Kamran to try and preserve it. He persuades Kamran to come to India and also bring his wife and children with him. He says that this letter could go on and on but he could not continue endlessly like that. He closes his letter as the time to say prayers has come and that he has to put all the legal documents regarding the haveli in order for the four hundred twenty-seventh hearing in the court of law the next morning.

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### 6.2.2 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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**Epistolary form:** "A Letter from India" is a story in the epistolary form about the travails of migration from India to Pakistan in the wake of India's Partition and the subsequent happenings following the historic migration. The letter is written in 1974, that is, 27 years after the Partition of India and the creation of Pakistan. As

such, the time involved in the story spans twenty seven consequential years in the history of the subcontinent during which Muslims migrated from India to Pakistan, Pakistan got divided to create a new country called Bangladesh, and many people sought their careers elsewhere. In this manner, "A Letter from India", being a letter that it is, is also a narrative, a story, and a chronicle of changing times, places, and people.

The epistolary form of the story makes way for free association of ideas that the central character exhibits during the course of his letter writing. It is not a linear narrative with time and space put in a sequence or order, but creatively mixed and merged. This contributes to the general tone and tenor of the story which is essentially sad.

### **Central Character**

Qurban Ali, the letter writer, is a God-fearing, tradition-loving old man. He has passed through the travails of history and is clearly a victim of anxiety although he dons a posture of self-confidence and righteousness. It is a kind of subterfuge for him; he does not accept defeat nor does he give up his effort to connect and communicate with his own people on the other side of the border even though he miserably fails in doing so. His world is torn apart and he is located between the two poles of illusion and reality. He is a helpless witness to the terrible history of the subcontinent that has erased his familial line but it has not resulted in the erasure of memory that keeps and sustains him through all this terrible tug of times—past and present, and dynamics of places—here and there. On the other hand, he innocently mourns the death of a solemn communal and familial tradition at the hands of new threats resulting in the exploration of greener pastures in alien lands, deplorable marriages beyond one's own faith, and impossible conditions of life. The new generation is an inheritor of loss—of line and lineage, family and faith, bands and bonds. Sharply in contrast to this generation, Qurban Ali is a symbolic configuration, a lone figure who ventures to keep the boundaries from vanishing away, the new generation from going astray, and the conditions around from slipping out of reach and repair. As Qurban Ali faces the stark realities of life and seems to have been defeated in the process of living this life of loss and longing, he wishes for the impossible.

The story is one of hankering to retrieve the past and relate with a world and a set of people removed far away from him and his world. In this manner, it may be asserted that "A Letter from India" is not merely about past and things past but also about present and future. Although Qurban Ali lives too much in the past, he is not entirely devoid of what happens in the present and how the future has already shaped or is in the process of shaping up. He is a victim of anxiety and of pre-conceived notions of life that he may hardly ever revise. He is, thus, a receptacle of happenings, a spectator, who moves between his dreams and despairs in his own way. As such, it is not only nostalgia that determines the tone and tenor of the

story; it is also a deep seated desire for union with the separated ones that reflects well in the story. Qurban Ali's despair is, therefore, not of a misanthrope but of one who explores possibilities and looks forward with certain hope. His nostalgia is of a kind that relates past with the present, and the present with the future. In this manner, he constructs his individual history as he assembles the communal history.

### **Major Themes:**

"A Letter from India" casts a wide net in terms of time and space. On the surface, it appears to be a story of the travails of Partition but, broadly speaking, it spans times much beyond 1947 and places farther away from the Indian subcontinent. His characters move from India to Pakistan, then from Pakistan to many other alien destinations where they see a future of prosperity and powerful positions. From this perspective, it is a story about the erasure of boundaries, about shrinking of space, as also about new communal and extra-communal equations, and the new world order marked by mobility, upward movement, and the fast expanding liberal culture.

One of the significant issues the story raises concerns the inability of the central figure called Qurban Ali to reach out. Pathetically enough, the two countries are drawn apart and their people cannot establish any contact. Like a stock character, Qurban Ali suffers this pang and reflects upon the consequences. The unexpected arrival of Imran Miyan in the night, his very brief stay, his silence, and his leaving without a destination in view, is a stark commentary on the relationship that the two peoples and their nations share. Qurban Ali's musings on the soaring prices in Pakistan, Pakistanis turning to socialism, their vast appetite for material possessions, his sister shopping freely in the marketplace, youngsters running after films and actors, Mirzais being declared as non-Muslims, and many such acts may be read as very important sub-themes of the story. While he laments on all these happenings in Pakistan, he also mourns how his son, Akhtar, has taken a pseudonym of "Premi", and his daughter is married to a Hindu and has now taken to wearing saris and sporting a bindi on her forehead. As Qurban Ali freely moves in time and space, he is reminded of many odds in the name of socio-cultural transformation that he is unable to reconcile with. The two very important acts of his entrusting Kamran with the responsibility of preserving the familial history and his own effort to save the ancestral property are symbolic enough of how deeply committed he is to his world view. His narrative is, therefore, extremely complex in its make up and implications.

The phenomenon of migration unfolds many facets in the story. It is not the question of one migration from India to Pakistan, but of multiple migrations to various destinations. Although it is not an aimless wandering from one land to another yet it foregrounds the problems related to one's living in various states of exile,



immigration, homelessness, dislocation, and diaspora. The story also raises the important questions of how and why a race makes its choice of location and belonging. Interestingly, it also turns out to be a tale of an ethnic minority that seeks its identity from place to place and from time to time. The problem of identity thus forms one of the essential points of reference in the story. Qurban Ali is in the quest of his own identity as also of all those with whom he associates on familial and communal levels.

Let us also keep in mind that “A Letter from India” is a typical text that foregrounds some of the major references with which we read postcolonial literature(s). It takes up issues of history, memory, and identity—individual/racial/communal—that ultimately create the myth of a people. While it emphasizes personal truths and testimonies, it also explores the contexts of its imagery and symbol. The symbols of the "graveyard" and the "garden", as one being the extension of the other in the story, may be read in this context. The disappearance of the old trees and the change of scenario in the graveyard serve as terrible metaphors of loss. The story has many stark images that underline the essential thrust of the story. Imran's going back after a very brief stay of three days in India in a state of uncertainty and despair is yet another metaphoric retreat into nowhere, yet another migration to an unknown land. The story has alternating moods of anguish, changing situations, and elusive characters to underline the pathetic plot of the people involved. In one subplot continues another and many of them, taken together, compose a story which does not end but continues indefinitely.

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### 6.2.3 GLOSSARY

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*Ahl-e-Bait:* Those related to Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain—all hailing from the family of the last prophet of Islam, Hazrat Muhammad.

*Akbarabad:* The city of Agra. Associated with the Mughal King Akbar.

*Ashoora:* Tenth day of the month of Muharram in the Islamic calendar.

*Azadaari:* The act of mourning the dead, especially in the month of Muharram to mourn the martyrdom of Imam Hussain.

*Deewankhana:* A sitting area for male members, a meeting place.

*Diaspora:* a population of a people with common ethnic identity who were forced to leave or who chose to leave their territories on their own and came to live in areas far away from the place where they lived earlier. The word has a Greek origin which means "a scattering or sowing of seeds."

*Gyarahween Shareef:* Birthday of the holy prophet of Islam, Hazrat Muhammad.

*Hanafi:* A sect of the Muslims who believe in Imam Abu Hanifa.

*Hijrat:* Migration in the context of this story. Originally associated with the year

of the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina.

*Insha Allah:* God willing. An expression to repose faith in God that things may happen as desired.

*Mirzai:* A sect of Muslims.

*Miyanjani:* An address of endearment and respect for father.

*Muharram:* The first month of the hijri calendar. Associated with the battle of Kerbala and the martyrdom of Imam Husain.

*Saadat-e-Azam:* Descendants of the holy prophet of Islam, Hazrat Muhammad.

*Shahajahanabad:* The city of Delhi. Associated with the Mughal King Shahjahan.

*Wahabi:* A sect of Muslims.

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### 6.3 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. Is "A Letter from India" is a story based in  
(a) India            (b) Pakistan        (c) India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh ?
2. Choose the correct answer  
(i) Intezar Hussain draws heavily upon  
(c) Oriental sources (b) Occidental sources (c) Purely Pakistani sources  
(d) purely Indian sources.  
(ii) The eldest living member in the story is:  
(a) Kamran            (b) Qurban Ali            (c) Meer Mansur Mohammad
3. "Isphahan" is located in:  
(a) Afghanistan        (b) Iran                    (c) Pakistan
4. A story written in the form of letter(s) is known as  
(A) Historical            (b) Conversational        (c) Epistolary
5. "Graveyard" in this story is a  
(a) A simile            (b) An image            (c) A symbol
6. "Ramazan" is the month of  
(a) Praying            (b) Fasting            (c) Mourning
7. The general tone of the story is one of  
(a) Dark humour        (b) Nostalgia            (c) Tragi-comedy

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### 6.4 LET US SUM UP

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The sections above give you a fair idea of the author and his technique of writing

along with a background and summary of the story. This is supplemented further by the criticism on the form of the story, the central character, and the major themes.

It would be useful for you to take note of the major references the story makes to history and the historical span involved, migration(s) of the people, their racial preferences, uses of memory, and the question of identity. It is a story with layers of meaning concerning the significance and loss of racial tradition and history. A story spread over a few pages is, in fact, a long saga of a communal aspirations spread over a large span of time and human predicament. It is loaded with meanings and nuances, statements and undertones, all embedded in a letter written by an ageing uncle to a nephew. In other words, it is a monologue of the an old generation to a new generation and the two characters involved—Qurban Ali and Kamran—may be taken as archetypal characters of the worlds of fact and fiction.

It is also important to understand that Qurban Ali is not a character unto himself; he is a prototype. As such, it is his story as much as it is the story of those who are called mohajirs or migrants in Pakistan, and who are yet to find a home. His journey through time and memory is a metaphoric one in which he remains a character involved in a classical quest of roots.

In order to develop a broader perspective on the issues involved, you may also do a comparative reading of fictional works like *The Broken Mirror* by Krishna Baldev Vaid, *Half a Village* by Rahi Masoom Raza, *The Weary Generation* by Abdullah Hussain, *Basti* by Intezar Hussain, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hussain, *A bend in the Ganges* by Manohar Malgonkar, and *The Dark Dancer* by B. Rajan.

With Partition and its aftermath as themes of great significance for the contemporary viewers, many filmic representations have also been attempted. You may also like to see films like *Garm Hawa*, *Earth*, *Hey Ram*, *Khamosh Pani*, *Ghadar*, and *Pinjar*.

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## 6.5 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Give a reasoned answer about how Qurban Ali turns into a stock character in the story.
2. Comment on the significance of 'graveyard' and 'garden' as two important symbolic configurations in the story.
3. Explain how with the help of history and memory, Intezar Hussain creates a myth of home and homelessness in the story.
4. How would you read "A Letter from India" as a postcolonial text? Give reasons for your answer.

5. "'A Letter from India' fictionalizes history and historicizes fiction." Justify.
6. Do you think that "A Letter from India" is not only a Partition story but it is also about the erasure of boundaries in a postcolonial world? Give reasons for your answer.
7. Write a critical note on the narrative technique of the "A Letter From India".
8. Attempt an appraisal of the role of memory in the story "A Letter From India"

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## 6.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

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2. Bhabha, Homi K. "Interrogating Identity," *Identity Documents* (London), No. 6.3.
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7. Hasan, Mushirul., ed., *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*. New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995
8. Memon, Mohammad Umar. "Partition Literature: A Study of Intezar Hussain," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 14, No. 3 (1980), pp. 377-410.
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## **UNIT 7: A STUDY OF URMILA PAWAR'S "MY FOUR ENEMIES", FROM *WOMEN IN PATRIARCHY: CROSS-CULTURAL READINGS* ED. BY JASBIR JAIN**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 7.0 Objectives**
- 7.1 About the Author**
- 7.2 Situating the text**
- 7.3 Themes and Issues**
  - 7.3.1 Caste**
  - 7.3.2 Feminist concerns**
  - 7.3.3 Education**
- 7.4 Narrative Technique/Style**
- 7.5 Glossary**
- 7.6 Self Assessment Questions**
- 7.7 Let Us Sum Up**
- 7.8 Unit End Questions**
- 7.9 Suggested Reading**

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### **7.0 OBJECTIVES**

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This unit will help you to read the short story critically, with reference to both

- a) its sociological value and
- b) its literary merit.

We will look at the larger context of genre and thematic concerns within which to situate the significance of the story and its author, Urmila Pawar.

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### **7.1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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Born in 1945, Urmila Pawar is a renowned Marathi writer. Her writing is based on the identity and experiences of being dalit and the struggles involved therein. She also focuses on the plight of women in her stories, and the featured story is a good example of how she combines her two concerns: caste and gender, in a short narrative.

The youngest of seven children, Urmila Pawar was born in a village called Phansawle in Ratnagiri district. She lost her father when she was in class III. He was a schoolmaster who laid great emphasis on the benefits of education, and even after his death, his wife, Urmila Pawar's mother, underwent untold hardships so that

her children could be educated. She was herself illiterate, and would weave baskets for a living.

In 1966, Urmila married Harishchandra Pawar, and at that time she had passed her Matriculation Examination. They came to Mumbai in 1976, where she obtained her BA and MA degrees. They have two daughters. In the Maukhik History Workshop organized by SPARROW (Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women) in 1988, Urmila Pawar spoke at length on her life and her experience as a writer. Here she mentions that as a child, she considered her mother to be her enemy, as her mother used to beat her mercilessly. This idea gets imaginatively elaborated in the story we will discuss in this unit. Looking back on her childhood, Urmila Pawar, now an adult woman, understands the reason behind her mother's act, and recalls with barely suppressed emotion how much her mother had sacrificed for her.

One particular incident stands out in her memory. Her mother was ill, and had asked young Urmila to get her fish from the market. The child agreed, and took the money with alacrity, as going out would give her an opportunity to watch the kabaddi competitions in the marketplace. She decided to buy the fish first, but in her anxiety not to miss the competitions, she did not check the fish the seller sold her, despite her mother's injunctions. The game took all her attention thereafter, and it was a while before she remembered the fish and her mother; but by the time she reached home, the fish had gone bad, and her mother went to sleep without having eaten anything: leaving Urmila terribly upset. She realizes, as an adult, how much her mother had suffered for her children's sake.

In the story "My Four Enemies", this adult consciousness is, nevertheless, submerged by the spirited voice of the child narrator. It is not until the very end that the weight of the adult knowledge makes its presence felt to the reader. In that one last sentence, the story skillfully shows the journey covered by the narrator from child to grown-up.

Urmila Pawar's writing is motivated by a strong sense of justice. She is unsparingly critical in her delineation of the violation of basic human dignity and self-respect. Thus her story "Nyay" conveys the cruelty that women are capable of to their own sex. She also believes that dalit men are unfair to their women. She rejects male dalit writers' claim that this feminist stance of hers would give the upper caste a handy weapon to use against the community.

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## **7.2 SITUATING THE TEXT**

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The story we will discuss in this unit is titled "My Four Enemies", a dalit narrative, written in the first person and overtly autobiographical in nature. The term 'dalit' was first used by Jyotiba Phule and later popularized by Dr Ambedkar. The dalits were designated as untouchables according to the caste system of Hinduism, and

the word, in Marathi, means 'broken'. They fall outside the pale of the four castes in Hinduism. Although the Constitution of India has formally abolished untouchability, in practice dalits continue to be subjected to discrimination. "My Four Enemies" expertly captures this.

A simple short story, its simplicity reveals the impressionable child behind the narrative voice, who is a victim of caste discrimination. The child identifies four principal enemies who thwart her: her father, her mother (Aai), her brother and her teacher.

What all of them have in common, as far as she is concerned, is a heavy, punishing hand. "Father was a school teacher and like all teachers of his generation, he was very good at beating" (299). A few pages later, recounting the disturbing episode of Ulgavya, she states, "I wanted to ask mother, but that meant telling her about bunking school and sitting in the temple, and then Aai would certainly give me a sound thrashing, and my enemy number three – my bother, would also assist her in that" (304). And the fourth enemy whom she describes as a "fire-breathing devil" is also a 'thrasher' like her father, only worse. "My father would thrash me only when I did not study, but Harlekar Guruji would punish me even when I studied" (305).

There are, besides, "petty" enemies as well: those who discriminate against her on the basis of caste: "'Go away or you will touch us!'" (298). They seem petty to her only because they do not appear to interfere in her life so much as those whom she lives with. But the story overtakes the child's perspective, to show how these "petty" enemies are responsible for giving her a childhood marked by deprivation. Her struggle is in fact against the larger social framework, but with the innocence typical of a child, she sees herself as struggling against her family, who are actually working overtime to help her find a respectable identity in society.

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### 7.3 THEMES AND ISSUES

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"My Four Enemies" foregrounds caste and gender in its themes: the former overtly, and the latter more subtly. The child narrator is a victim, in particular, of discrimination on the basis of caste. Caste is represented in the story as an overwhelming pillar of the social structure, and it is woven into everyday life in insidious as well as disfiguring ways. Since the story makes its point largely through events presented, we get an unfiltered view of the injustice of caste oppression. And bias in the presentation is perforce reduced to a large extent, by virtue of having a child narrator. When bias is present, it reflects innocence more than anything else. This will be discussed at greater length in the section on Narrative Technique/Style.

The intersection of caste and gender also nuances "My Four Enemies" in various ways. There are times when caste and gender combine to oppress the

underprivileged, as in the case of *Ulgavya*, which I will comment upon in greater detail a little later. At other times, caste and gender seem to follow independent trajectories of oppression. All through this struggle, however, the voice of the child narrator remains lively.

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### 7.3.1 CASTE

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Caste is an over-riding concern in the story. In her comprehensive study on dalit writings, Rege points out that dalit life narratives are a distinct genre in themselves, and the first person voice, the “I” in these writings, does not refer to an individual so much as a community. Thus an entire community speaks through an individual’s voice, investing the writer with the authority to represent the experience of a caste. Rege states, “Dalit life narratives are *testimonios*; acts testifying or bearing witness legally or religiously. A *testimonio* is a narrative in book or pamphlet form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts and whose unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or significant experience (Beverley 1992: 92-93)”. (13)

“My Four Enemies” finds its feet within this genre. This form of writing invites new ways of perception and interpretation, particularly in the relationship between self and community, and the reach of the choric voice. It is also a comment on the role of writing as resistance, and not mere representation.

Over and beyond the little girl’s preoccupation with her principal enemies, we see the society that she is a part of, in the incidents she recounts in passing. They are lost in the more intense experiences she lives, but their presence in the story suggests that they form a routine part of her experiences. After her father’s death, her mother sometimes sent her to deliver baskets to her clients.

The people I delivered the baskets to were the type who would make me stand at their doorstep. They would sprinkle water on the baskets and the winnowing baskets that I was delivering before they touched them, and would drop money in my hand from above so that they should not touch me. Such behaviour would astonish me. If their hands were to touch mine, would they turn black or would they be scorched? All this aroused a sense of shame in me if a child from my school was present in the house. This feeling of disgrace was worse than death... 303-304

The poignancy of this passage comes largely from the unsparingly objective nature of this articulation, as well as the way the child asserts her spirit through and in spite of the experience of humiliation.

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### 7.3.2 FEMINIST CONCERNS

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Rege further adds that “[T]his dialectics of self and community assumes further



significance in dalit women's *testimonios* for, situated as women in the community, they articulate concerns of gender, challenging the singular communitarian notion of the dalit community" (14). "My Four Enemies" may not be overtly feminist, but it does foreground the social experience of a woman, Aai, and of the little girl, who is the narrator-protagonist. The formidable Aai becomes an agent of transformation in this girl's estimation of the people around her, especially Aai herself.

If we are to read this story in the light of Urmila Pawar's interview in SPARROW, we find that her mother was an important figure for her, a figure whose importance in shaping her life she recognized only late in life. The story seems to mark a turning point in the way her mother changes in her perception, from enemy to friend. The last sentence of the story reinforces this newly forged friendship on the part of the narrator: "But a more significant event was that I now started looking upto my mother as my strongest support and my life got a new direction" (308). The 'epiphany' on which the story ends is a feminist one.

Feminism – in theory and critical practice – has grown along the way from being a critique of patriarchal modes of representation and endorsing of women as authors, to arriving at the recognition of the heterogeneity of female experience. It has moved from documenting white, heterosexual female experience to including race and class in its identity politics.

In "My Four Enemies", caste severs, but gender seems to forge alliances for the little girl. Besides the ending which helps the little girl see Aai as a friend, in her recollection of her late father, there is no mention of his discriminating between son and daughter. He insists that all his children, irrespective of gender, be educated. Recounting the fate of her older sister, the little girl declares, "How much had he wanted my elder sister to study! It was beyond him to teach her and therefore, he had sent her away to some other people so that she could study. But she was rather dumb, and she was married off" (301).

Possibly, gender differences are submerged by the overwhelmingly oppressive burden of caste and class, as we see in the following excerpt about the father: "When father came home, he would make us sit down to study in the dim light of the lantern. We would sit with our heads bent over our books till our necks would start aching. If we did not study, we would be badly beaten up and our stupid mother would watch us being thrashed" (299). Notice the replacement of the "I" by the "we".

Caste and gender are conflated, ironically as well as subtly, in the description of an event beyond the little girl's grasp, yet disturbing enough in what she understands of it. On days that she skipped attending school, she would sit in a temple, where the priest sometimes distributed prasad. To her, he looked like God: "He was a well-built, tall and fair man who looked like the marble statue of Ram. He had

black hair and black eyes and the soles of his feet were pink. He wore a janeyu – the sacred thread – on his bare chest and a red tilak on his forehead” (304). The last sentence lays to rest any doubt one may have about his upper caste identity.

One day, she was playing with some others in the temple and the priest had kept them waiting for a considerable length of time. “After a long time, the door opened and Ulgavya, a girl of Kambati caste – a backward caste – came out. She was crying and looked terrified. The pujari came out behind her, and sent us packing without giving us any prasad. I don’t know why, but after that I was frightened of the priest. Why was Ulgavya weeping?” (305).

This disturbing incident however occupies a marginal role in the story. The ending, which stays in the reader’s mind, leaves a more lasting impression of woman empowered. When Aai encounters Harlekar Guruji and warns him not to beat her daughter ever again, she is clearly at a disadvantage. The schoolmaster is initially arrogant, but Aai is unfazed. The little girl even notes that “Aai was using wrong grammar” (307). Yet, Aai speaks without any hesitation, while it is the erudite master who stutters on encountering the mother’s righteous indignation. In an event replete with humour, irony and power-play, Urmila Pawar shows woman power despite all odds, leaving the schoolmaster to beat a hasty retreat.

And finally, the role of weaving. Weaving, traditionally, has been identified as a part of woman’s space. Weaving tapestry, weaving stories, they are both part of the woman’s domain. The word ‘distaff’ in fact refers to the female branch of family. The word literally refers to the staff for holding wool or flax used in weaving. This symbolic convergence of woman and weaving is achieved in Aai, who is shown to be weaving baskets endlessly in the story. The narrative foregrounds this image of her and encourages a feminist slant to the interpretation of this story.

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### 7.3.3 EDUCATION

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The need for education, a desperate need, forms the core of “My Four Enemies”. The little girl’s father was a schoolteacher, though all she can gather from this fact is that her father can beat, and beat very well too. “He did not only hit, but as soon as he started on the job, he would lose all control” (299). So much does education matter to him that he also hit his nephew in the nearby village, despite the boy’s mother stating that it was no matter whether her son studied or not. On his deathbed, he would insistently tell his wife to “educate the children” (301), an order that she follows at all costs.

The little girl uses a telling simile to show her father’s commitment to education: he urged people to study just as a doctor would prescribe medicines. This comparison underscores the way studying seems as unpalatable as taking medicine, and also the way it is as imperative to health and well-being as taking medicine is.

After her father’s death, it seems to the little girl that her mother has taken over her

father's role as teacher. "It seemed to me that mother was very fond of emulating father's role as a teacher" (301); "But she was always hectoring us like a teacher" (302); and, what is interesting, "Ma believed that if knowledge had to be acquired then I had to take the beating that went with it. She had seen my father hit his students" (305).

The little girl's brother, her enemy number three, is also fixated (as she perceives it) on her going to school and getting educated. It is an older Urmila Pawar who recognizes that to her family, education was the lifeline that would raise them above the barriers of caste. In the overwhelmingly oppressive caste-determined scenario, education is perceived as one, possibly the only way out.

"My Four Enemies" ends on a note of irony and triumph. When the little girl's teacher discriminates against her, Aai, her mother sees him as having failed in his role as an educator. She confronts him on the road, to the amazement of her daughter. Though the teacher begins arrogantly enough, he is reduced to stammering by Aai, who, despite her wrong grammar, manages to intimidate Guruji with "see from now on even if you lay a finger on this girl, then I will see how you pass on this road!" (307). Describing Aai's pose, the little girl says she was "like a mother reptile with her hood spread out, ready to strike!" (307).

Aai's idea of education has a clarity that enables her to believe that even a teacher may need to be taught what is right and what is wrong. We find here that not just education, but even the idea of education and the expectations associated with it, are empowering. The intertwining threads of caste, gender and education come together here.

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#### **7.4 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE/STYLE:**

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Arguably, the most important aspect of a short story or a novel is its narrator. Unlike, say, drama, fiction is always mediated through the point-of-view of a single narrator, so that who tells, is almost as important as what is told. Three broad categories might be identified here: the Omniscient narrator who knows all, the Third Person narrator, and the First Person narrator. The First Person narrator may not be all-knowing, but s/he has the advantage of directly impacting the reader by enabling easy identification with the narrator. Also, the use of the First Person makes possible an immediacy of effect, and helps the reader suspend disbelief not just willingly, but effortlessly.

"My Four Enemies" is narrated in the First Person by a little girl. It recounts her experience of childhood and a significant event that radically changes her perception of her mother. The ending of this story is extremely effective for this very reason, as it brings the protagonist narrator to the realization, which comes to her as a revelation, that her mother is not the enemy she had supposed her to be, but her friend.

As with most child narrators, a gap in comprehension is generated between narrator and reader. The child observes everything but lacks the experience and maturity to interpret all her observations accurately. The child's innocence gives the reader greater freedom and license to interpret, as we see in the event with the temple priest and Ulgavya.

The child becomes a glass through which we see reflected not just her, but also those whom she represents. Smarting from incidents that left her humiliated because of her caste identity, the child would resolve not to go to school afterwards, especially if one of her schoolmates had been witness to this humiliation – indeed, often the humiliation was inflicted by the very family of the schoolmate. But Aai would somehow read her mind, she says, for as soon as she went back home, Aai would bribe her with some jaggery, asking her to go to school and promising her money for gram when she returned.

The mother's desperate attempt to keep the child going to school is self-evident, to the reader at least, but not to the child, who puts a different construction: "I always believed her, but she was a liar" (304). This kind of split perspective is a significant part of "My Four Enemies", and enriches the text by layering it.

Also, the reader understands fairly early what the child does not; that her parents' excessive disciplining comes from their anxiety to give her an empowered adulthood. If at all we do wonder whether the mother is cruel and harsh, the child's supplying of detail such as the fact that the mother was endlessly, tirelessly weaving baskets, or that when the child fell ill, "she would caress me and the touch of her hand on my forehead was so gentle and soft" (303) are self-explanatory.

Similarly, when the little girl prays to God not to send her father home, she has no idea of the enormity of what she is asking. The reader has, and this adds the dimension of poignancy to the story.

Yet (and herein lies the skill of the author) the child is not so young that she cannot understand discrimination. Harlekar Guruji's tool of supposed chastisement, where she is concerned, is caste-based oppression. Without ever stating it in so many words, the child shows how this man of education treated her: with injustice. Cleaning the school compound fell to the lot of the classes in the school by turns, but when it came to her class, only this child was asked to clean it. On this particular day, it was not even the turn of her class, and yet here was Harlekar ordering her to clean the compound, claiming that Aai's cow Kapila dirtied the place as always. Recounting the incident scrupulously, the child nevertheless does not have the vocabulary to capture her situation, but we as readers know that what she was facing here was discrimination, unfair and cruel.

There are other instances where the child's voice endears, even reaches out to move us with emotion. Witness the conflict in her mind: on the one hand, she is

eager for Aai to reprimand Guruji, on the other hand, she is ashamed of her mother's torn saree, her inelegant wearing of the saree, and her unkempt hair. The child's innocent desire that her mother be like the mothers of other children has been wistfully expressed even earlier in the story: "Once in a while, the children passing by on the road would stop to watch her weaving her baskets. They would stare at her and I would be embarrassed. Their mothers were beautiful – wore fine clothes and jewellery, with enchanting smiles on their faces and there was my Aai – always irritated and annoyed with me..." (302).

An advantage of having a child narrator is that she does not hide her biases, and so it is easy for the reader to look beyond them. The experiencing 'I' is the child's voice, which overwhelms the adult, narrating 'I', the latter making her appearance very sparingly, thereby contributing to the powerful impact of the child's voice. A typical example of the experiencing 'I' would be the use of the adjective 'stupid' for the mother in the sentence: "If we did not study, we would be badly beaten up and our stupid mother would watch us being thrashed" (299).

One of the rare instances where the narrating 'I' intrudes is in the very last sentence of the story, to register the change in the relationship between mother and child, and the dawning of understanding in the child. It is a coming of age in a very powerful sense.

Another instance is the beginning, where the author explains what brought her to writing the story in the first place. Rather than occupy extra-textual space like an interview or a journal, the circumstances under which "My Four Enemies" came to be written, is a part of the story itself. This technique effectively blurs the line between story and real life, a device that belongs to the repertoire of realism in the novel. "My Four Enemies" however is not a realistic piece of fiction, it belongs to the genre of autobiographical narrative; it is a testimonio.

In the first sentence, the author tells us that she was commissioned to write a piece for children. A task that she found difficult, and yet before she knew it, her "childhood caught hold of me by the neck. Not only did it catch me by the neck, but it also swiftly turned the time back" (298). The gradual replacement of the older woman by the child becomes evident in the next paragraph which begins: "When I was young I took all older people to be my opponents. Perhaps all children feel that way. But my enemies were of a different kind" (298). Hereon the child takes over and the adult disappears till the very end, as already pointed out.

As an autobiographical story, the narrative uses anecdotes to build interest. Urmila Pawar in a moment of self-conscious narration, remarks while drawing her father's character-sketch: "I remember another interesting anecdote about him" (300). Anecdotes also help in illustrating character, working more effectively than mere description.

The presence of the child's voice through the story gives it freshness and charm, occasionally reflected in the language, privileging the child's idiom: "He looked

like the demon hiding in the moon when he was angry with his black and white glaring eyes” (300).

The tone of the narrator is comment-worthy, being very informal. The child’s transparency is self-evident, and she naturally, and periodically, includes the reader in the course of her narration: “Oh yes, I was telling you about Aai asking me to deliver baskets to her customers” (303). The use of questions as a stylistic device also serves to strike a rapport with the reader. Having painted her father in black-and-white, both literally as well as symbolically, she asks, “Now tell me why did I need any other colour?” (299). The use of Marathi words like ‘kokum’ and ‘dhaktya’, and culture/region-specific references like ‘Satyanarayan Puja’, contribute to local flavour in the story.

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## 7.5 GLOSSARY

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<i>Aai</i>	‘Mother’ in Marathi
<i>alum</i>	A sulphate used as an emetic and astringent
<i>anecdote</i>	A short, interesting narrative that could be biographical
<i>baleful</i>	Harmful, deadly, malevolent
<i>berate</i>	Scold, rebuke
<i>chinapod powder</i>	
<i>dhaktya</i>	‘Younger one’
<i>emulate</i>	Imitate, attempt to equal
<i>exhort</i>	Urge, persuade strongly
<i>fidget</i>	Make restless movements
<i>hector</i>	To bully, be domineering
<i>Kokum</i>	Or <i>Garcinia Indica</i> is a fruit tree with medicinal properties, and used For culinary purposes as well
<i>mankapya</i>	Believed to be a demon who would chop off people’s heads
<i>mantle</i>	(Symbolic) Role or authority
<i>Sane Guruji</i>	Pandurang Sadashiv Sane (1899-1950), renowned Marathi author and activist, who joined in the Nationalist Struggle for Independence
<i>Satyanarayan’s Puja</i>	A Puja performed for Lord Vishnu, who in this form is considered to be truth incarnate
<i>scorched</i>	Burnt, shrivelled
<i>scruff</i>	Back of the neck
<i>surpass</i>	Exceed, overtake

<i>wadi</i>	Dwellings
<i>winnowing</i>	Fluttering

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## 7.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. What does "My Four Enemies" foreground?
2. What role does caste play in the story?
3. How did her mother's customers treat the writer?
4. Why did her mother weave baskets?
5. What was the occupation of the writer's father?
6. Which of the following statements is correct :
  - (a) The schoolmaster was her friend.
  - (b) The schoolmaster fails in his role as an educator.
  - (c) The schoolmaster is a regular visitor at their house.
7. Who is the narrator of the story? What kind of a narrative is it?
8. Who are the four enemies?

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## 7.7 LET US SUM UP

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Dalit autobiographies are *testimonios* : they bear witness to actual happenings "My Four Enemies" is written in the first person by a dalit woman writer who reflects upon her childhood experiences and recalls that there were four people whom she considered her enemies — these were her father, her mother, her brother and her school teacher. The word 'enemy' is used in an ironical manner. At that young age she resented the manner in which they curbed her freedom and pushed her into the discipline of education. Now, she realises that this was the best thing that could have happened to her.

"My Four Enemies" pushes the reader to reflect on his/her attitude towards caste. It also comments on the way we treat others who are less privileged. The narrative depicts the life of a dalit family, the discrimination it experiences and the struggle it goes through.

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## 7.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. How does the author negotiate between/straddle autobiography and fiction in

“My Four Enemies”?

2. Identify instances from the text that foreground the voice of the experiencing “I” (in such a manner as to reinforce its distance from the narrating “I”).
3. Is there a fundamental difference between the four enemies that the author describes in her story? As an adult, how would she see at least one of them differing in kind, from the others?
4. Locate the similes in “My Four Enemies” and examine how they reinforce the themes of the story.
5. What events in the story seem particularly poignant to you? Discuss their relevance to the principal issues raised by the text.
6. Attempt a character-sketch of Aai. Does weaving have a symbolic significance in the context of feminist theory?

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## **7.9 SUGGESTED READING**

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Rege, Sharmila. *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women's Testimonios*. New Delhi: Zubaan, an Imprint of Kali for Women, 2006.



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## **UNIT -8: INTRODUCTION TO POSTCOLONIAL POETRY**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 8.0 Objectives**
- 8.1 Introduction**
- 8.2 The Poetic Voice**
- 8.3 Background**
- 8.4 Critical Terms**
- 8.5 Self Assessment Questions**
- 8.6 Let Us Sum Up**
- 8.7 Unit End Questions**
- 8.8 Suggested Readings**

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### **8.0 OBJECTIVES**

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- To define and analyse poetry as a literary form.
- To understand and appreciate the contribution of postcolonial poetry.
- To compare the specific forms of postcolonial poetic expression from India, Africa, Australia and the Caribbean
- To analyse the theme of cultural displacement, in postcolonial poetry.
- To illustrate the use of landscape, imagery, symbol, point of view and oral traditions in postcolonial poetry.
- To appreciate and evaluate the experimentation with English and englishes in voicing postcolonial histories and identities.

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### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Postcolonial literature is a new field of writing that came into being as a conscious form of expression from, approximately, the second half of the twentieth century. The former colonized peoples of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the Settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand and Canada, looking for a new identity, tried to locate their literature in their own understanding, rather than the colonial understanding of their cultural identity.

Cultural displacement is an important theme explored in postcolonial literatures. This theme has been explored through many strategies such as nostalgia, memory, anger, resistance, interior monologues and dialogic voices.

In this unit, you will be briefly introduced to the genre of poetry, and its distinction as a form, from drama and fiction. You will be able to appreciate the components of poetic form such as its figurative language, structure, rhyme, rhythm, metre,

connotative and subtextual meaning and the use of narrative voice and point of view.

The discussion on poetry as a genre will help you apply your understanding of these poetic features to the specific field of postcolonial poetry both historically and geographically. Though postcolonial poetry drawn from different regions may have in common, a note of protest against the injustice or the ironies born of the colonial situation, such as dual loyalties, each postcolonial culture carries the imprint of its unique cultural and linguistic traditions. Postcolonial poets from different nations may have in common a reliance on English, sometimes even a love of English. The rhythms of their poetry however and the forms of address to and within their communities, can be markedly different. You will also be in a position to comment on the dynamic mix of poetic styles that can be found within any one postcolonial culture because of the internal divisions of caste, race, community and gender groups.

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## 8.2 THE POETIC VOICE

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Literature was generally classified into epic, drama and poetry. More recently, as Klaser (2000) states : "Because the epic was widely replaced by the new prose form of the novel in the eighteenth century, recent classification prefer the terms fiction, drama and poetry as designations of the three major literary genres." (9)

As a literary form, poetry is structured in a different way from drama and from fiction. In this section you will focus on identifying and interpreting some important components of poetry. You will also understand how language itself is structured differently in the dramatic and the fictional form, though each of the three genres may show features similar to the other genres. You will find that poetry structures language more carefully as *patterns*, when set beside dramas and novels.

Drama is a literary mode written for *performance*. Actors recite dialogues and perform on stage in theatres before an audience. Stage setting, the use of music and lighting make drama a multidimensional audio-visual experience. A drama or play therefore is fully realized only when it is staged. The characters in a drama are flesh and blood individuals, imparting a strong element of realism to the dramatic script. An ancient literary form, the earliest dramas, Greek or Sanskrit date back to the 5th or 3rd century B.C. Plays may be written in prose or in verse.

A novel is a long, fictional work of literature written in prose. Generally, the length of a novel is at least a hundred pages. An imaginative narrative, a novel is meant to be read by readers and does not depend, like a drama, on enactment before an audience. The novel is the youngest among the literary forms and is regarded to have developed from the seventeenth century onwards. Being an extended narrative, a novels allows the author the freedom to develop, the story, description, characters and a philosophy of life, at length. Modern novels have been written in many different styles ranging from the structured, well-plotted, realistic novels to the more lyrical, fluid, stream of consciousness varieties. *Don Quixote* (1605) written by Miguel Cervantes is one of the earliest examples of the genre. Salman Rushdie's *Midnights Children* (1981) redefined the idea of the postcolonial novel,

whose language, style and technique disrupts the realistic tradition of the British Victorian novel.

As a literary medium, poetry is characterized by an economical use of language. Poetry touches our emotions and even a few simple poetic lines, can capture the human voice. Poetry, because of its features of rhythm and rhyme has often been compared to song. A poem gains a musical quality through the conscious use of sounds, arranged in such a way that they become memorable. While prose largely relies on clarity of communication of ideas, poetry conveys its meanings by playing around with sounds and narrative voices, carefully choosing the words that generate echoes and suggestions.

Poetry can elicit strong feelings on the part of the reader as, like a musical instrument, it can select from a variety of notes and tones. Poetic thought is wrapped in these layers of connotative meaning, making many poems difficult to comprehend or ambiguous in their meaning. We read poems for the pleasure they give us, rather than knowledge alone. The British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge felt that the poet "brings the whole soul of man into activity." The American poet Robert Frost stated that : "A complete poem is one where the emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words." Poetry is a favourite form of expression for beginners who like to try their hand at writing rhymes or composing metrical verse, often initiating preceding models. When you read a poem, you may have found that you experience the poem better when you, or somebody else reads it out aloud. Poetry requires that we *listen* to its reading or recitation so that we are able to lose ourselves in the accumulation of sounds.

Poetry, as Klaser (2000) states in his discussion on the genre : "... is often subdivided into the two major categories of *narrative* and lyric poetry. Narrative poetry includes genres such as the epic long poem, the romance and the ballad, which tell stories with clearly developed, structured plots. The shorter *lyric poetry*... is mainly concerned with one event, impression or idea." (29)

In his *Poetic Image* (1948) C. Day Lewis expressed the view that "a poem may itself be an image composed from a multiplicity of images" and an image as M.H. Abrams defines it "is a picture made out of words." (*A Glossary of Literary Terms* 121) "Imagery is often regarded as the most common manifestation of the "concrete" character of poetry." (Klaser 31).

Poetry as a genre, results in an intellectual and emotional experience for the reader. It works through the channels of *sounds* and the agency of the *imagination*. While many poets consciously work through rhymes and metres, it is not necessary that poets accept these conventions. Modern poetry in most languages is marked by the freedom to do away with poetic conventions tied to rhyme schemes and metrical stanzas.

In his book *Practical Criticism : A Study of Literary Judgement*, the critic I.A. Richards tried "to provide a new technique for those who wish to discover for themselves what they think and feel about poetry..."(3) He observes that "language- and pre-eminently language as it is used in poetry - has not one but several tasks to perform simultaneously..."(180). He identifies four types of functions or four

kinds of meaning through which we can interpret most human utterances. The four aspects are sense, feeling, tone and intention. *Sense* is the gist of what we say and *feelings* are held and expressed about the sense or content of what we say. The *tone* of an utterance is determined by the relationship of the speaker to the audience. Finally the *intention* consists of the speaker's "aim, *conscious* or *unconscious*, the effect he is endeavouring to promote." You can use these broad categories presented by Richards, to approach a poem and get a grip on it. These four aspects as you will find, can be interpreted by identifying patterns of imagery, attitude to the theme, overall choices of diction and rhythms to drive home the intention of the poet.

Poetry as a form, has strong potential to disrupt and *subvert* our mechanical approach to people and our relationship with them, and our understanding of our natural and social environment. The best poetry is evocative and stirs many layers of our being. Most good poetry is based on a close observation of life in all its minute particulars.

Before you apply yourself to understanding postcolonial poetry, you must be in a position to analyse and appreciate a poem on three levels as Thaker (7) points out :

- (A) Phonological level, or the level of sound
- (B) Structural level, or the level of grammar and syntax
- (C) Semantic-stylistic level, or the level of meaning.

There have been many debates on the choice of words a poet makes in writing a poem i.e. the *poetic diction*. The preference for a certain poetic diction over another was often determined by the fashion and preference of a particular literary period. M.H. Abrams (228) explains the term in the following way : "Many poets in all ages have used a distinctive language, a poetic diction; which includes words, phrasing, and figures not current in the ordinary discourse of the time."

When we interpret a poem, we have to look for hidden meanings and connotations, to interpret the *sub-textual* meaning it contains. Interpreting a poem, by drawing such linguistic and cognitive inferences is a skill.

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### 8.3 BACKGROUND

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Postcolonial poetry articulates the rediscovery of a cultural and natural identity after the former colonies attained independence. In India, pre-independence poets like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Henry Derozio writing in English made the first attempts to explore Indian myths and Indian landscapes. Even though they adopted the literary conventions and stylistic forms of the British romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats and used Victorian diction, they explored fresh themes, drawn from Indian life and society. Toru Dutt's *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) focuses on the mythical characters of Lakshman, Bharata, Prahlad, Sita and Savitri. M.K. Naik (1999: 39-40) states: "What is most impressive about Toru Dutt's poetry is its virtually total freedom from imitation... at an age when most writers are in their artistic swaddling clothes." Toru Dutt's *hybrid* identity - that of a Hindu baptized into Christianity, anticipates

the hybridity of many modern postcolonial and diasporic poets, who draw on both their European heritage and their native one.

The approach to discovering their new identity and finding suitable forms of expression as postcolonials, despite similarities, produced different kinds of poems in India, Africa, the Caribbean and the Settler colonies of Canada and Australia. As poetry is a genre that makes more *visible* the deviations from Standard English, highlighting the lexis and idioms of the former colonized, you will, in this section, be oriented towards some of the key linguistic issues relevant to the study of postcolonial poetry. Even when postcolonial poets rely on Standard English and the usage patterns that belong to the social contexts of Europe, their ambition is to find an authentic voice, that will not be a mere mimicry of the European.

We must remember also as **Ashcroft et al.** point out ([www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/ashcroft3.html](http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/ashcroft3.html)) that : "Postcolonial literatures developed through several stages which can be seen to correspond to stages both of national or regional consciousness and of the project of asserting difference from the imperial centre. During the imperial period writing in the language of the imperial centre is inevitably, of course produced by a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonizing power." Postcolonial writers who wish to break free from the imperial model have to effort to discover "the basis for an indigenous culture", by "fully exploring their anti-imperial potential."

Rajeev S. Patke sums-up the function of postcolonial poetry as describing "the historical preoccupations and linguistic strategies that constitute the central link between poetry and postcoloniality". He states : "...any poem is postcolonial which happens to be written from a place implicated in colonial history, by a person whose access to language has colonial associations". Postcolonial poets, for Patke have to respond to the fundamental issues of "assimilation and resistance", or "dependency and the will to autonomy".

The new varieties of postcolonial use of English by the former colonized is signified by the term "englishes". The spelling with a small "e" and the plural form conveys the distinction between the hegemony of Standard English imposed by the colonizer and the freedom to experiment with English on the part of the colonized, and to impart their own cultural flavour to it.

Postcolonial poetry as you will understand, is born of the self-awareness of this dual inheritance. We speak of the *location* of these poets in a specific time frame such as pre-independence or post-independence, diasporic or globalized locations. Location is also theorized in terms of country of birth or residence, adoption or migration. The late poet Nissim Ezekiel who belonged to the Bene Israel Jewish community that had migrated to India, lived and worked in Mumbai and in his poems such as "Background Casually," articulated the complex location of his cultural identity. The geographical location of identity for immigrant poets like Derek Walcott involves nostalgia for the Caribbean (that constitutes his cultural roots) and a connection with Britain, his country of adoption.

Though postcolonial poetry is primarily concerned with the issue of cultural displacement and the finding of ones *subjectivity*, the acceptance or rejection of

both Europe and ones mother country can vary drastically, depending on the historical conditions such as slavery, indentured labour, and the response to the conditions of freedom and choices available. Postcolonial poets today may wish to explore cultures of the past and the present that they are interested in, as travellers, or from the philosophical point of view. Thus, the *binary opposition* between Europe and the former colonized cultures may be toned down or rejected altogether, if a postcolonial poet wishes to transcend the boundaries defined by colonial histories. The following extract from the poem "Situation" by Ka Na Subramanyan (b. 1912), a Tamil poet takes us into the heart of such intercultural influences :

Introduced  
to the Upanishads  
by T.S. Eliot;  
and to Tagore  
by the early  
Pound;  
and to the Indian Traditions  
by Max Muller  
(late of the Bhavan)  
and to  
Indian dance  
by Bowers;  
and to  
Indian art  
by what's his name;  
.....  
Vociferous  
in thoughts  
not his own;  
eloquent in words  
not his own  
("The age demanded...")

(trans. from Tamil in the *Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry ed*, Eds. Vinay Dharwadker and A.K. Ramanujan)

You will be able to appreciate, after reading the quoted lines of poetry above that the postcolonial voice in the, poem states that he has contact with his culture, only through interpretations coming from European scholars like Max Mueller, or Modern British poets like T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound. *Alienation* from ones own literature and cultural roots and the feelings of irony, bitterness and self-deprecation

are common in postcolonial poetry, as the poet finds himself/herself unable to come to terms with the loss of a primary cultural identity.

Postcolonial poetry, specifically, takes up the central question of identity. Afro-American poets and Irish poets voice their anger against the unjust practices of colonisation and the condition of slavery, apartheid and poverty it resulted in. In the poem "Kinship" the Irish poet Seamus Heaney protests the violence of British colonization:

Our mother ground  
is sour with the blood of her faithful,  
they lie gargling,  
in her sacred heart  
as the legions stare,  
from the ramparts.

Postcolonial poetry is closely related to the culture, history and location of the poet under consideration. It is important to mark the differences of aesthetic and ideological approaches from one poet to another, and to trace the cross-cultural affiliations that these poets establish. Diasporic poets may share similar anxieties about the legacy of colonialism with the indigenous poets, though they many address their poetry to a more cosmopolitan audience. Feminist poets belonging to postcolonial nations may find common ground with white feminist poets, and yet preserve their own cultural allegories and women-centred myths to understand their postcolonial identity as women.

The use of oral narrative traditions in postcolonial poetry gives a distinctive shape and disrupts the European tradition of poetry. The appeal is to the collective notion of nation or community. Even when there is anger against the internal failure of postcolonial people, especially politicians to stabilize the nation, there is a sense of identification. Postcolonial poetry works with a notion of the "we", unlike the colonial ideology that separated the "us" of the colonizer in a contemptuous way from the "them" of the natives.

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#### 8.4 CRITICAL TERMS

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<i>diaspora</i>	the term originally referred to the Jewish people who were compelled to migrate from their homeland to other countries. Diaspora is now used for all people who have permanently moved out of their own country.
<i>subaltern</i>	originally used for an officer in the British army who is of lower rank than a captain. Generally used for members of the working class.
<i>subversion</i>	the process of trying to destroy the authority of a political or religious system by direct or indirect means. Postcolonial writers use various subversive narrative and linguistic strategies to question the authority of colonialism.

<i>poetic diction</i>	the choice of words considered to be suitable for poetry, that contributes to its poetic effects.
<i>allegory</i>	a literary narrative that has an underlying meaning, closely structured and embedded, in another narrative on the surface.
<i>agency</i>	the power of an individual in society.
<i>alienation</i>	a concept that originates in the theory of Karl Marx. It refers to the inability of workers to benefit from the fruits of their labour. Former colonized people suffer alienation from their tradition and cultural identities.
<i>settler colonies</i>	those colonies like Australia where the European colonizers established their settlements and continued to live in these territories even after the colonies gained independence.
<i>hybridity</i>	Homa Bhabha, the postcolonial theorist gave wide currency to this term. It refers to the co-presence of two or more identities within an individual or a culture.
<i>mimicry</i>	Frantz Fanon first used the term for the process adopted by the colonized people to imitate the identity of their colonial masters; largely rejecting their own native identities.
<i>subjectivity</i>	the condition of being a self-determining individual i.e. one who claims one's consciousness, and refuses to be treated as an object or as "the other", by processes such as colonialism.

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## 8.5 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTION

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- 1 Why is a poem often referred to as "a verbal picture"?
- 2 On how many levels can a poem be analysed? Briefly explain each level.
- 3 What do you understand by the term poetic diction?
- 4 What are the four kinds of meaning discussed by I.A. Richards in *Practical Criticism*?
- 5 Explain the concept of ambiguity in a poem.
- 6 Do poems give us pleasure? Why?
- 7 What is the reader's role in interpreting a poem?
- 8 Identify three themes commonly treated in postcolonial poetry.
- 9 What are settler colonies?
- 10 What is the distinction between *Standard English* and *englishes*?

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## 8.6 LET US SUM UP

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Even though postcolonial poets may not be as popular as postcolonial novelists, they express with sincerity and depth, many of the thematic concerns of postcolonial literatures. They dwell on themes like alienation, hybridity, exile, nostalgia and cultural displacement, following the rule and departure of the former colonizers. While the settler colonies have to contend with the continuing presence of the



Europeans in their midst even after attaining independence, the non-settler nations are still in the midst of working out their cultural conflicts regarding their routes to modernization. Postcolonial poets as you will have understood, are trying to find and express the meaning of Indianness, Africanness or Australianess in terms of their past tradition and the new influences brought in through colonization.

The indigenous identity of the former colonized has developed a hybrid identity and it is the dilemmas of coping with such hybrid identities that poets speak about with sadness, anger or humour. In common with other genres of postcolonial writing, postcolonial poets speak of the disruption of traditions, breaks with the nation's past and recovery and continuity of cultural values.

In the first phase of postcolonial poetry the English educated elite largely relied on European literary forms and conventions, while bringing in new Indian landscapes and myths. In the second phase of post 1970s poetry, more serious efforts were made to exploit the linguistic resources of the English language to formulate the postcolonial consciousness in poetry. You will be able to identify this phase of development in the self-critiquing conveyed in the poetic voice, acknowledging that it is situated between two traditions - the European and the indigenous. In the third phase of post 1980s poetry, many new voices are heard, speaking from gender positions and subaltern perspectives. These voices are the voices of protest and subversion, who refashion the very imagery and symbols of poetry. Of course not every national literature can be neatly divided into the three phases of development outlined above. Perhaps the most distinctive feature identifying the *maturity* of postcolonial poetry is the finding of an *authentic voice* and the capacity for *self-representation*.

At the level of linguistic experimentation, postcolonial poetry is marked by the play with the voices of different generations and histories. The shift in awareness is articulated by juxtaposing Standard English with the idiom of native languages and by mixing the tones of colonial speech with that of indigenous speech rhythms. Contemporary postcolonial poets wish to preserve their choice to write as women, subalterns or diaspora, taking ideological and political positions, or as cosmopolitan poets with a global consciousness.

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## 8.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1 Identify and discuss some key features of postcolonial poetry.
- 2 What are the stages of evolution of postcolonial poetry ? Discuss.
- 3 "Identity is the central preoccupation of postcolonial poetry." Elaborate.
- 4 What do you understand by the term "location" ? In what way does the location of a postcolonial poet influence the themes and perspective in his/her poetry ?
- 5 Analyse the concept of "hybridity" in postcolonial poetry with reference to Indian, African or Australian poets.
- 6 Comment on the theme of "anger" in postcolonial poetry.

7 Discuss the theme of cultural nostalgia in the diasporic postcolonial poets.

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## 8.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## **UNIT 9 : LANGUAGE : EXPLORATION OF KAMALA DAS'S AND R. PARTHASARATHY'S POEMS**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 9.0 Objectives**
- 9.1 Introduction**
  - 9.1.1 Indian English Poetry**
- 9.2 Kamala Das**
- 9.3 An Introduction : Summary**
  - 9.3.1 Interpretation**
  - 9.3.2 Glossary and Annotations**
- 9.4 R. Parthasarathy**
- 9.5 Exile from Homecoming : Summary**
  - 9.5.1 Interpretation**
  - 9.5.2 Glossary and Annotations**
- 9.6 Self Assessment Questions**
- 9.7 Let Us Sum Up**
- 9.8 Unit End Questions**
- 9.9 Suggested Readings**

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### **9.0 OBJECTIVES**

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This unit deals with Indian poets writing in English. The two poets and poems that we intend to discuss in this unit are Kamala Das's "An Introduction" and R. Parthasarathy's "Exile from Homecoming" respectively. The objectives of this unit are to enable you to understand the relationship of these two Indian poets with English language which has been historically and psychologically implanted in their environment. It also aims at explaining the conditioning of sensibility among the two poets in the postcolonial context.

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### **9.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The term postcolonialism refers to a historical phase undergone by many of the world's countries especially, in Asia and Africa during the period of colonisation by the Western power and its aftermath manifested in resistance struggle and search for identity and independence. The process of colonisation tended to use the language of the imperial masters, thus alienating people from their own cultures and languages. Therefore the colonial period not only created a sense of alienation from the native cultural tradition, but also ingrained an attitude of subjection. 19th century colonialism saw the emergence of the English language as an academic

discipline. Language became the medium of establishing a hierarchical power structure with its hub located at the imperial centres.

In India, Lord Macaulay's Minute, 1835 paved the way for English as medium of education and employment. Freedom struggle focused attention on national cultures and traditions and these found a literary expression. It was natural that a sizeable literature was also in English. 1830s onward is known as the period of the Bengal Renaissance. The intellectuals began to look at themselves through the eyes of the 'Other'. They were impressed by the freedom struggles in Europe and influenced by Lord Byron and Thomas Paine (the writer of *The Rights of Man*).

The Bengal Renaissance clearly falls into two phases: the first when Indians found themselves wanting in matters of (i) industrialization (ii) rational habit of thinking and (iii) modernization. This was a period when they sought to imbibe the values of the West. Mid. nineteenth century debates underline these issues. The second phase was one of self-discovery and re-forming of Indian identity on nationalistic lines. This was the post 1860 period when nationalist feelings began to seek expression in the works of Bankim Chandra Chatterje, Swami Vivekanand and others. An awakening of national consciousness and a rediscovery of her cultural heritage was actually the outcome of the western impact.

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### **9.1.1. INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY**

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The story of Indian Poetry in English begins in 1830, with Kashiprasad Ghose publishing his volume of poems. From the cultural point of view, India, at this time was passing through a phase of wholesale condemnation of everything Indian and whole-hearted glorification of everything English. Syed Ahmed Khan declared in his "Letters from Europe", all things spiritual and worldly which should be found in man have been bestowed by the Almighty on Europe, especially on England.

Indian poetry in English may be said to have emerged under unfavourable conditions (as the country was still groaning under the burden of a foreign government) but as conditions changed, this brand of poetry became more and more indigenous and patriotic. Indian English Poetry began in the early part of the 19th century and was a literary product of the historical situation that emerged in India under the impact of British rule. Right from the beginning, the Indian poets who adopted English as their medium of expression were intent on communicating the ethos and milieu of India, her culture and civilization in various forms of poetry in English. Post-independence Indian English poets took upon themselves the task of modulating the diction and rhetorical devices of Indian English Poetry to make it suitable for the representation of the changed situation in the context of Indian political and social scenario.

The Indian counterpart of Anglo-American modernism reflected itself as a nationwide movement that started in 1930s and continued to affect writers until the end

of 1970s. The poets took up distinctively high modernist positions and concentrated on themes as the disintegration of traditional communities and familiar cultural institutions, the alienation of the individual in urban society, the dissociation of thought and feeling and the anguish of unresolved doubts and anxieties.

Colonial culture gains extra significance for writers who use English. There is no denying the fact that the Indian writer in English owes his very existence to British Empire, and hence he is very much a product of the postcolonial situation. The alien intervention was not merely confined to political and economic sphere, it was something far more subtle and insidious, it was an intervention on a colossal civilization scale, uprooting the entire peasantry not merely from land, but from all that which connected it from the past. The destruction of the past alienates a man from all that which gives him a meaning to its life on earth. By uprooting him from the past, it distorts man's relation to his own self. It is precisely this "damaged self" of the average Indian, neither purely traditional nor completely colonized, a lacerated soul which became the most sustained, poignant theme of many Indian writers during the first decades of the present century. The colonial experience persists despite the withdrawal of political control. Frantz Fanon identifies colonialism as a denial of everything outside the colonizer's frame, a systematic negation of the other person. Post-colonialism hence is multidimensional in the context that the colonized understands that the colonizer has in some ways become part of him and can never be driven away in the fullest.

The post-independence Indian poets writing in English live in a bafflingly complex world, very different from that occupied by other contemporary poets of the country. The poets admit having a difficult and complex relationship with the medium which fails to catch their experiences. That is why Indian poetry is said to be Indian in sensibility and content but English in language. There has always been a time-lag between the adoption of the living, creative idiom of the English speaking people and the Indian writing in English in India. The writers in English are conscious of their Indianness because at the bottom of it all, one suspects a crisis of identity and a sense of alienation.

The post-independence poets tried to express a modern Indian sensibility in a modern idiom. Colonialism, a historical reality has evoked different creative responses in Indian English literature. An Indian writer because of his colonial past, is heir to two languages and two cultures. Therefore, he suffers from linguistic dualism and anxiety born out of divided allegiance. The colonial experience continuously informs and deforms the native imagination, making it sometimes mute and sometimes articulate.

Compared with the work of pre-Independence poets, the writings of new poets is free from poeticisms, their diction is free from clichés, archaisms and mere line-fillers. Another important feature is their liberation from an inherited but moribund

metrical concept. Their language has more suppleness and more dramatic quality. It is more creative, confident and less imitative.

The two poets Kamala Das and R. Parthasarathy give us a taste of the heterogeneity of the cultural space we inhabit. While parthasarathy opens up possibilities of an unchaining of the English chains, by introducing a bi-literary strain, Kamala Das's poetry is an articulate voice of her ethnic identity and her Dravidian culture. To Parthasarathy, a poem is a re-enactment, a re-living of the past with a sense of non-involvement. For Kamala Das it is a conflict between passivity and rebellion.

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## 9.2 KAMALA DAS

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Kamala Das is one of the prominent Indian poets in English whose emergence in the post-Independence phase contributed immensely to the growth of modernist sensibility. The Daughter of V.M. Nair and well-known Malayalam poetess Balamani Amma, Kamala Das was born in Punnayurkulam in the coastal region of Malabar in Kerala on 31 March, 1934. She had her early education in St. Cecilia's a European school in Calcutta and in the Elementary school at Punnayurkulam and also at a boarding school run by the Roman Catholic nuns. She was married to Madhava Das, an official in the Reserve Bank of India. The Das family was mostly in Bombay except for brief periods in Calcutta and Delhi.

Kamala Das has published four volumes of poetry in English viz. *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), and *Strange Time* (1973). Apart from her occasional writings in English, her autobiography in Malayalam has been published in English as *My Story* (1975). Her works in Malayalam include more than fourteen books, a majority of them being collection of short stories. She was awarded the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Prize in 1967 for her collection of stories, *Thanuppu* (The Cold). Earlier in 1963, she had won the Asian Poetry Award as well as the Sahitya Akademi in 1985.

She is acclaimed for her originality and freshness and also for showing a great command over the verse technique. Her poetry reveals a mastery of phrase and a control over rhythm. Her characteristic trick is to split phrases and meanings—even the infinitive between two lines and this is surely symbolic of the fissured, or fractured sensibility she wishes to communicate.

Nostalgia and confessionality that is, writing about personal experiences and responses, are the two dominant features of her poetry. Her personal experiences, the hollowness of married life, feminine sensibility, the diverse roles as granddaughter, daughter, sister, mother, wife and beloved are all part of her method of self-exposure. Many of her poems carry tender recollections of her childhood and nostalgic yearning for her family house, especially for her grandmother "My Grandmother's House", Living in Calcutta, she remembers, "the noons in Malabar

with an ache growing inside me, a homesickness "A Hot Noon at Malabar". Her retreat into the past is a major preoccupation with her.

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### 9.3 AN INTRODUCTION : SUMMARY

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The poem "An Introduction" first appeared in Kamala Das's very first volume of poems *Summer in Calcutta* and then in *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*. The poet introduces herself to the readers and tells them that though she does not know politics, yet she knows the names of these persons who have wielded political power in the country, beginning with Jawahar Lal Nehru. She also tells the reader that she is an Indian, very dark, born in Malabar, that she speaks three languages, writes in two, and dreams in one; that she writes in English despite objections from certain people and quarters. She sarcastically refers to those 'critics' 'friends' and 'visiting cousins' who urged her not to write poetry in English as this was not her mother tongue. She takes such advisers to task for having given her this advice because she claims the right to speak and write in any language she likes. She further adds that whichever language she uses, would become hers, with all "its distortions and its queernesses".

... The language I speak  
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses.  
All mine, mine alone. It is half  
English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest... (lines 10-13)

English she says, comes to her as naturally as 'cawing to the crows' or 'roaring to the lions', As a woman, she has the freedom to choose her language and also her 'joys', her 'longings' and her 'hopes' as they are no different from a man's. Her language, her creative talent and her speech is human speech, the speech of the mind and is not 'deaf' and 'blind'.

Kamala Das writes that she was married to a 'youth of sixteen' when she grew up from a child to an adult, she asked for love and what she got was a husband who performed the sexual act with her in the crudest possible manner. Though her husband did not beat her, yet he left her woman-persona crushed and broken. She started moving about in society in a male dress, ignoring her womanliness.

Everybody advised her and urged her to do some embroidery or cooking and also to keep quarrelling with the servants in the manner of a typical housewife. People objected to her non conformist attitude to social norms and courage. They objected to this too (earlier for her use of language and now her behaviour) and wanted her to 'fit in' or 'belong' and not play pretending games or roles. They expected her to behave like a woman and not 'sit on walls or peep in through our lace-draped window (36-37) as women are forbidden from doing this. They also advised her to choose a name which can define her role as a woman as they did not accept her entering into two many roles and activities not prescribed for women. They said-

Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better  
still, be Madhavikutty,  
It is time to choose a name, a role... (lines 38-40)

People also urged her not to pretend to be a split personality suffering from a psychological disorder, and not to become a nymphomaniac. They objected to her loud expression when rejected in love.

Finally, Kamala Das describes herself as being no different from other human beings and like every other human being, she is sometimes sinful and sometimes pious, she is sometimes loved and sometimes betrayed in love. She has the same joys in life which others have, and that she suffers from the same disappointments which others suffer from.

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### 9.3.1 INTERPRETATION

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The poem is concerned with the questions of human identity, but it effectively uses the confessional and rhetorical modes in order to focus pertinent questions relating to a woman's or an Indian poet's identity in English. The poem makes a clear and significant statement relating to the questions why some Indian writers choose to write in English rather than in an Indian language. Starting with a reference to politics, the poem moves on to a statement of convictions in respect of her choice of medium and leads to convulsive outbursts of feelings of hurt and shame as also to statements on love and marriage which make for self-exposure and confession.

Kamala Das recounts some incidents and experiences of her life which had affected her most till the time of her writing this poem. She creates her own Indian English idiom, an idiom which could recapture quite successfully her sensibility.

Although, the idiom is a combination of English and Indian expressions, yet it honestly records her experiences and feelings. She accepts English as a competent language that can convey her emotions and thoughts and this acceptance voices the existential pressures generated during in the modern Indian woman's journey from tradition to modernity. It also expresses the Indian woman poet's sense of commitment to reality.

Her search for ideal love and resultant disillusionment seem to involve the psychological phenomenon of the 'animus' (spirit/temper) struggling to project the masculine imprint as interpreted by Jung the psychologist. The attempt to seek perfection in love is destined to end failure. Her wearing a shirt and trousers, cutting her hair and ignoring her womanliness shows her non-conformist attitude to social norms. People had wanted her to conform to their notions and their definition of a woman. They urged her to behave like a 'girl', a 'wife' and to busy herself in embroidery and cooking. But she revolts against conventionalism and the restraints imposed upon women by society, and this she does by ignoring her womanliness.



At this point, the poem questions Indian poet's identity in English, 'fit in' they said, 'Belong' - cried the categorizers but she responds to this by alienating herself from 'critics', 'friends', 'visiting cousins', who say- 'Don't write in English' into a larger and more universal alienation which is sexual(32-33), social (36-42) and artistic (9-13), the alienation thus becomes an attempt at self-integration. First the freedom to choose her language and to build up confidence, in her creative talent. Then the poet writes about the puzzling years of adolescence and the pain and confusion of growing up. Her experience as a woman leads her to question the conformative roles being pushed upon women. Her questioning is reflective of her feeling of alienation from social environment. Her unusual frankness in dealing with the subject of sex and her sensitive awareness of her outward surroundings, their sordidness, their ugliness, their horror constitute the strength of the poem. The poem shows her complete and absolute alienation from those surroundings as well as from the social context in which she lived.

Towards the close, the poem becomes incantatory. Her identification with 'every woman' is a statement of her credo, her attitude to language and experience. The use of personal pronoun 'I' evokes much larger questions in relation to the cosmos and the world. After a sense of betrayal and disillusionment, she proceeds to identify the 'I' with each and every individual in quest of an identity The 'I' thus becomes the consciousness.

For Kamala Das woman's personal feelings of longing and loss becomes part of collective experience of womanhood as she says-

---I am sinner,  
I am saint I am the beloved and the  
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no  
Aches which are not yours I too call myself I (lines 56-59)

The emphasis on the 'self' can largely be seen in historical cultural context and hence shifting postcolonial identities.

The poem is compact in structure. Though written in free verse, punctuations are fully observed. The language is simple and colloquial-

Be Amy, or be Kamala Oor, better  
Still, be 'Madhavikutty. ... (lines 38-39)

The tone of the poem is intimate and convincing. The monosyllabism provides swiftness of movement. The use of parallel yet contrary words like "make love and then feel shame", sinner-saint, beloved-betrayed etc. show her sense of failure and frustration. The images in the poem emerge from cultural sources of the typical Indian background and define her identity. Expressions such as 'blind speech' evoke imagery of trees producing sound in storms, clouds roaring during monsoon and also the burning funeral pyre muttering unclear sounds thus evoking also the

image of death and destruction. Here two different senses - one sight and the other of sound are combined in order to draw attention. This image contrasts with Kamala Das's desire to express herself through language. She creates for herself a style and voice which reflects both her Indian and feminine sensibility. The poem carries within it most of the themes which one associates with her poetry—themes of love, sex, loneliness, courage, self exposure and search for identity.

The poem also illustrates her daring innovativeness as she trusts her own resources and culture. The poem thus illustrates Kamala Das' ability to "successfully marshal diverse and tangential themes in one controlled poem" (Daruwalla).

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### 9.3.2 GLOSSARY AND ANNOTATIONS

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<i>queernesses</i>	:	Odds/Peculiarities
<i>It voices my joys, my longings:</i>	:	Language as a medium for expression of both her joys and suppressed desires
<i>muttering</i>	:	Say in a voice which can barely be heard
<i>womanliness</i>	:	The qualities traditionally associated with women.
<i>Schizophrenia</i>	:	Mental disorder indicating split personality
<i>Nympho</i>	:	Women with an uncontrollable sexual desire
<i>jilted</i>	:	Cast off/ rejected in love
<i>I am sinner, I am saint</i>	:	A human being with common weaknesses and virtues.

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### 9.4 R. PARATHASARTHY

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Rajgopal Parthasarthy born in 1934 and was educated at Don Bosco High School and subsequently at Siddharth College, Bombay, later at the University of Leeds England in 1963-64. He worked as a lecturer in English in Ezekiel's department at Mithibai College, Bombay. This is the period Parthasarthy refers to as one when, 'He had spent his youth whoring/after English gods'. The year 1963-64 and his stay in England was significant for him as it proved to be a culture shock- "My encounter with England only reproduced the by-now familiar pattern of Indian experience in England : disenchantment" ("Whoring after English Gods"). This 'disenchantment', however, was extremely productive as it brought forth some of the finest poems in Indian English poetry on cultural encounter like *Poems of Exile* (1963-66), Parthasarthy's works include *Poetry from Leeds* (which he edited in collaboration with another scholar), *Ten Twentieth- Century Indian Poets* (ed.) and an original work entitled *Rough Passage*. As a discerning critic, his prose tracts like "Poet in Search of a Language". "Indian English Verse : The Making of a Tradition". "Notes of Making on a Poem", and "How it Strikes a

Contemporary : The Poetry of A.K. Ramanujan” form part of Indian literary criticism in English. His statements like, “A poem ought to, in effect, try to arrest the flow of language, to anaesthetize it, to petrify it, to fossilize it” and “the poet by sheer dedication to words, arrives at a truth which may otherwise be impossible for him to attain” or “Poetry is an ascetic art, doing without, rather than ‘doing with, indulgence’ have become almost axiomatic.

*Rough Passage* was adjudged to be a runner-up for the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1977. Parthasarthy is a bilingual poet, writing in both English and Tamil. In fact, he has been experiencing an acute conflict between his resolve to write poetry in Tamil only and his inability to give up writing in English for which he had developed a strong dislike because of his realization that a man, having deep roots in his native culture, should write poetry in his native language on one.

One of the most striking conceptions of R. Parthasarthy’s *Rough Passage* is the emotional and spiritual dilemma caused in the poet’s mind as a result of being educated in a foreign language. He is self-reflective and evaluative. The poet feels that he has become a stranger to the traditions of Tamil culture and has thus lost his roots. *Rough Passage* is the one of the most neatly and deftly structured poetic sequence in Indian English Poetry. The poem is written in three parts—“Exile”, “Trial” and “Homecoming”. The first part, entitled “Exile”, opposes the culture of India to that of Europe, and examines the consequences of British rule and loss of identity. Against the turmoil thus created in his mind, personal love holds forth the promise of “belonging”, and the second part “Trial” celebrates love as a reality. “Homecoming”, the third and final part, explores the phenomenon of returning to one’s home. The various thematic strands are the social commentary, (“the epitaph of the Raj”) the poet’s cultural and linguistic predicament, search for the “roots” and the poet’s problem of craft—how to make poetic use of the past, particularly memories of the complex South Indian family network with its telescopic relationships. No other Indian poet has explored his linguistic dilemma so thoroughly and so painfully as Parthasarthy has.

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## 9.5 EXILE FROM HOMECOMING : SUMMARY

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R. Parthasarthy’s stay in England shattered his illusions about England and equipped him to view India and Indianness with an almost alien perspective. The conflict or active engagement between two cultures is the dynamic force behind his book of verse, *Rough Passage*. The first part “Exile” (1963-67) opposes the culture of Europe with that of India and examines the consequences of British rule on an Indian, especially the loss of identity with his own culture and the need to return to his roots. Against the turmoil of non-relationship, personal love holds forth the promise of belonging and the second part, “Trial” (1961-74) celebrates love as a reality. “Homecoming” (1971-78) the third and the final part explores the phenomenon of returning to one’s home. The sense of exile has reinforced the need for the quest for self and also native roots.

Parthasarthy had suspended creative writing for a few years and this phase of introspection and silence in his life coincided with some events in 1960s and 1970s. Out of this anxiety and anguish for expression, he turns to develop a language of struggle and liberation, as language becomes for him a medium for expression of identity and culture. His days at school and university were an intense infatuation with English literature and culture. He dreamt of England as his future home and English language as the strongest link. But later in life, it all turned out to be sheer disenchantment. His poetry is born out of this encounter with the self i.e. with his Tamil past and native heritage. His quest for the elements of authentic speech is expressed thus:

My tongue in English chains  
I return, after a generation, to you. (lines 1-2)

The dependence on a foreign tongue (English) has distanced him from his native (Tamil) culture and tradition. He assumes the responsibility to present the soul's search for the lost meaning. Torn between 'what we are' and 'what we ought to be' is the dilemma that forces the poet in

Parthasarthy to become aware of the conditions of mind and being. In a country where men have forgotten 'what they are' or have identified themselves with 'what they are not', the recovery of language is the road to the recovery of self and community. The imperial language injures imagination. Through his own language (Tamil) he can participate in the process of remembering and recalling the things which belong to his being.

But, for the poet, the transition from English to Tamil is complex for the Tamil language itself seems to be eroded by a process of decomposition. Tamil has degenerated into an effete language through centuries of complacency on the one hand and extreme commercialisation on the other. He writes that Tamil has lost its grandeur and it is:

.....a tired language  
wrenched from its sleep in the kural  
teeth, palate, lips still new  
to its agglutinative touch  
Now, hooked on celluloid, you reel  
down plush corridors..... (lines 7-12)

Memories further anchor him to his familial, personal past. This makes the poem very redolent with his characteristic Indian experiences. He describes events of family re-union since his grandfather's death in 1959. The family re-union becomes an occasion for renewing relationships. After a long time a family reunion takes place as cousins arrive in Tiruchchanur. This reunion presumably took place some time after Parthasarathy's return to his native place from England. Neither the

cousins nor the poet could recognize each other immediately because they had not met for many years and had never ever written letters to one another.

Then their conversation began. Each of the cousins sat down, cross-legged, on the steps of the inn where they had been accommodated. As the conversation went on, the participants in the family gathering occupied themselves with roasting coconuts and eating rice and pickle. Sundari, who had been playing all sorts of games with the poet when they were both teenagers, was also there. Forty years back they had together been climbing up the tamarind trees every morning even though they had been forbidden to take the risk of climbing up the trees. On that day of the family gathering, Sundari looked much taller. Besides, she was now the mother of three daughters who were all playing by her side and feeling perfectly secure because of her presence by their side. It seemed to the poet that the girls were, "floating like safe planets near her".

Further Parthasarathy speaks about a domestic tragedy. In the month of November his father died; and he prefaces this bit of news by remarking that he had already become an expert in farewells, meaning that he had already lost several relatives and friends either through death or through separations brought about by other causes. The unexpected death of his father, came as a heavy blow to him so much, so that it seemed to him that somebody had banged a door in his face. He felt like a glasshouse which has been hit by a stone and has been shattered.

At the cremation of the dead body of the poet's father, his relatives stood around the funeral pyre like exclamation marks, meaning that they stood and stared at the fire in a state of surprise.

The poet now feels that, having lost his father, he must regard himself as his own father and manage his affairs without any support. The lines of his palms probably do indicate the time at which his father was to die. In course of time, he himself would die too; and after him, his son, who is yet to come into this world, would also die. Death is like a "needle of forgetfulness" through the eye of which everyone has to pass.

The poet then mentions the river Vaikai, passing through the city of Madurai in Tamil Nadu, which once was held in great respect. Birds like the kingfisher and the egret used to settle down on its banks; and the river used to feed them with the fishes which they could easily catch from its waters. The ashes of emperors and poets, who died and were cremated, were floated in the waters of this river because it was regarded as a sacred river. But now boys, sitting on its banks, float paper boats on its waters; and buffaloes, treating it as a mere pond, walk into its shallow water in order to relax and cool themselves there. Eaglewood and stale flowers may be seen on the surface of its water; and every evening, as the bells ring in the temples, a man may be seen sitting down on the steps to clean his arse. This river has now become a sewer or a carrier of garbage.

In the evening, the traffic on the street causes a jam because everybody is going homewards after the day's work. It is at that time that the poet gets up from his seat before the table and picking up his glasses, begins to make a search for himself in every nook and corner of the night. But the pavement, becomes inimical to him when it hears his footsteps on it. Then a stray dog flings the whole lane at him in contempt. Eventually he comes to the conclusion that he has lost the battle of his life and achieved nothing more than a table and a chair. Even so, he does not wish to complain against life because he can sit on the table and chair and write poetry.

Speaking about himself, Parthasarathy says that he has made a false start in life, and had to be adopted a wrong course by having gone to England and having developed an interest in the English language and also using it for writing poems. Another mistake which he had made was to have got married. If he had properly understood the message of the ancient Greek poets, he would have realized that it was better to bury a woman than to marry her subsequently he had become a sort of teacher. Next, he became a reviewer of poems written by others. He began to be invited to literary conferences, and he made it a point to attend them. Parthasarathy goes on to say that it took him a long time to realize that he had no talent at all even though words came easily to his mind. Perhaps, his guardian angel, the English language had deserted him. Now, while riding his bicycle, he asks himself what it means to be a poet; and the answer to this as a poet, all that he does is to borrow thoughts and ideas from the poems of the dead poets of the past. He regrets producing nothing original.

He returns home, tired and climbs up the staircase leading to his flat, he stumbles over the footpad outside his door, and even forgets where he had placed the key of his door. He feels that he has again made a mess of things; and also feels that his attempts to refine the language (English) had come to nothing. He compares his poetic capacity to an inflated balloon which contains nothing but air. He has lost faith in his poetic ability: and he would even go to the extent of recommending to people the ordinary newspaper as a replacement for the classics of literature. He further adds that he has completely emptied his heart of all that it contained. He has poured all the feelings of his heart into the poems which he has written. From now onwards, he says, he would make no further attempts to write poetry and would be satisfied with spending the rest of his life in a state of uncertainty.

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### 9.5.1 INTERPRETATION

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The poem acquires meaning in the context of the tradition that Parthasarathy is part of. Parthasarathy makes use of images that lie inherent in his native consciousness. Vivid images of familiar coconuts/out of the fire/ of rice - and - pickle afternoons; memories of Vaiokai river, 'the street in the evening tilting homeward/as traffic piles up, lend the descriptions an identifiable Indianness. The

arrival of cousins and the conversation between them are memories which associate him not only to his past but his real self too. An image has an extended application for Parthasarathy and its connotative richness occurs in the total context of its recurring use, hence providing it a prismatic quality.

The image that indicates the death of his father sharply focuses on the reality of life and death. This image is reflected in the brittleness of glass and the relative permanence of stone:

An unexpected November  
Shut the door in my face;  
I crashed, a glasshouse,  
hit by the stone of father's death. (lines 32-35)

Another image which objectifies the immediacy of personal sorrow, the compass, also highlights the continuity of the family-

I am my father now,  
The lines of my hands  
hold the fine compass of his going;  
I shall follow.... (lines 40-43)

Parthasarathy shows a profound sense of loss and pathos at a great cultural tradition finally degenerating into a sewer. The metaphor depicting the degeneration and desiccation of the culture and the language is the river Vaikai. The river has now lost its grandeur and sacredness just as the language (Tamil) has lost its hold. "Buffaloes have turned her to a pond" and also "Stale flowers" and cleaning of "arse" turn her into a "sewer".

Parthasarathy explicitly explores the theme of the individual's predicament in the form of rootlessness and crisis of identity. The poem becomes a statement of his realisation of the futility inherent in the situation of being an exile. Michael Madhusudan Dutt has also debated the language issue in his sonnet "Bengali language" wherein he finally rejects English in order to return to the mother-tongue Bengali. Poets like Keki Daruwalla and Kamala Das are also aware of the dilemma but their choice seems to have been made with ease and acceptance. For Parthasarathy the relationship between 'English Gods' proved to be 'wrong' and 'marriage made it worse'. As a temporary expatriate he comments upon his English experience.

Never completely at home either in India or in England, Parthasarathy shuttles between the two worlds, searching in vain for a sense of belonging. He translates from his native Tamil but translation is a poor substitute for creation. Disgusted with "whoring after English Gods", he puts an end to writing in English. He starts writing in Tamil instead only to become dissatisfied with it. He returns to English to feel even more unhappy than ever before. The image of "the loss of poetic speech"

and return to Tamil Nadu is in effect the turning of vision towards the absolute and hence the “exchange of his world for a table and chair”(68-69).

The sense of trying to “settle” is crystallised in the final section. The poverty of Tamil literature has failed to come to grips with bare realities and living experiences of human life. The poet is being struck with an aphrasic fit of poetic sterility. At best he can-

Now he teaches. Reviles verse  
written by others. Is invited to conferences  
and attends them.... (lines 77-79)

It is not creative but a derived, vicarious creativity whose resultant disgust and diffidence is uttered in the poet’s commentary upon - “What’s it like to be a poet?” and the reply - “The son of a bitch/fattens himself on the flesh of dead poets” (86-88).

The end expresses a meek reconciliation. Having learnt in exile that “roots are deep”, he returns home. The prose of everyday life invades again and there are lacerations and resigned acceptances. The sequence concludes -

Hereafter, I should be content,  
I think, to go through life  
with the small change of uncertainties. (lines 118-120)

In such a state, devoid of quality, it is expected that -

.....The balloon  
of poetry has grown red in the face  
with repeated blowing. For scriptures  
I, therefore, recommend  
the humble newspaper .... (lines 108-112)

Newspaper and marriage are used as modes for communication at micro and macro levels respectively. Parthasarathy seems to say that language itself is an inadequate mode to structure his dravidic psyche and experience. The ironic implication suggests the futility of verbalization in the face of live experience. Experiential flux is articulated through the stanzaic form of the triplet, with three variable and unrhymed lines. Each section flows into the next and helps the poem to move forward to its destined end. The sense of private predicament (the loss of identity as a result of cultural alienation) is reinforced by newspaper as its linguistic fulcrum which serves as a vocal mode.

The images are realistic and vivid. The imagery is integral to the ideas being expressed.



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## 9.5.2 GLOSSARY AND ANNOTATIONS

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<i>My tongue in English chains</i>	:	his ability to express his true feelings in an alien language
<i>Dravidic tether</i>	:	chain/ties with Dravidian (Tamil) culture and native language
<i>unassuaged</i>	:	dissatisfied
<i>Wrenched</i>	:	injured/feeling of sudden pain and distress caused by one's own or another's departure
<i>sleep</i>	:	dormant state
<i>Kural</i>	:	the name of an ancient Tamil classic by Valluvar (3rd, 4th century A.D.)
<i>hooked on celluloid</i>	:	being used mainly for cheap commercial purposes such as cinema and television
<i>unlettered</i>	:	no correspondence between the poet and his cousins, thus they meet as strangers
<i>Choultry</i>	:	a Hindoo caravansary, an inn with a central court
<i>squirrelled up and down</i>	:	climbed up and down the tamarind trees briskly like a squirrel
<i>glasshouse</i>	:	a house made of glass
<i>crashed</i>	:	suffered a blow from the stone (here attack) of death
<i>her ribs</i>	:	the river banks
<i>her hair</i>	:	river personified as a woman
<i>arse</i>	:	bottom or buttocks
<i>paps</i>	:	archaic word for woman's breast
<i>egrets</i>	:	heron with mainly white plumage
<i>pariah dog</i>	:	outcaste (Tamil) hereditary drummers in southern India were of low caste and were not allowed to join religious procession/ here the poet feels desolate and alien.
<i>reviles</i>	:	hates
<i>read his greek poets</i>	:	an allusion on to the ten year war of Troy which was the result of a married woman's (Helen) elopement with the lover (Paris, a Trojan prince)
<i>lines his pockets</i>	:	enriching himself with ideas of others

<i>hellespont</i>	:	the ancient name for the Dardanelles, the entrance to the Bosphorus
<i>Java sea</i>	:	the sea around the island of Java, near Indonesia
<i>the balloon of poetry</i>	:	effort to write poetry is compared to an inflated balloon which has no substance except air
<i>small change</i>	:	coins of small denominations/ Here uncertainties are trivial in nature

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## 9.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. Why is the language issue important to Indian poets ?
2. How is language related to culture ?
3. How does language influence expression ?
4. Why does Kamala Das resent being fitted into a role ?
5. What do names like Amy or Madhvakutty signify ?
6. Why does Parthasarathy find it difficult to recognise his cousins ?
7. What does exile mean in the context of Parthasarathy's poem ?
8. Why is Parthasarathy not happy ?
9. Reason out the relationship between colonialism, loss of language and a sense of alienation.
10. How and why does Parthasarathy identify with his father ?

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## 9.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we read two poems, “An Introduction” by Kamala Das and “Exile from Homecoming” by R. Parthasarathy respectively. Kamala Das’ poem shows how Indo-Anglian poetry in spite of its distortions, “its queerness” is charged with its own kind of honesty. It is a direct statement on the conditioning of sensibility through language. “Exile from Homecoming” deals with Parthasarathy’s relationship with his native land, his sense of loss and alienation and also the lack of personal relations and an ever widening gap depicted through the recurrent image of exile. For both the poets self revelation becomes culturally representative. As an expatriate writer, Parthasarathy succeeds in his attempt to come to terms with bi-culturalism and bi-lingualism by invoking his cultural past and making it come alive through English. The recreation of past as well as finding a voice for her own psyche or sensibility in a language that is alien, is a great challenge which Kamala Das accepts gracefully.

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**9.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

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1. Comment upon postcolonialism as a historical phase in the context of Indian poetry in English.
2. How does colonial culture gains extra significance for India writers who use English as a medium for expression?
3. Comment on the diction and structure of the two poems.
4. Write a brief note on the element of nostalgia in the poems “An Introduction” and “Exile from Homecoming”.
5. Comment on the use of imagery and metaphors in Parthasarathy’s poem “Exile from Homecoming”
6. Explain the title of Parthasarathy’s poem.
7. Kamala Das’s poetry expresses a sense of betrayal and disillusionment Comment.

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**9.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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1. K. Radha, *Kamala Das, Kerala Writers in English Series* Madras: Macmillan, 1986.
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3. Parthasarathy, R. Ed., *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976.
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## **UNIT 10 : LANGUAGE : EXPLORATION OF P.K. PAGE'S AND DEREK WALCOTT'S POEMS**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 10.0 Objectives**
- 10.1 Introduction**
  - 10.1.1 Caribbean and Canadian Literature**
- 10.2 P.K. Page**
- 10.3 'First Neighbours' : Summary and Interpretation**
- 10.4 Derek Walcott**
- 10.5 'A Far Cry from Africa': Summary and Interpretation**
- 10.6 Self Assessment Questions**
- 10.7 Let us Sum up.**
- 10.8 Unit End Questions**
- 10.9 Suggested Readings**

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### **10.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The objective of this unit are :

- (i) to understand the making of Commonwealth;
- (ii) to enable you to understand the experience of settler colonies and of poets located in lands other than India;
- (iii) to understand the relationship between self-image, history and environment;
- (iv) to be able to relate to the division in the idea of self experienced because of racial difference;
- (v) to appreciate the imagery, poetic diction and approach of these poets;
- (vi) and also to see the connection between self, history and nation, important issues for postcolonial writing and theory.

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### **10.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The Commonwealth of Nations, usually known as the Commonwealth, is a voluntary association of 53 independent sovereign states, most of which are former British colonies, or dependencies of these colonies. No single government in the Commonwealth, British or otherwise, exercises power over the others, as in a political union. Rather, the relationship is one of an international organization through which countries with diverse social, political, and economic backgrounds are regarded as equal in status, and co-operate within a framework of common values and goals, as outlined in the Singapore Declaration. These include the promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance, the rule of law, individual liberty, egalitarianism, free trade, multilateralism, and world peace. The symbol of this

free association is Queen Elizabeth II, known for this purpose as Head of the Commonwealth. This position, however, does not imbue her with any political or executive power over any Commonwealth member states; the position is purely symbolic, and it is the Commonwealth Secretary-General who is the Chief executive of the organization.

Although performing a vastly different function, the Commonwealth is the successor of the British Empire. After World War II, the Empire was gradually dismantled, partly owing to the rise of independence movements in the then-subject territories and partly owing to the British Government's straitened circumstances resulting from the cost of the war. The word "British" was dropped in 1949 from the title of the Commonwealth to reflect the changing position.

The Commonwealth is also useful as an international organization that represents significant cultural and historical links between wealthy first-world countries and poorer nations with diverse social and religious backgrounds. The common inheritance of the English language and literature, the common law, and British systems of administration all underpin the club-like atmosphere of the Commonwealth. The shared history of British rule has also produced a substantial body of writing in many languages i.e. Commonwealth literature.

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### **10.1.1 CARIBBEAN AND CANADIAN LITERATURE**

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Postcolonial cultural and literary theories trace the origins of forms of cultural expression in postcolonial societies, elucidating the interconnectedness of the colonized and colonizer as manifested in linguistic, semiotic and aesthetic traditions. With African, British, Dutch, French Indian, and Spanish influences, the Caribbean islands were immeasurably affected by colonization, which began with the discovery of the Western Hemisphere and the advent of the Transatlantic Slave Trade by Western European nations in the 1500s and 1600s. In this postcolonial era, the culture of Caribbean societies still bear historical, political, linguistic, and cultural influences of colonization, and postcolonial theories are being utilized to develop critical frameworks by which to understand the impact of these influences on contemporary forms of cultural expression which have developed in the Caribbean. Specifically, the body of literature produced by Caribbean writers in this postcolonial era is one area of research which has come to the forefront of contemporary postcolonial studies, and in particular, postcolonial literary theory. Caribbean authors of the postcolonial era have written important works which reflect the experience of slavery, cultural oppression, colonization, and the complex relationships which developed between the colonized and the colonizer.

Canada, which is also a part of the commonwealth achieved self-government in 1867 after merely a century of imperial rule by Britain Canada originates from North British Colonies which remained loyal during the American War of

Independence and were reconstituted as British North America afterwards. The legislation that changed British North America into Canada was the British North America Act of 1867. This legislation change not only brought self-government; it created a new nation consisting of a (con) federation of three provinces—Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia.

Although Canadian Writing began as an imitative colonial literature, it has steadily developed its own national characteristics. Because of the huge immigrations, first of New England Puritans from 1760 on and later of American Loyalists during the Revolution, Canadian literature followed U.S. Models almost until the confederation in 1867.

English Canada was settled by displaced persons who brought their language and their preconceptions with them. Genuinely Canadian poetry was late in developing. In the 18th century Puritan hymnists, such as Henry Alline, and refugee Tory satirists, such as Jonathan Odell, took their models from American colonial or English neoclassical literature. Before the confederation of 1867 the only poets of note were Charles Sangster, the first to make use of native material. The poetry they wrote does not differ formally from that of the times in which they wrote. Two notes appear prominently in Canadian poetic tradition: the elegiac, a mourning of homes left and things lost ; and the satiric, a bitter account of dismal surroundings, both social and geographical.

English Canada was settled later than either French Canada or New England. Canada became a nation in 1867, and several poets born in the 1860s later became known as the Confederation poets. Although they were impelled partly by the desire for self definition and partly by national pride that political event gave rise to, their best poetry is rarely political. Rather their earlier poetry is chiefly lyrical focused on nature. Poets like F.R. Scott, A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, P.K. Page, Margaret Atwood etc. share the modern cosmopolitan tradition of the United States and Western Europe.

In the forties and fifties there was an astonishing outburst of poetic activity in Canada which unfortunately was not matched by a corresponding increase in readership. Poets were known to each other and to a small audience through magazines such as *Preview*, *First Statement* etc. P.K. Page's poems also first appeared in periodicals in the late 1930s. Poetry is the fusion of the modern world with the archetypal patterns of myth and psychology rather than with Christianity or patriotism that gives a characteristic cosmopolitan flavour to much of the poetry of the fifties in Canada.

In the relative absence of novels and theatre, poetry became a predominant literary form. The notion of cultural nationalism was understood as determination on the part of writers to stay in their own country instead of moving to New York or London, and to write about what they knew and saw around them. But English

Canada at that time felt so overshadowed by English and the states that these seemed to be something revolutionary in this stance. The movement generated much self-examination. This resulted in a remarkable amount of linguistic experiment in the sixties. Canada, like Australia, is a settler colony. The immigrants from European countries permanently settled there, pushing the native population to the periphery. At first they governed on behalf of the British authorities, later they became independent.

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## 10.2 P.K. PAGE

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Patricia Kathleen Page was born in Swanage in Dorset, England on November 23, 1916. She and her family moved to Red Deer, Alberta in 1919, so that her father could advance his career in the Canadian military. She lived in various places across Canada including Calgary, Alberta and Saint John, New Brunswick before settling in Montreal, Quebec, in 1941. While working as a filing clerk and historical researcher there, she helped found and worked on the magazine *Preview* (1942-45) with poets Patrick Anderson, A.M. Klein, F.R. Scott., A.J.M. Smith and John Sutherland.

She is the author of over two dozen books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction including books for children. Her poems first appeared in periodicals in the late 1930s and later in Ronald Hambleton's anthology *Unit of Five* (1944). Her first book was a romantic novel, *The Sun and the Moon* (1944), which she published under the pseudonym Judith Cape; she published the first solo book of poetry, *As Ten, as Twenty* (1946) under her real name. During her years abroad, Page wrote little poetry and instead pursued her interests in drawing and painting. Page's work in the visual arts and her exposure to foreign climates and cultures intensified attention to detail and enriched her verse. Page renewed her literary career on returning to Canada and published four poetry collections: *Cry Ararat! Poems New and Selected* (1967), *Poems : Selected and New* (1974) *Evening Dance of the Grey Files* (1981), and *The Glass Air : Selected Poems* (1985). In addition to her Poetry, Page has collected her prose works in *The Sun and the Moon, and Other Fictions* (1973) and *A Brazilian Journal* (1987), which relates her experiences in South America.

Whereas Page's earlier works were inward-looking, imaginary biographies, her later poems are often set abroad and suggest a path of liberation for the isolated, alienated individual who has become imprisoned in a world of imagination. From 1946 to 1950 she worked as a scriptwriter at the National Film Board of Canada in Ottawa. In 1950 she married editor William Arthur Irwin, and between 1953 and 1964 she travelled with him to his postings as Canadian High Commissioner to Australia (1953-1956) and Mexico and Guatemala (1960-1964). She now makes her home in Victoria, British Columbia. Page is also an accomplished visual artist, having studied art in Brazil and at the Art Students' League and Partt Graphics

in New York (among other places) in 1959 and 1960. Her visual art (as P.K. Irwin) is exhibited in several permanent collections in Canada, including the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario.

Throughout her long career Page has maintained a style of poetry in keeping with the modernist influences developed during her association with the Montreal group of poets in the 1940s. Among these influences are T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Elizabeth Bishop, Wallace Stevens, and D.H. Lawrence, as well as the symbolist and metaphysical poets (such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Gerard Manley Hopkins and George Herbert) that the modernists admired. As the same time she has resisted the creative stultification that such longevity may imply.

Page's early writings rely heavily on suggestive imagery and the detailed depiction of concrete situations to express social concerns and transcendental themes. Her poetry focuses on issues of hidden realities, self experience and alienation.

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### 10.3 FIRST NEIGHBOURS

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The poem begins on a negative note as Page talks about her first neighbours in a foreign land. The very first line expresses her search for belonging. She writes that her neighbours have always been grudging and complaining to her for reasons enough that she is unable to understand and talk in the same dialect as theirs. This shows her sense of alienation from dialect as well as culture. Though she now lives with them, breathes their air, occupies their land, still the sense of isolation remains. She further expresses her inability to grasp the language by calling her ears as "differently shaped." Her neighbours' anger is further expressed through their use of unpleasant and harsh words to her, a language that she does not understand :

Speaking a twisted dialect to my differently  
shaped ears. (lines 5-6)

Despite her efforts to adapt herself socially as well as culturally, she was constantly mocked at and ridiculed. Her efforts for adaptation were made difficult because of their non-acceptance and they always treated her like an alien. Even the native Indians of a lower social strata passed rude and mocking remarks at her. They asked her to go back to the place where she has come from. To these reactions also, Page remained silent and made her stay a way for understanding experience. This also happened because she now realized the fact that she cannot return back to England as :

knew that England  
was now unreachable, had sunk down into the sea. (lines 11-12)

It becomes more difficult for her to accommodate as she is young and hence lacks the skill to cope with a new environment. She further tries hard to express herself



through unskilled remarks and ‘spastic gestures’ which too in turn, prove futile. These are, in fact, images which indicate non-communication between her and the native whabirtants as languages, cultures and responses differ.

A parallel discourse that runs through the poem within brackets reflects her cultural alienation. It becomes an expression of Page’s social concern and the pain of displacement. As an isolated individual, she searches for connectivity by making herself a part of their culture and trying to understand their food habits. She questions the Indian about ‘the squat thing on a stick’ confusing it for a toad, but the reply comes annoyingly as it was “deer liver.”

Finally she gives up, not by leaving but by growing thick skinned. Her search for belonging culminates through negotiation and endurance. Each “drizzle’ or utterance brings her strange, unknown meanings but gradually her surprise changes into tolerance. She no longer feels shocked but tolerates each remark hurled at her.

Ironically her sense of endurance deceives her because after all she is a human being. Her way of reacting and adjusting proves inaccurate. She is still not quite at home in the new surroundings. She admits that -

The forest can still trick me. (line 29)

The image described at the end of the poem reveals Page’s love for nature. Being painter, one day, she starts drawing a bird. The image of the bird appears in the poem at a crucial time as a symbol of resolution and transformation. Her dilemma and conflict becomes obvious and it is difficult to decide between certainties and uncertainties. The image of a malignant face flickering over her shoulder is reflective of her fear and fright. Language is capable of containing many meanings and thus can become a medium to reach out and establish connections. But for her the alienation from resolving will always remain because she is at a loss of language. She cannot decide firmly whether to be ‘tentative’ or to ‘startle’ although clumsiness and undecidability are part and parcel of life and hence ‘inevitable’, yet she has entered into a foreign land where prediction and decision depend upon the knowledge of language. This alienation from culture and language makes her situation even worse.

In this area where my damaged  
knowing of the language means  
prediction is for ever impossible. (line 37-39)

### **Glossary and Annotations**

- grudging* : complaining, doing something or giving something unwillingly,  
*twisted* : unpleasant, round about, not direct  
*differently shaped ears* : inability to understand language, used to different sounds

<i>jeered</i>	:	to pass rude/mocking remarks
<i>inept</i>	:	lacking skill
<i>chapped</i>	:	cracked
<i>tarpaulin</i>	:	heavy duty waterproof cloth/here being thick skinned
<i>birds</i>	:	for Page 'birds' convey the image of an angel as they are different from men, with their hollow bones and are also different in temperature and heart beats / Here a symbol of transformation as she realizes the fact that resolution is impossible. Birds also have wings and are symbols of imagination, vlight, peace and lightness,
<i>malignant</i>	:	harmful, vicious
<i>tentative</i>	:	uncertain
<i>damaged knowing</i>	:	alienation or lack of understanding.

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#### 10.4 DEREK WALCOTT

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Derek Walcott was born on January 23, 1930 in the Eastern Caribbean island of St. Lucia, a territory at that time under the dominance of Britain. While the official language of St. Lucia was English, Walcott grew up also speaking French - English. Both his grandfathers were white and both grandmothers were black from the beginning, Walcott was, in terms of St. Lucia, a bit of an outsider. In a poor, Catholic country, his parents were middle class and Protestant. His mother was a teacher at a Methodist grammar school, and worked in a local theatre, and his father was a civil servant by vocation and a fine artist and poet by avocation. Walcott's father died when Derek was still a young child.

His work, which developed independently of the schools of magic realism emerging in both South America and Europe at around the time of his birth, is intensely related to the symbolism of myth and its relationship to culture. He is best known for his epic poem *Omeros*, a reworking of Homeric story and tradition into a journey around the Caribbean and beyond to the American West and London.

Walcott founded the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in 1959, which has produced his plays (and others) since that time, and remains active with its Board of Directors. He also founded Boston Playwrights' Theatre at Boston University in 1981 with a hope of creating a home for a new plays in Boston, Massachusetts. Walcott continues to teach poetry and drama in the Creative Writing Department at Boston University and gives reading and lectures throughout the world. He divides his time between his home in the Caribbean and New York City.

Walcott has published more than twenty plays. His famous poetry collections are *25 Poems* (1948), *Poems* (1951), *The Castaway and other Poems* (1965), *Sea Grapes* (1976), *The Star Apple Kingdom* (1979) etc.

Walcott shifts his poetic language between formal English and patois to highlight the linguistic dexterity of the Caribbean people. While recognizing the profound psychological and material wrongs of the colonial project, Walcott simultaneously celebrates the hybridization of Antillean cultures. His epic poem *Omeros* exposes the complex cultural strains that converge in his native St. Lucia, celebrating at once the European, Amerindian, and African heritage shared by the islanders. Walcott won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992.

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## 10.5 A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA : SUMMARY

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Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa", published in 1962, is a painful and thought provoking depiction of ethnic conflict and divided loyalties. The poem begins with a description of the native Kikuyu tribe that later formed revolutionary group called the Mau Mau in what is now the Republic of Kenya. Although Walcott never mentions the Mau Mau by name, it can be inferred because of Walcott's history and his expressed intentions.

The first stanza compares Africa to an animal whose 'pelt' has been ruffled. It begins with the description of wind blowing on the open uncultivated grassland of Southern Africa. The nation is compared to a lion with a "tawny pelt" Tawny mean yellowish brown colour that is a common colour in African landscape. The ruffling of the pelt is the uprising of the Kikuyu people. The idyllic portrayal of the African plain quickly shifts into an image of Kikuyu as flies buzzing around the lion i.e. Africa. Once the battle is over, Africa does not seem to be a paradise but a landscape littered with corpses. The flies feed themselves on blood which is present in large amounts like that of streams. The worm or maggot that reigns in this setting of decaying human flesh cries and tell other worms :

Waste no compassion on these  
separate dead (line 6)

This actually implies that the victims got what they deserved. Walcott compares the brutal massacre to the massacre of the Jews. He infers that the British think the Africans are as dispensable as Hitler thought the Jews to be. Walcott further mentions the 'colonial policy' which refers to the Mau Mau uprising against British colonists in Kenya during the 1950s. Earlier the poet was blaming victims and now he blames those who forced the colonial system into Kenya and polarized the population. They cannot justify their actions, because their reasons will never matter to the 'white child' who has been murdered merely because of his colour.

Returning to the images of Africa's wildlife Walcott remembers how ibises and other beasts ruled this land long before African or European civilization existed. Walcott also mentions a centuries-old hunting custom of natives walking in a line through the long grass and beating it to flush out prey. Such killing for sustenance is set against the senseless and random death that the native African and the European settlers perpetrate upon each other.

In the third stanza, Walcott compares the warriors to animals. He says that violence in the animal kingdom is perfectly natural. The animals kill merely for food and survival but human beings extend this violent act and use force to control and prove their superiority. Man fights against other men only to seek divinity by inflicting pain.

The violence of beast on beast is read  
As natural law, but upright man  
Seeks his divinity with inflicting pain. (line 15-17)

This aspiration of man turns him delirious like beasts. In this fit of delirium, they dance to the beating of a drum which is an instrument made of an animal hide stretched over a cylinder. Despite the fact that the conflict is bloody, the Kikuyu continue to fight because they fear the British rule after the conflict more than they fear death. For Whites, historically peace has not been the result of a compromise with an opponent, but a situation arrived at because the opposition has been crushed and can resist no more.

..... that native dread  
of the white peace contracted by the dead (line 20-21)

In the fourth stanza, the poem turns to Walcott's personal inner conflict over the war. He targets the observers who judge the Mau Mau uprising from a distance. These observers somehow accept brutality as necessary and are even aware of the dire situation but they wipe their hands and refuse to involve. The poet condemns this attitude and compares this uprising with the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). The uprising is a colonial conflict where the gorillas negative reference to the Africans, reflecting the popular perception of them as savages, are fighting the superman, i.e. Europe. Walcott is of mixed heritage (both English and African) and the last stanza depicts his conflict as he is torn between his African and his English heritage. He cannot resolve the inner conflict between his hatred of colonialism and his love of England. He openly acknowledges that he is sympathetic to the African cause but at the same time, he still feels tied to England. He is sickened by the behavior of Mau Mau just as he has been disgusted by the British, and despite this, his dilemma is not reconciled. He questions if he should give up both of them. Finally, in the last line, he questions if he could, in good conscience turn from Africa and continue to live. He asks "How can I face such slaughter and be cool. He can neither abandon Africa nor Britain. (32)

### Comments

The Mau Mau uprising was an insurgency by Kenyan rebels against the British rule that lasted from 1952 to 1960. The core of the resistance was formed by members of the Kikuyu ethnic group, along with smaller numbers of Embu and Meru. The uprising failed militarily, though it may have hastened Kenyan

independence. It created a rift between the white colonial community in Kenya and the Home Office in London that set the stage for Kenyan independence in 1963. It is sometimes called the Mau Mau Rebellion or the Mau Mau Revolt, and, in official documents the Kenya emergency.

The ongoing in Kenya magnified an internal strife within the poet concerning his own mixed heritage. Walcott has both African and European roots, his grandmothers were both black, and grandfathers both white. In addition, at the time the poem was written, the poet's country of birth, the island of St. Lucia, was still a colony of Great Britain. While Walcott opposes colonialism and would therefore seem to be sympathetic to a revolution with an anticolonial cause, he has passionate reservations about Mau Mau; they are, or are reported to be, extremely violent to animals, whites, and those of the Kikuyu perceived as traitors to the Mau Mau cause.

As Walcott is divided in two, so too is the poem. The first two stanzas refer to the Kenyan conflict, while the second two address the war with in the poet as outsider/insider, between his roles as a blood insider but geographical outsider to the Mau Mau uprising. The Mau Mau uprising, which began in 1952, was put down - some say in 1953, 1956 or 1960, without a treaty - yet the British did leave Kenya in 1963. Just as the uprising was never cleanly resolved, Walcott, within the poem, never resolves his conflict about whose side to take.

The title of the poem emphasizes Walcott's cultural instability as it implies a type of alienation from Africa, despite its concentration on African themes. Walcott just opposes the Africans and the British, focusing on each group's transgressions. The following lines express his negative views on hybridism -

I who am poisoned with the blood of both  
where shall I turn, divided to the vein ? (line 26-27)

This pessimistic image illustrates a consequence of displacement - isolation. An individual's sense of identity arises from cultural influences which define his or her character. The poet's mixed heritage prevents him from identifying directly with any one culture and creates a feeling of isolation, primarily because of power conflicts.

Walcott portrays the cruel imperialistic exploits of the British without creating sympathy for the African tribesman. This objectivity allows Walcott to contemplate the faults of each culture without reverting to the bias created by attention to moral considerations. The Kikuyu resemble primitive savages who abuse the fertile resources of their native plains. The last lines of the poem reveal his dilemma. Walcott remains partial to the African terrain and way of life, while he prefers the English language and literary tradition Walcott's divided loyalties engender a sense of guilt as he wants to adopt the civilized culture of the British, but cannot excuse

their immoral treatment of the Africans.

The title of the poem suggests that Walcott is writing about an African subject and doing so from a distance. The poem is remarkable for its complexity of emotions and treats of the Mau Mau uprising in terms that mock the usual justifications for and criticisms of colonialism. Walcott seems to be stricken with confused and irreconcilably opposed feelings; identification with black Africa, disgust with the killing of both white and black innocents, distrust of motives, love of the English language, and dislike of those who remain emotionally uninvolved.

The poem contains four stanzas of mostly iambic tetrameter. Actually the poem starts off in iambic pentameter, the prevalent form of poetry written in English, but it soon veers off course metrically - a change that reflects the changing scene and perspective in the poem - with lines of varying length and number of stresses. A point of consistency is Walcott's use of masculine ending (lines ending with accented syllables) and masculine rhymes (one syllable rhymes). Rhyme is as irregular as meter.

### **Glossary and Annotations**

<i>ruffling</i>	:	the ruffling (disturbance) of the pelt is the uprising of the Kikuyu people
<i>tawny</i>	:	yellowish brown colour
<i>pelt</i>	:	skin of an animal with the fur still on
<i>Kikuyu</i>	:	an ethnic group/tribe in Kenya. [The opening images of the poem are drawn from accounts of the Mau Mau uprising, an extended and bloody battle during the 1950 between European settlers and the native Kikuyu tribe in what is now the republic of Kenya.]
<i>veldt</i>	:	open uncultivated grassland of Southern Africa.
<i>the worm</i>	:	the authoritative British figure as a worm, creature which exists below the fly on the evolutionary ladder.
<i>colonial policy</i>	:	in the early 20th century, the first white settlers arrived in the region, forcing the Kikuyu people off their tribal lands. Europeans took control of the farmland and the government, relegating the Kikuyu to a subservient position.
<i>expendable as Jews:</i>		the reference is to the attitude of Nazis against Jews, deemed worthless or expendable
<i>savages</i>	:	derives from French word <i>sauvage</i> meaning wild and

		the usage is now wholly derogatory in English. (Here British colonialist's racists point of view)
<i>ibises</i>	:	long-billed wading birds
<i>dirty cause</i>	:	war as dirty because it is unnecessary, for a worthless reason/cause
<i>the gorilla wrestles with the superman</i>	:	the Africans associated with a primitive natural strength, and the British, portrayed as an artificially enhanced power. (Hence the futile comparison of two cultures.)
<i>as with Spain</i>	:	the reference is to the Spanish Civil war. Leaders of France and Great Britain wanted to avoid another war that would engulf all Europe, so they introduced a non-intervention pact that was signed by 27 nations. The insurgents / Nationalists under the leadership of General Franco were aided by and received military aid from Germany and Italy. The loyalists or Republicans had no such backing; they fought valiantly but were outmanned and were eventually defeated in March 1939.

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### 10.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTION

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- 1 What are the reason for the conflicting loyalties in "A Far Cry from Africa."
- 2 Is there a similarity between Walcott's and Page's inner conflict?
- 3 How does Page try to adopt and accommodate herself in the new environment.
- 4 Identify the reason for Page's conflict ?
- 5 What do you understand by a 'settler community' ?
- 6 How do the surrounding in "First Neighbour", affect the poet ?

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### 10.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we studied two poems, "A Far Cry from Africa" and "First Neighbours". The two poems written by Derek Walcott and P.K. Page gain significance in the context in their thematic similarity and difference in national identity. Both Caribbean and Canadian Literature belong to the Commonwealth writing. And thus the basic social and identity concern remains the same. Both the poets express not only their sense of alienation but also their sense of belonging. Both of them are divided in their loyalties and suffer from a dilemma which they wish to resolve on humanitarian grounds. There are parallels in their thoughts and experience.

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### 10.8 Unit End Questions

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- 1 Compare and contrast the sense of alienation of Walcott and P.K. Page.

- 2 Write a note on the imagery of "A Far Cry From Africa".
- 3 Discuss how migration and shared history becomes a matter of concern for Walcott.
- 4 Comment on the sense of displacement and belonging in P.K. Page's poem "First Neighbours."
- 5 Comment on the objectivity of Walcott's attitude in "A Far Cary From Africa".
- 6 Write a note on the imagery of "First Neighbours".
- 7 What do you know about the Man Mau Rebellian ?

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## **10.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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1. Brown, Stewart, ed., *The Art of Derek Walcott*, Mid Glamorgan, Wales : Seren Books, 1991.
2. Klinck, C.F. ed., *A Literary History of Canada*, McGill University Press, 1965
3. Hammer, Robert D. *Derek Walcott*, New York : Twayne, 1993.
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5. Terada, Rei. *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, Boston : Northeastern University Press, 1992
6. Toye, W. ed., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, 1983.



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## **UNIT 11 : TERRITORY AND HOMELAND : A.D. HOPE AND JUDITH WRIGHT - I**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 11.0 Objectives**
- 11.1 Introduction**
- 11.2 Land/Territory and History of Australia**
- 11.3 Introduction to the Poet - A.D. Hope**
- 11.4 Paraphrase and Appreciation : "Australia"**
- 11.5 Introduction to the Poet - Judith Wright**
- 11.6 Paraphrase and Appreciation : "Nigger's Leap, New England"**
- 11.7 Self Assessment Questions**
- 11.8 Let Us Sum Up**
- 11.9 Unit End Questions**
- 11.10 Suggested Readings**

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### **11.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The objective of this unit is to help you study the two poems written by two Australian poets and place them in the postcolonial context. After reading this unit you will be able to :

- (a) comprehend the language of the poems;
- (b) evaluate and appreciate the two poems;
- (c) familiarise yourself with the concept of territory and homeland with regard to these poems;
- (d) locate the relationship with the homeland in the postcolonial context.

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### **11.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit, we will discuss A.D. Hope's poem "Australia" and Judith Wright's poem, "Nigger's Leap New England". Both the poets are concerned with the way in which territory and landscape are viewed, and what is the importance of one's country, one's homeland and the manner in which it holds a person's imagination. The word territory originates from the word 'terra' meaning land, a defined area including land and waters considered to be a possession of a person, organization or state.

A defined territory constitutes a nation. Nations are rooted in particular territories. James Anderson (1988 : 24) was of the view that "the nation's unique history is embodied in the nation's unique piece of territory – its homeland, the primeval land of its ancestors ... the same land which saw its greatest moments, perhaps its mythical origins."

Territory also signifies a homeland and a sense of belonging. The human population occupying a territory share common myths and memories, culture and common

rights. Territory helps the people of a nation to commune with its past and to emphasize the strong bond between it and the land. People who go to other places always suffer from nostalgia and a desire for their homeland, and its familiar plants and fragrances.

Territories define national boundaries and are often the cause of disputes between nations. Imperial powers by invading other countries and establishing their authority over them have virtually deprived the native people of their claim on their own land. The colonial experience subjects one to a sense of severance from one's culture and past. When the settler communities embarked upon the shores of a new country, they brought along with them their own histories and their own cultures but generations of life here form the upper layer of conventions.

As you are aware, the early migrations developed into imperial governments by mid and late nineteenth century. There were two broad categories of colonial empires. The older ones were that of the Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese. The more recent ones were the British and the French empires. Large number of Europeans migrated to Australia and settled on that land considering it as uninhabited although there was adequate evidence of previous aboriginal and indigenous people inhabiting the land. Therefore, place or land acquires importance in the history of colonialism. Thus large populations of colonized people are forced to migrate or become slaves. People are, thus, alienated from their own land and pushed into conclaves.

During the colonial period, convicts and slaves were sent to far off places like Australia. Convicts were taken out of Britain and Ireland and transported to these nations. The use of slaves as a form of cheap labour has been integral to the colonizers as owners who sought to gain maximum profits by using the cheapest form of labour. The British changed the course of history by providing vast human resources, in the form of convicts and slaves, to expand their empire. Still later they turned to India for indentured labour.

Colonisers used land as a productive resource whereas indigenous people have always seen land as part of something greater called territory. For them, territory included not only the productive function of land but also included the concepts of homeland, culture, religion, ancestors, the natural environment and other resources like water, forests, minerals etc. Though a piece of land can be handed down from a parent to a child yet territory is immovable. Territory has political connotations. One's own territory gives rise to nationalist thought. Even in America and Canada, the indigenous inhabitants were pushed to the margins, people we usually refer to as Americans (natives).

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## **11.2 LAND/TERRITORY AND HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA**

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Before we read the poems of A.D. Hope and Judith Wright let us have a look at the history, the land and the culture of Australia. Land or territory, in a way,

determines the history of the place.

Australia, as you all know, is the youngest continent. It is the world's smallest continent and the topography of Australia is extremely diverse comprising of snow-capped mountains to large deserts, tropical and temperate forests. The terrain of Australia is heavily eroded, low plateau with deserts and a fertile plain in the south-east. Nearly half of the land mass is covered with sand dunes.

The first inhabitants of Australia were the Aborigines. Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish ships located Australia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The written history of Australia began when Dutch explorers first saw the country. Captain Arthur Philip established a settlement at Sydney on 26 January 1788. This date later became Australia's national day. In 1829 Britain formally claimed the western part of Australia.

Initially there was a harmonious relationship between the explorers and the aboriginal inhabitants based on understanding the terms of trading for food, water, axes, cloth and artefacts. This relationship was fanned by Governor Philip himself. Gradually these relations became hostile as aborigines realized that the colonizers were actually plundering their land and resources upon which their life depended. The presence of the colonizers brought havoc to the lives of the aborigines.

What followed was a wave of massacres and resistance against the European settlement. In 1838, twenty-eight indigenous people were killed at the Myall Creek massacre. In 1884 there was another massacre of over two hundred people. As late as 1928 there was another massacre at Coniston. Indigenous Australians did not consider 26 January as a day of celebration. They rather considered it as the day of mourning and protest.

Now that we have learnt something about the land and history of Australia, let us read the poem "Australia" by A.D. Hope.

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### **11.3 INTRODUCTION TO A.D. HOPE'S "AUSTRALIA"**

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#### **ABOUT THE POET**

A.D. Hope (July 21, 1907 – July 13, 2000) was not only an Australian poet but also an essayist, critic, teacher and academic. Born in Cooma, New South Wales and educated partly at home and in Tasmania, Hope attended Fort Street Boys School, Sydney University and later the University of Oxford on a scholarship.

Hope returned to Australia in 1931 and trained as a teacher. From 1945 to 1950 he worked as a lecturer at the Melbourne University. He joined the Canberra University College in 1951. Hope's first collection of poems was *The Wandering Islands* (1955). From the age of ten, A.D. Hope studied Latin from his father. This interest of his continued throughout his life. In his 87th year he wrote to Ann McCulloch saying that he was glad that he awakened to Latin before he encountered the Romance languages.

Hope saw himself primarily as a poet. In an interview with McCulloch in 1987, Hope said, "Poetry is not a thing you decide to do, or adopt a system or theory and proceed according to plan. It grows out of you and what you have in you". If we look at Hope's poetry, we will find two features which are very significant. They are, firstly, a fierce opposition to free verse and secondly, a re-invention of ancient stories included in myth.

Catherine Cole, wrote a memoir of Hope and it was reviewed by Kevin Hart, a critic. Hart, on Hope's death in 2000 wrote that Australia had lost its greatest living poet

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#### **11.4 PARAPHRASE AND APPRECIATION : "AUSTRALIA"**

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Hope gives a very ironic picture of the country, Australia in his poem titled "Australia". In the first stanza Hope denigrates the country saying it is a dull and lonely country. The trees are not green but of a grey colour and the hills wear a dark look. Everything in the country is destroyed, worn away and desolate. It is unusual for an Australian poet like Hope to speak of his country of origin in such a scathing way.

Hope uses the powerful imagery of a destroyed sphinx when he speaks of Australia. The name Sphinx is derived from the Greek word 'sphingo' meaning 'to strangle, to bind tight'. The creature had a habit of strangling its victims. So Hope does not give a benevolent image of Australia rather for him Australia is a worn out land.

Hope is even more vehement in his criticism of Australia in the second stanza. He says that though people call Australia a young country, he considers it a falsehood. He calls her the 'emptiest' of the lands. A country of one's origin is ordinarily termed as one's mother, one's motherland or one's fatherland. But Hope dared to define Australia in a negative way. He describes the country as a woman, who is past change 'A woman beyond her change' could mean a woman who has gone through menopause, who is unable to give birth to children. 'The womb is dry' indicates the poet's view that though Australia is able to sustain life, it is unable to bear life. For Hope, Australia is an empty, desolate and barren land.

Every country has an individual culture of its own. History, architecture, religion, songs and dance, rituals make up the culture of a country. But Hope is of the view that Australia is a depleted nation 'without songs, architecture history'. It does not have an identity of its own because it lacks songs, history and architecture. Rivers are a symbol of life, of sustenance and growth of a country. Hope is of the view that the rivers of Australia are not life giving rather they cause havoc and devastation. These rivers do not bring enlightenment rather they produce 'monotonous' people — people who are dull and boring and who are contented only in surviving. They do not take pride in their life. Hope is extremely scathing in his remarks about the Australian people saying that they are dim-witted.

The White races commodified the land. Each state capital grew as a port for the import and export of goods. In each state the settlement pattern was of a dominant coastal capital city with small towns scattered nearby. Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth are the 'five cities' Hope alludes to them in this poem. These cities continue to dominate the commercial and political life of their respective states. These cities are criticized by Hope. By calling Australia a 'vast robber-state' Hope is of the view that the state gives itself the permission to steal and plunder. Tyranny is prevalent everywhere.

Hope's criticism of Australia continues further in the fifth stanza. He says Australian cities are like 'five teeming sores'. Each city instead of adding glory to the nation, is more of a burden to the nation. The cities have been inhabited by 'second-hand Europeans' meaning that they are not the original inhabitants of the land. The shores of Australia are termed 'alien' because it is not a country of their origin. When Australia was discovered it was inhabited by the aborigines. The Europeans settled in Australia after depriving the indigenous aborigines of their land, their culture, their resources.

Yet at the end of the poem comes a surprise. After all the bitterness in the previous stanzas Hope redeems Australia in the final two stanzas. Despite all its imperfections and flaws, Hope would still like to return home 'gladly', and hope that prophets still come to the land of deserts and assuage the pain and suffering of people. Hope ends the poem on a positive note that although Australia is a dry and arid land yet it boasts of springs in that wasteland.

Throughout the five stanzas Australia is presented as a sequence of absences — she is drab and desolate, a dried womb, without songs, architecture and history yet towards the end of the poem Hope believes that it is not Australia that is lacking in culture. On the contrary it is Europe which is spiritually exhausted. The desert, the barren land is the site of the prophets. Australia which was the 'periphery' has become the central point of renewal, of rebirth whereas the centre, that is, Europe, is dismissed in the last line of the poem as being 'over there'. Thus the desert becomes a metaphor of the soul. Europe is the country where civilization is reduced to a 'chatter' of so-called 'civilised apes'.

Hope makes use of similes, metaphors and alliteration in the poem. The imagery he has used in describing Australia is stark. By using vivid imagery Hope at once paints a desolate picture of Australia.

The similes used by Hope in the poem are :

'And her five cities, like five teeming sores  
Each drains her',

and further, he uses metaphors in the following lines :

'From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find  
The Arabian desert of the human mind',

Hope makes use of alliteration in 'chatter of cultured apes

which is called civilization over there'.

When the poem "Australia" was published Hope was accused by critics and others for not really being an Australian poet because he had nothing but criticism for Australia. Hope, on the other hand, was of the opinion that no matter whatever was the theme of his poems he was always influenced by the phenomenal world around him for their nuances and their music. Hope's poem "Australia" was published in 1938 when Australia was celebrating the sequecentennial (150 years) year of its foundation i.e. Jan. 26, 1788. He was denounced and criticized by his countrymen who were highly offended with him for writing such a poem which challenged their patriotic feelings and the values that Australia stood for.

Hope did try to redeem the poem in the last two stanzas but the people who lived in the "five cities like five teeming sores" never forgave him for his description of urban places. He was also criticized for having used misogynist imagery for describing Australia as a woman with a dry womb and a woman 'beyond her change of life'.

But all said and done, A.D. Hope remained a significant Australian poet. He felt sorry for having written "Australia" many years later saying that it was the voice of a young poet who found only disillusionment on his return to Australia. The country offered neither employment nor the means of accomplishing his vocation as a poet. He was also apologetic about the disregard he had shown to the indigenous culture in the poem — a culture that had existed for immemorial times before the European invasion. Though the poem is critical of Australia yet Hope saw in Australia his inspiration. The shift is abrupt and difficult to understand, unless we read the poem as a poet's dialogue with himself and the passage from criticism to appreciation as one of transition and growing self awareness. It is representative of a white migrant-settler's attitude as the transition from a constant comparison with the distant home of origin, in this case Britain, takes a long time to be transformed to a patriotic identification with the new mother land.

## **GLOSSARY**

<i>drab</i>	:	lacking colour and excitement
<i>desolate</i>	:	extremely sad and feeling alone
<i>Sphinx</i>	:	an ancient imaginary creature with a lion's body and a woman's head.
<i>demolished</i>	:	completely destroyed
<i>architecture</i>	:	the art of designing and making buildings
	:	belief which is not based on reason or scientific knowledge
<i>superstition</i>	:	staying the same and not changing, boring
<i>Cairns of Perth</i>	:	Sea-port of N.E. Australia

<i>teeming</i>	:	containing large numbers of people or animals
<i>parasite</i>	:	an animal or plant that lives on or in another animal of a different type and feeds from it.
<i>pullulate</i>	:	to breed rapidly or abundantly.
<i>alien</i>	:	coming from a different country, race, or group, foreign.
<i>prophets</i>	:	A persons believed to have special powers, and wisdom, to prophesize is to foretell.
<i>apes</i>	:	animal like a large monkey which has no tail and uses its arms to swing through trees.

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## 11.5 INTRODUCTION TO JUDITH WRIGHT’S “NIGGER’S LEAP, NEW ENGLAND”.

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### ABOUT THE POET

Judith Wright (1915 – 2000) was a prolific Australian poet, critic and a short story writer. Born near New South Wales, she was brought up on her family’s sheep station. At a young age of 14, she decided to be a poet. With her debut collection *The Moving Image* (1946) she soon gained a reputation as a new voice with a distinctly female perspective in literature. Poems like “Bullocky” and “Woman to Man” found a place in all standard anthologies of poetry.

Though Judith Wright belonged to the White Australian community she was always concerned with the Aborigines as members of a wronged race. She considered the aborigines as symbols of indigenous and environmental values. She also considered these people as subjects worthy of compassion. She loved Australia so much that she tried to make reparation for the inhumanities and injustices inflicted upon the indigenous people by the White settlers.

Judith Wright’s poems are documented by references to many Australian historical events. Many of her poems conveyed a strong sense of Australia’s cultural identity. In her poems is reflected her love of Australia and her people. Her poems like “The Wonga Vine” and “A Country Town” depict the landscape, environment, history, beliefs and social issues that Australia had during the period Judith Wright lived through.

Many of Wright’s critics claimed that she was more of an activist than a poet. This was because she was instrumental in the declaration of the Great Barrier Reef as Marine National Park. She was also successful and emerged victorious in ending mining on Fraser Islands in the mid seventies. The truth was she was both an artist and an activist. An “ethical” poet Judith Wright always called Australia and Australians to give up “pride, greed and ignorance” in favour of a spiritual vision.

The strange beauty of the Australian landscape was never far from her poems.

Land and story are always woven together in her poems. Her poems are an inspiration of the different regions in which she lived : the New England, New South Wales, the subtropical rain forests of Tambourine Mountain, Queensland etc. From mid 1950s there was an amalgamation of the love of the land and the deep unease over the fate of the indigenous inhabitants in her poems thereafter. She remarked that the rest of her life would be influenced by that connection.

Wright became an advocate for conservation of the environment, aborigine land rights and human rights. A poet should be concerned with national and social issues, she believed. It is a testimony of her grave concern that even at the age of 85, she attended a march for reconciliation with Aboriginal people.

Kevin Hart, a poet and critic, believed that Judith Wright's poems taught him how to see the country for what it was and its people for who they were. Commenting upon the greatness of Wright as a poet Hart further said that whether they (Australians) knew it or not, they all lived inside her poems.

Now let us read the poem "Nigger's Leap, New England" by Judith Wright.

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#### **11.6 PARAPHRASE AND APPRECIATION : "NIGGER'S LEAP, NEW ENGLAND"**

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"Nigger's Leap, New England" is a poem based on a real-life incident narrated by Judith Wright's father to her. The poem has been taken from Wright's first volume of poems entitled *The Moving Image* (1946). She had a continuous relationship with rural Australia and she also knew the original and bloody foundation of White Australian history. It was for the first time that an Australian poet had dared to raise consciousness of its people towards the ill-treatment of the aborigines. In the poem, Wright laments the sorrow of a people who were brutally massacred.

In the first stanza, Judith Wright recalls the night on which the aboriginal people were killed. It was a lonely and dark night. Everywhere there was darkness. Darkie Point, as it was called, was the site of massacres of aborigines who were forced to jump off the cliff by the Whites as punishment for stealing cattle. This place was visited by Judith Wright and her family and it was a favourite camping spot for Wright when she was a child. Hence, the place held "magical" connotations for her though it had a darkness to it.

The manner in which Wright had described the cape, bay, eastward spurs shows that she was passionate about the landscape. The poem begins with the encroachment of night and Wright also requests Night to 'swallow' the landscape so that one is not reminded of the bloody massacre that took place years ago. She also makes a plea to the air to function as a shroud for the corpses. But the use of 'cold quilt across the bone and skull' is an uncanny and bizarre image. The quilt which actually acts as a cover for giving comfort and warmth does not serve



its purpose here. Rather, the quilt is cold and the first stanza ends with a terrifying image. In this stanza the past and the present are intermingled.

The second stanza is rich in imagery. When the colonizers set foot on the shore, it was a miserable time for the natives. Now everything would be measured by darkness. Their days would no longer be days but would be changed into nights. The dwellers of the tropics would be met by the cold and indifferent attitude of the colonizers. There would be an end to love and a renewal of hostility and hatred would be rampant everywhere. The speech of the natives would be silenced and their homes would be reduced to nothingness. Earlier the aborigines or the indigenous people considered the whole land of Australia as their own home but now things would be different. They would be treated as refugees and outsiders in their own country.

The third stanza establishes the fact that it was the aborigines who were the first settlers and they reaped and sowed the land with their blood. The crops they grew were the result of their sweat and toil. But the Australian people had forgotten their sacrifice. The reasons for avoiding this issue or forgetting to accept their sacrifice, Wright feels, is obvious. The Australians thought of themselves as decent, fair-minded people but Judith Wright confronts the other side of history. For her, land, territory and place in which she grew up and where her family had lived for generations is of great significance. Her compassion enables her to feel for the land and its aboriginal people.

Wright confronts history because 'the love of the land we have invaded and the guilt of this invasion have become PART of me' (Wright 1990, x). She feels all men are one at last. Those who died in the massacre were 'ourselves'. In killing the aborigines, the Australians had wounded themselves.

In the fourth and final stanza of the poem Wright talks of the effects of repression. She deliberately makes use of the coolamon, a word associated with the aborigines especially the women. It was a basin like dish made from wood. It was a multi-purpose vessel used by aboriginal women to carry water, fruits, nuts as well as to cradle babies. They were either carried on the head when traveling any distance or carried under the arm. Wright regrets that the coolamon and 'thin black children' will no longer be visible in Australia.

In comparing 'the thin, black children dancing like the shadows of saplings' Wright makes use of a picturesque simile. She began the poem on a note of darkness and she ends the poem with darkness once again. An awareness of historical guilt is created in this poem. In the final lines of the poem, both night and history return to flood the people because what is repressed comes back to assail the consciousness.

She believed that aboriginal Australia had been physically and psychologically invaded. Hence, her work brought in its wake a phase of guilt investigation and an

expiation, a healing which has continued to be expressed in White Australian literature till the present day. It is a reaching out to the 'Other'.

Poems like “Nigger’s Leap” and “The Dark Ones” continue to express the convulsive effect that Aborigines exercise even in a modern Australian society. The anger and pathos of this colonial history was given voice by Kevin Gilbert, a critic, who wrote:

The onus is on the Aboriginal writers to represent the evidence of our true situation. Cut off a man’s leg, kill a mother, rape his land, psychologically attack him and keep him in a powerless position each day – does it not continue to scar and affect his thinking? Deny it, but it still exists. (1990)

Judith Wright’s remedy for this situation is to consider all human beings as belonging to one humanity.

### **GLOSSARY:**

<i>nigger</i>	:	a black person, a derogatory term for black-skinned people.
<i>spurs</i>	:	(a noun) a high piece of land which sticks out from a mountain. The word is also used as a verb and has several other meanings. Look up a dictionary.
<i>obscure</i>	:	hidden, not known to people, difficult to grasp.
<i>cape</i>	:	a large piece of land sticking out in the sea.
<i>bay</i>	:	a part of the coast where the land curves in.
<i>quilt</i>	:	a cover for a bed.
<i>synthesis</i>	:	merging of different ideas or things to make a whole
<i>buoys</i>	:	a floating object on the top of the sea, which is used for directing ships and warning them of danger.
<i>gulfs</i>	:	a large area of sea surrounded on three sides by a coast to direct something into a particular place.
<i>coolamon</i>	:	a basin like dish made from wood.
<i>scarp</i>	:	a very steep piece of land.
<i>channelled</i>	:	to direct something into a particular place or situation.
<i>keels</i>	:	a long piece of wood or steel along the bottom of a boat that helps to keep the boat balanced in water.

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### **11.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

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1. Why does A.D. Hope describe Australia in negative terms?

2. What is the significance of the last two stanzas in the poem 'Australia'?
3. Hope believes that Australia is a country 'without songs, architecture, history.' What is the significance of songs, architecture and history in the culture of a country?
4. Name the incident behind the poem "Nigger's Leap, New England".
5. How has Judith Wright intermingled the past and the present in the poem?
6. What is the message of Judith Wright in the poem?
7. Why has Wright made use of the imagery of darkness in the poem?

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## 11.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have discussed two poems written by two major Australian poets, A.D. Hope and Judith Wright. When we consider them in the postcolonial context, we realize that between 1886 and 1904 a great many changes took place in Australia. The division between the bush and city cultures and the difference in the character of the two principal cities - Sydney and Melbourne were significant. World War II also brought changes in Australia.

Australian literature developed slowly and arduously with the conflict between old convict legacy and the bush, a colonial hangover and an attempt to carve a national literature. The land was new, strange, barren and full of hardship. The poets had to come to terms with the land, the great deserts which were inhospitable to human habitation. They had to derive inspiration from this land they called 'home' Such inspiration is exemplified in the poetry of Hope and Wright.

What is common between the two poets is that they are both writing about Australia and its people. Where there is a certain ambivalence in Hope's attitude towards Australia, Wright is sympathetic towards the aboriginal people who were maltreated by the white settlers. In the poem "Australia" Hope is derisive of Australia, the land and its people in the initial stanzas but towards the end of the poem he redeems the land saying that it is the place where prophets come.

Judith Wright, on the other hand, begins the poem with the narration of a historical event told to her by her grandfather but later she takes a very comprehensive view of the torture and inhumanity faced by the indigenous people at the hands of the white settlers. Throughout the nineteenth century more and more of the interior of Australia came under white control. The aborigines used land for material and spiritual purposes. The whites treated it as a commodity only, trying to extract all that they could to gain profits. Wright, though she belonged to the settler community, was moved by the plight of the aborigines and through her poetry she tried to fight for their cause.

After reading the two poems, we know what kind of territory Australia possesses,

who were the people who lived here and what was the attitude of the colonists towards the natives. We have also realized the vivid imagery used by the two poets and the figures of speech used by them to make the poems picturesque.

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### 11.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. What aspects of postcolonialism can you trace in A.D. Hope's 'Australia'?
2. Consider Judith Wright as a postcolonial poet on the basis of the poem you have read.
3. Write a note on Judith Wright's attitude to her homeland. Why does she feel a sense of guilt?
4. Wright uses images of land and sea. What impact does it make on the reader?
5. Contrast A.D. Hope's images relating to Australia with the images Wright uses.

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### 11.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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#### **Books by A.D. Hope**

1. *The Wandering Islands*. Sydney : Edwards and Shaw, 1955.
2. *Poems*. London : Hamish Hamilton, 1960.
3. *A.D. Hope*. Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1963
4. *Collected Poems : 1920-1965*. Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1966.
5. *Selected Poems*. Manchester : Carcanet, 1986.
6. *Australian Literature 1950-1962*. Melbourne : Melbourne University Press, 1963.
7. *Native Companions : Essays and Comments on Australian Literature 1936-1966*. Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1974.
8. *Directions in Australian Poetry*. Townsville : Foundation for Literary Studies, 1984.

#### **Books by Judith Wright**

1. *The Moving Image*. Meanjin Press, 1946.
2. *The Oxford Book of Australian Verse*. Oxford: OUP, 1954.
3. *Collected Poems*. Sydney : Angus and Robertson, 1971.
4. *The Cry for the Dead*. Oxford : OUP, 1986.

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## **UNIT 12 : TERRITORY AND HOMELAND - II**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

#### **12.0 Objectives**

#### **12.1 Introduction to the Unit**

##### **12.1.1 Land/Territory and History of Africa**

#### **12.2 Introduction to the Poet - David Diop**

#### **12.3 A Note about Negritude**

#### **12.4 Paraphrase and Appreciation : "Africa".**

#### **12.5 Self-Assessment Question**

#### **12.6 Suggested Readings**

#### **12.7 Land/Territory and History of Canada**

#### **12.8 Introduction to the Poet-Margaret Atwood**

#### **12.9 A Note on Atwood's *Survival***

#### **12.10 A Note on Atwood's *Surfacing***

#### **12.11 Paraphrase and Appreciation : "Journey to the Interior"**

#### **12.12 Self Assessment Questions**

#### **12.13 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **12.14 Unit End Questions**

#### **12.15 Suggested Readings**

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### **12.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The objective of this unit is to help you study the two poems written by David Diop, an African poet and by Margaret Atwood, a Canadian poet and place them in the postcolonial context. After reading this unit you will be able to

- (a) comprehend the meaning of the poems;
- (b) appreciate and evaluate their poetic qualities;
- (c) differentiate between the African and Canadian perspective of territory and homeland with regard to these poems.

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### **12.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit, we will discuss David Diop's poem "Africa" and Margaret Atwood's poem "Journey to the Interior". In the previous unit, i.e. Unit-11 we have already seen the meaning of territory and homeland. We have also discussed what colonization meant in the context of Australia. In this unit, we will study the impact of colonization on Africa and on Canada. For this, we will have to know the history as well as the geography of these two places. To begin with let us understand the land and history of Africa first.

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### 12.2.1 Land and Territory and History of Africa

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Africa is considered to be the oldest inhabited territory on earth. Also called the Dark continent, Africa is separated from Europe by the Mediterranean Sea. It is the second largest continent after Asia. The Mediterranean coast and the Sahara Desert are Africa's most significant natural features. Africa comprises of no true mountain ranges but the productive agricultural regions are the highland Steppes.

The climate of Africa is also varied like its physical features. It ranges from tropical to sub arctic on its highest peaks. The northern half of Africa is primarily a desert or arid whereas the central and southern areas include both Savannah plains and very thick forest regions.

European explorers became interested in exploring the heart of the continent in the 19th century. Their motive was opening the area for trade, mining and other commercial exploitation. An additional desire of the explorers was to convert the inhabitants to Christianity. Some of the explorers were also desirous of locating the source of River Nile.

Whatever the motive, the European imperial powers engaged in a major territorial 'scramble' and became occupants of most of the continent. For the Europeans Africa was a commodity to be looted and plundered. Colonialism had a destabilizing effect on a number of ethnic groups an effect that has left a permanent mark on their history and politics. Europeans were unaware of the rhythms that characterize the life of the Africans and created a cultural dichotomy between the native inhabitants and themselves. The colonizers lacked the power found in Africans and their traditions and oral history.

As a result of years of neglect and oppression by colonial powers much of the traditional African cultures have been lost or become weakened. But in recent years there is a resurgence in the attempts to re-discover and re-glorify the African traditional cultures.

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## 12.2 INTRODUCTION TO DAVID DIOP'S 'AFRICA'

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### ABOUT THE POET

David Diop (1927-1960) was one of the most promising West African poet whose career was short-lived as he died in an air crash. He was born in Bordeaux, France in 1927 and had his primary education in Senegal. He lived an unstable life, frequenting between France and W. Africa.

While Diop was still at school he started publishing poetry. He was inspired and influenced by Aime Ce'saire, He saw several of his poems published in Senghor's *Anthologie de la negre at malgache* (1948), described as "an important landmark of modern writing in French". Most of his poetry was written before he was twenty-one years old.

Diop spent most of his life in France but he often expressed his yearning for Africa in his poems. He shares the pain and loss felt by the Africans under French colonialism with his readers. In the 1950s he returned to Africa to participate in the building of Senegal. When he returned, tabloid publications were influential in the development of African poetry. A journal called *Bingo* began to be published in Senegal in 1953 and it contained poems by Diop, Senghor and other emerging African writers. He taught at the Lycee Delafosse in Dakar, Senegal. Later he volunteered to work for the new government.

In Paris, Diop joined the negritude literary movement which championed and celebrated the uniqueness of black experience and heritage. His poems depict his anger and hatred of colonial rulers and his desire to see Africa as an independent country. The negritude movement expressed opposition to colonialism and assimilation and glorified African values. Although Diop's poems contained harsh and gentle statements yet all his poems ended on a note of optimism. Africa's endurance and the power to survive are other themes of Diop's poetry.

Diop, while writing of his motherland, used a language that contained agony, despair, monotony and finally optimism. In many of his poems Diop has used the figure of the old shattered man as a symbol for Africa under colonial rule. But in other places we have the image of Africa as one with endurance and as a tree which bore freedom's 'bitter flavour'.

Diop's career was cut short when he died in an air crash at the young age of 33. His poems in *Coups de Pilon* (1956) represent his only surviving collection of poems.

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### 12.3 A NOTE ABOUT NEGRITUDE

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Negritude was a literary movement of the 1930s that began among French speaking African and Caribbean writers living in Paris as a protest against French colonial rule and the policy of assimilation. Aimé Fernand David Césaire, a Martinican poet, playwright and politician founded this movement with Leopold Sedar Senghor to restore and re-establish the cultural identity of Africa.

Césaire, though he was French, supported the decolonization of the French colonies of Africa. He gave voice to his rebellion in the French language which was replete with African imagery. The things that the negritude poets favoured were the glorification of Africa. They ardently worshipped everything African and native concerns were the oft repeated subjects of their poetry.

In "The Meaning of Africa" by Aibiosch Nicol, the description of Africa is thus :

Africa, you were once just a name to me  
So I came back  
Sailing down the Guinea coast

You are not a country Africa,  
You are a concept  
I know now that is what you are Africa.

David Diop was part of the Negritude school of writing. Negritude referred to the sense of a common Negro inheritance rebellion against colonialist beliefs and values and nostalgia for the glory of African heritage. This was a movement which caught the imagination of black writers, no matter where they were located. The 50s and 60s, saw the wave spreading to America where writers took on African names, began to practice Islam and use tribal arts and costumes.

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#### **12.4 PARAPHRASE AND APPRECIATION : "AFRICA "**

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David Diop begins the poem by addressing Africa and in the very first line he establishes a connection with his motherland. He uses the possessive pronoun – ‘my Africa’ He pays a tribute to his country. Though he uses simple words to describe Africa, yet he evokes a very powerful image of Africa. The poem is a celebration of the beautiful savannah grasslands where proud warriors rode in Africa before slavery and colonialism.

When the poet was a small child he had heard stories from his grandmother about the savannahs, the cool rivers and the proud warriors He says that he has never known Africa in the real sense of the word but he does not deter from acknowledging his indebtedness to Africa. He is proud of the fact that he has African blood flowing in his veins — the same blood that irrigates the fields and makes production possible.

Africans toiled very hard, suffered at the hands of the colonizers and were transformed into slaves. The bliss that was Africa was scarred by the sufferings inflicted on them by colonial powers. The Africans were subjected to forced labour, brutal rule and punishment. Physical torture was the order of the day during most of the colonial period. Whippings were routinely administered to the blacks during World War II.

Diop has not set foot on the African soil but he knows all about the humiliation of slavery and colonization suffered by his motherland and his own people. The source of this knowledge was his grandmother. Diop uses contrast in the poem where he places the horror of subjugation of Africans at the hands of the colonizers along with the beauty of the African land. Contrastive realities are juxtaposed in the poem.

The landscape of Africa trembles and is scarred and dark. It has been darkened by force, by getting the produce of labour under the whip. The image of Africans ‘saying yes to the whip under the midday sun’ is a horrifying one. Diop knew that Africa had suffered from hatred, prejudice and racism. He was of the view that until Africans reached out to each other, unless they saw more than a map, they



could not survive. Towards the end of the poem, Diop gives a message that though Africa has borne the brunt of humiliation and shame yet it grows again 'patiently'. The 'grave voice' is the voice of the poet's conscience that tells him to rebel against the acceptance of the whip and taste the fruit of 'liberty'.

In the poem 'Africa' Diop tells of nostalgia, sorrow and regret. The nostalgia is expressed by an undoubting sense of pride in having an African ancestry, the sorrow and regret are expressed by the acknowledgement of the suffering of an African people, a nation but the poem ends with the anticipation of freedom.

### **GLOSSARY**

- ancestral* : that which is inherited from one's ancestors, i.e. forefathers.
- savannahs* : a large flat area of land covered with grass and with few trees, especially in Africa.
- humiliation* : embarrassment, loss of self-respect, to feel small.
- impetuous* : acting quickly and without thinking; impulsive.
- obstinately* : refusing to change opinion or way of behaving.

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### **12.5 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

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1. What image do you draw of Africa on reading the poem?
2. What were the characteristics of negritude writing?
3. How has Diop expressed the evils of slavery and colonialism in the poem?

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### **12.6 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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#### **Books by David Diop**

1. *Coups de pylon* : David Diop (1956).
2. *Hammer Blows and Other Writings* (1973).

#### **Other Books**

1. Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Trans. Constance Farrington. Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1961.
2. Gandhi, Leela, *Postcolonial Theory : A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh: University Press, 1998.

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### **12.7 LAND/TERRITORY AND HISTORY OF CANADA**

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Now that we have read about an African poet David Diop let us move further north to Canada and read about the Canadian poet, Margaret Atwood. What is so fascinating about her poetry ? How we the postcolonial and the feminist perspectives conjoined in her poems is for us to understand. But before reading the poem **Journey to the Interior** by Atwood let us know something about the

land that Canada is.

Canada is a huge land. For its environment, Canada possesses soaring mountains, the majestic waterways and the huge expanse of territory. History is full of instances how the immigrants had to meet the challenges of the land to gain its bounties. It covers most of the northern part of North America and it gave a sense of unlimited space. It has an area larger than that of United States.

The first inhabitants of Canada were the native Inuit hunting families. The white man who sighted Canada was John Cabot, an Italian who reached Newfoundland in 1497. English fishermen and then French fur traders came to Canada. The French explorers had penetrated beyond the Great Lakes to the western prairies. In the next few decades thousands of British colonists settled in Canada. Whether they were the Italians, the French or the English, one thing is certain that all of them had to adapt and respond to the demanding problems of the environment which comprised of icebound islands, huge spaces, waterways and the gigantic mountains.

Canada was inhabited by aboriginals. Later the group of European colonies became an officially bilingual multicultural federation. Though it were the French who settled first in Canada in the 17th century yet Canada came to be dominated by the British until Canada became independent in the 20th century. Even now the power struggle between the French and the English goes on.

Coral Ann Howells, a critic, has pointed out, that colonisation of the prairie was in the deepest sense a power struggle between whites and the indigenous people over possession of the land. Possession of the land meant two entirely different things to the two people. To the whites, possession of the land meant exclusive possession of the prairies through the signing of land treaties with the Indians. For the whites, land meant economic and political power. It was an extension of the British dominion. On the other hand, for the indigenous people, land was life itself, necessary for their physical, cultural and spiritual survival. In the Canadian experience, submission and subjugation were carried out through armed conflict. Patriarchy and racism acted together to give the white people power over the indigenous people. Until 1947, Canadians were described as "British subjects."

As far as Canadian literature is concerned, the earliest writers - the immigrants- wrote in the tradition of Britain until the reality of the Canadian experience dawned upon them. Canadian culture comprises of a unique blend of customs, cuisine and traditions which have helped in the socio-cultural development of the nation.

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## **12.8 INTRODUCTION TO MARGARET ATWOOD'S "JOURNEY TO THE INTERIOR"**

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### **ABOUT THE POET**

Margaret Atwood (1939- ) was born in Ottawa, Ontario. Daughter of a forest entomologist, who studied insects, she spent her early childhood in the bush of

North Quebec. At the age of seven, she moved to Toronto. Canada's most prolific novelist and poet she also writes short stories, screenplays, radio scripts, books for children and criticism, her works have been translated into over thirty languages. She has also held a variety of academic posts.

Until recently Canadian women poets were largely ignored because of gender hierarchies. This has gradually been rectified when poets like Margaret Atwood and Dorothy Livesay appeared on the literary scene. They wrote about issues and subjects that were very close to them. How they faced the hardships of frontier life was a recurring theme in the early poetry of Canadian women poets.

Atwood used her childhood material in her books. From childhood to adolescence, her family spent half of every year in the bush of northern Ontario and rest of the year in Toronto. Her first publication was a book of poems entitled *The Circle Game* (1964), which received the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry. Some of her other collections of poetry are *Inter Lunar* (1995), *Eating Fire : Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (1998) and her latest collection entitled *The Door* (2007).

Atwood is also known for writing novels with strong women characters while dissecting sexual politics. Some of her novels are *The Edible Women* (1969), *Surfacing* (1973), *Lady Oracle* (1977), *Bodily Harm* (1982). Some recent ones are *Alias Grace* (1996), *The Blind Assassin* (2000) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Recipient of many awards, Atwood was successful in winning the Booker Prize for fiction in 2000 for her novel *the Blind Assassin*.

Atwood has written that by discovering your place you discover yourself and her novel *Surfacing* brings the subject of Canadian national space forward. Competing territorial claims is the hallmark of the novel. The narrator's family home is located in "border country"(26) and her acceptance that her "home-ground" is also "foreign territory"(11) tells us of the struggle between French and English colonists. In most of her work is revealed the consciousness of Canadian space that was fought for instead of being silently discovered.

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## 12.9 A NOTE ON ATWOOD'S *SURVIVAL*

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Margaret Atwood's *Survival* as one of the most astonishing books written about Canadian literature. Published in 1972 when Atwood was just 32, it points to survival as the central theme in Canadian literature. When she was asked to define what was Canadian about Canadian literature, Atwood's reply was in the form of this book.

Atwood believed that Canadian literature is primarily concerned with victims and the victims' ability to survive. The book is simultaneously a book of criticism, a manifesto and a collection of personal remarks. The theme of survival has been dealt in twelve brilliant chapters and she has covered a whole range of writers

from Susanna Moodie to MacLennan to Blais, from Pratt to Purdy to Gibson and seen their works from a new perspective.

Survival is the central symbol for Canada. For the early explorers and immigrants, it meant bare survival in the face of inhospitable elements and trying just to keep alive. Many Canadian poems have survival as a theme. Canada moved from bare survival to grim survival to cultural survival. Grim survival meant survival in the face of a criticism or disaster, like a shipwreck etc. When the English took over from French Canada it became a cultural survival, staying together as a people, retaining a religion and a language under an alien government.

Atwood is also of the view that for the earlier writers obstacles or impediments were external – for instance, the land, the climate etc. In later writers the obstacles are no longer physical but they are internal. One who has survived has no feeling of triumph or victory but the fact that he has survived. He can only express gratitude for having escaped with his life.

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## 12.10 A NOTE ON ATWOOD'S *SURFACING*

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Since the poem we are going to discuss is about a journey it would be ideal to know something about Margaret Atwood's second novel *Surfacing* published in 1972 which also talks about the two forms of a journey. The novel opens with an 'on the road' sequence, in which the readers are moving, with the narrator towards, "the past". The only motive for undertaking this journey is to find her father. The journey the narrator undertakes is in two forms, physical and metaphorical.

But as the novel progresses, we see a shift, a change in her concerns. The search for her father (home) finally becomes a search, a move toward a state of nature. In the novel when the boat comes to report that her father has been found, she is not startled or shocked. Rather the finding of her father is no longer her central concern.

The physical journey is a beginning for the spiritual/metaphorical journey. From chapter three of the novel begins the synthesis between the physical and the metaphorical journey. In the novel the past and the present intersect continuously when a young unnamed woman returns home to the remote north of Quebec to search for her missing father. The narrator does not have a name which is a sign of a deep identity crisis. She is an extremely detached person and cannot connect or relate to others. She suffers from homesickness, a nostalgia and is aware of it. With a new, adult life in the city her outlook undergoes a change. Atwood talks of the destructive features of the city as against the respect for the wilderness.

The novel also deals with gender issues and feminism. Female achievement is considered a threat to masculinity. This psychological story also presents a study of a woman who is also searching for herself. Atwood has shown us that we all possess the talent and strength to re-energise our lives and that we can be

empowered. In *Surfacing* the narrator must reconstruct herself to preserve a strong sense of self, not merely to find her self but to develop her true self.

In the novel, the wilderness and the city are understood as Canadian and American respectively. The American frontier motif is regarded as one of aggression and colonisation, associated with the quest. On the other hand, the Canadian survival motif was associated with passivity and victimisation.

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## 12.11 PARAPHRASE AND APPRECIATION : "JOURNEY TO THE INTERIOR"

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Now let us read the poem "Journey to the Interior" by Margaret Atwood and try to place her in the postcolonial context and to see how she uses the Canadian landscape, which is harsh, inhospitable and black. Let us also see what strategies are required to embark upon a journey to the inner recesses of the mind.

Margaret Atwood's poem "Journey to the Interior" has been taken from her collection of poems entitled *The Circle Game*. In historical times, the phrase would mean the discovery of a new land, venturing into the mysteries of the human mind, something that is uncertain and apprehensive. It is a metaphorical journey – a journey to the unknown – an inner journey of self-discovery. In the poem the human psyche has been compared to the unrelenting Canadian environment and natural landscape.

In the first stanza, Atwood makes a comparison between the human psyche and the Canadian environment saying there are similarities between them. The images conveyed here are dark, there is no beauty in nature – the hills are 'endless as prairies.' Atwood makes use of a simile here saying just as the prairies are vast and limitless, so are the continuous hills. The trees are not bountiful but tall and weak which shows that the country is an impoverished country – a poor country.

The poem was written in the 1960s and it is a confessional poem which explores the secret of human behaviour. Atwood was always fascinated by the Canadian landscape and she makes use of its physical terrain as a metaphor for this inner psychological expression. Written as a first person monologue, the poem seems like a meditation. Her mental wanderings take her on a journey – a quest to discover meanings associated with identity and nationhood.

She further describes travel as something which is not easy moving from one point to another. The poet's travel is surrounded by lots of hurdles and obstacles. Something impedes her reaching the destination. Atwood provides for our journey to 'her interior' by referring to geographical surroundings. This inner terrain represents darkness. She believes that travel is difficult while at the same time she tells us of the similarities between the journey to the interior and other journeys.

In the second stanza the poet tells us of 'distractions' along the way. Inner journeys are non-linear, having no fixed destination. Individuals, in such circumstances, undergo self-reflection which is a continuous process. When there are no, 'reliable charts' or distraction of 'small details', when traditional tools are denied, then only the self-reliance of the persona embarking on self-exploration becomes necessary. In this stanza, the persona becomes aware that the journey is on two levels. The image of 'your shoe among the brambles' gives the reader a sudden shock as it is suddenly 'interior', that is, indoors - the kitchen and immediately 'sentence crossing my path' tells us that the landscape the persona is in is actually the brain which makes the journey difficult. The mind is a more dangerous place than the external world.

The symbol of 'shoe under the chair', and 'white mushrooms and a paring knife' are suggestive of mundane household chores – of how female domestic responsibilities can interfere with self-knowledge. The 'shoe' may represent the conventional cleaning and tidying role most women undertake. Whereas the 'white mushrooms and a paring knife' symbolize the cooking role of women. These images evoke the difficulties faced by women in looking within. The aside 'Have I been walking in circles again?' Is used to emphasize the women's traditional domestic chores are recurring and there is no end to them. The stanza ends with a rhetorical flourish.

In the third stanza Atwood warns the readers that the journey is dangerous. The reason why the journey is so difficult and demanding is that the traveler must undertake the journey unaided and alone. She is of the view that traditional navigational tools are of no use – 'A compass is useless;' and also the movements of the sun are irregular.

The persona then realizes that the only thing to be depended upon is composure. So the only remedy is 'I must keep my head', meaning she must not lose her balance. Inner journeys allow individuals to recognize their strengths and failures. Obstacles can be overcome. Individuals can progress further on their inner journeys if they accept the challenge of self-reflection.

Atwood has used similes, imagery, symbolism and recurring motifs in the poem. The similes are 'endless as prairies', and 'sodden as a fallen log.' She uses navigational tools like the 'map', 'compass' and 'charts'. The poem is full of frequent dashes which highlight the interruptions in the thought process. The use of first person narrative by Atwood shows that it has informed her perceptions of self and the World. The interior of the human psyche is perhaps mankind's most unexplored region.

On reading the poem, we get an idea of Atwood's classic style-slow, meditative and thoughtful. The poem can be divided into three stages. The first stage could be the similarities between different physical phenomena like the endless hills and

the prairies. The second stage tells of the differences between a physical journey and a mental journey. The third and final stage is an exit from the reflective exercise. Many explorers have lost their path in this 'wilderness' but Atwood's-suggestion is to 'keep my head'. The 'interior' in the poem could include the physical unknown land mass, the prairies, a jungle, a kitchenroom and finally the mind itself.

If we see the style of Atwood we find that she has made use of enjambment (run-on lines) throughout the poem. This lends the poem the rhythm of natural speech. The objects of successful navigation like the compass and the sun acquire a symbolic significance. The title of the poem "Journey to the Interior" depicts a dangerous venture into the uncertain regions of one's own mind.

Some critics suggest that the poem is perhaps an allegory. The poem tells us that the search for truth or reality always follows a pattern. One begins with similarities and differences with the known and the familiar. And the known and familiar itself may take new forms and shapes. When we read the poem all over again it becomes clear that it is the 'mind' which is the interior.

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### 12.11.1 GLOSSARY

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<i>welded</i>	: join two pieces together
<i>prairies</i>	: a wide area of flat grassy land with very few trees, in Canada and the northern US
<i>spindly</i>	: long or tall and thin, looking weak
<i>swamps</i>	: very wet soft land
<i>inaccessible</i>	: very difficult or impossible to reach
<i>tangle</i>	: untidy mass of things that are not in an ordered state.
<i>reliable</i>	: that can be trusted or believed.
<i>distraction</i>	: something that takes away your attention
<i>brambles</i>	: wild bush with thorns
<i>lucent</i>	: transparent
<i>mushrooms</i>	: a fungus with a round top and short stem
<i>paring knife</i>	: a knife used to cut away a thin outer layer of something
<i>sodden</i>	: extremely wet, drenched, soaked in water
<i>erratic</i>	: irregular uncertain or without organization
<i>compass</i>	: device for finding direction whose needle always points to magnetic north.

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## 12.12 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. What are the poetic features used by Atwood in the poem ?
2. How does Atwood use an extended metaphor to communicate the concept of an inner journey ?
3. What are the prerequisites for going on a journey ? How is a physical journey different from going on a journey into the interior ?

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## 12.13 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have discussed two poems : one by the African poet, David Diop and the other by the Canadian poet, Margaret Atwood. Diop's "Africa" tells us about the landscape, the culture and the aboriginal people who were colonized by the Europeans. On the other hand, Atwood's "Journey into the Interior" tells us about the unexplored human psyche with the unexplored Canadian landscape which is inhospitable as the background of the poem. Diop's language is simple but he evokes a very pathetic picture of the brutalities faced by the African people. The manner in which the African aboriginal people were victimized by the colonizers is the central idea of the poem. Though Diop had not set foot on the African soil, he still maintains a very close relationship – that of a mother and son – with his mother land, Africa. He uses poignant imagery of 'black blood' irrigating the fields, 'the slavery of children' and 'This back trembling with red scars.'

Atwood's poem is a metaphorical poem. In the first stanza she does refer to the inaccessible Canadian landscape with hills, prairies, swamps and its barrenness. Somewhere these references indicate her latent consciousness of Canadian space as fought for and won rather than discovered peacefully.

Using a first person narrative, the poem talks of the concept of journey which is a universal phenomenon. The poem centres around the importance of the journey theme in human experience and the opportunities journeys offer for self-discovery and enlightenment. Atwood contrasts between a physical journey with its navigational tools like charts, maps, dotted lines and compass and the psychological journey which is non-linear. This journey offers opportunities and openings that can be explored. Individuals are often faced by hurdles and barriers which can be overcome if one maintains composure.

Atwood has used similes, vivid imagery and symbols to prove her point. Ideas are presented via flow-on-lines that allow them to merge and develop into one another. She is of the view that inner journeys allow individuals to reorganize their strengths and shortcomings.

In conclusion, we can say that in countries like Africa and India the cultural imposition related to colonialism took place on the homeground of the colonized people, whereas in countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the English language



and culture were transplanted by settlers, convicts and slavemasters to a foreign territory where the indigenous inhabitants were either destroyed or marginalized. Africa was considered attractive by the colonizers for the untapped wealth that could be exploited. Canada on the other hand, was settled by immigrants who did not consider themselves as Canadians but as Englishmen living in a new land.

On the basis of the two units on “Territory and Homeland”, we have seen how land is fundamental to the wellbeing of the aboriginal people. Land is the core of spirituality and these people endeavoured to live with the land.

The culture of these indigenous people is kept alive by transferring their knowledge, arts, rituals etc. from one generation to another. The indigenous inhabitants had great affinity with their surroundings, their territory, their homeland.

Césaire considered colonialism as a product of a sick society, a "pseudo-humanism which diminished the rights of man". A significant feature in settler postcolonial theory is an examination of the processes by which emigrant European settlers 'displaced' the indigenous occupants. This displacement took many different forms which were physical, geographical, spiritual, cultural and symbolic.

In the case of Canada, postcolonial theory worked on three fronts - firstly, it was understanding Canada as a settler-invader society, secondly, healing the wounds of the indigenous people through the development of indigenous research and activist techniques and finally, understanding postcolonialism as a global phenomenon.

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## 12.14 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Comment upon the visual element emphasized in Diop’s poem “Africa.”
2. How has Diop interwoven a sense of belonging, nostalgia and a sense of memory in “Africa?”
3. Critically evaluate Atwood’s “Journey to the Interior.”
4. Comment upon the similes and metaphors used by Atwood in “Journey to the Interior.”
5. Why does Atwood think "it is easier for me to lose my way/forever here....?" Explain.

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## 12.15 SUGGESTED READINGS

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### **Books by Margaret Atwood**

1. *The Circle Game*. Cranbrook Academy of Art, 1964.
2. *Survival : A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 2004.

3. *Surfacing*. Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1972.
4. *The Canadian Imagination : Dimensions of a Literary Culture*. Harvard University Press, 1977.
5. *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English*. Oxford : OUP, 1983.

**Books on Margaret Atwood**

1. de Papp, Carrington. *Margaret Atwood and Her Works*. Toronto : EWC, 1985.
2. Howells , Coral Ann. *Margaret Atwood*. New York : St. Martin's, 1996.
3. Sullivan, Rosemary. *The Red Shoes : Margaret Atwood Starting Out*. Toronto: Harper Flamingo Canada, 1998.

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## **UNIT 13 : PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE 'SELF': BERNARD DADIE AND RICHARD NTIRU'S AFRICAN POETRY**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 13.0 Objectives**
- 13.1 Introduction**
- 13.2 About the Age**
- 13.3 About the Poet : Richard Ntiru**
- 13.4 Introduction : "The Shapes of Fear"**
  - 13.4.1 Explanation**
  - 13.4.2 Glossary**
  - 13.4.3 Self Assessment Questions**
- 13.5 About the Poet: Bernard Dadie**
- 13.6 Introduction : "I Thank You God"**
  - 13.6.1 Explanation**
  - 13.6.2 Glossary**
  - 13.6.3 Self Assessment Questions**
- 13.7 Let Us Sum Up**
- 13.8 Unit End Questions**
- 13.9 Suggested Readings**

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### **13.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The present unit aims at acquainting you with some dimensions of African postcolonial poetry with special reference to Bernard Dadie and Richard Ntiru. This unit takes up a close reading of two poems, "I thank You God" and "Shapes of Fear", and focuses on the effects of colonialism, portrayal of contemporary reality, negritude, etc.

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### **13.1 INTRODUCTION**

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This unit deals with two major poems by eminent African postcolonial poets. The poems under discussion in this unit have some special traits that truly portray the effects of colonialism. A close reading of the poems reveals how African poets have been influenced by the decline of African culture because of western influences during the colonial period. Ntiru highlights the fear that drove colonial Africa to visualize all sorts of terrors. He shows not only colonial Africa's true fear of a colonial past, but of a universal primeval darkness inherent in human nature. What often motivated African poetry and what Ntiru's poetry is all about is the desire

to describe and admit to those particular feelings, especially negative feelings, such as fear, anxiety, loss, sorrow, grief, and guilt. To understand postcolonial African poetry, then, we cannot simply read it in isolation from the events of colonialism. While examining these poems, the colonial past has to be kept in mind. Africans have received harsh treatment by people throughout the course of history. When this kind of gross negligence is geared towards one culture for such a long period of time, the feelings that build up from this discrimination will manifest themselves in one way or another. The manifestation that came out of all the hatred of the past was the Negritude movement. Making African people aware of their culture and instilling a sense of pride in them about their homeland were the major foci of the Negritude philosophy, and these ideas translated beautifully into the literary world as filtered through the prism of Dadie's poetry. Dadie focuses on furthering the Negritude movement throughout the poem *I Thank You God*. He makes use of literary techniques to express what he wants to say. Throughout the poem, he attempts to convey the beauty and splendor that the Blacks must feel as they are created to be the "porter of all sorrows". Dadie overwhelmingly succeeds in giving his countrymen a sense of the gratitude that the Blacks are endowed with special privileges by the Almighty.

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### 13.2 ABOUT THE AGE

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Postcolonialism in Africa refers in general to the era between 1960 and 1970, during which time many African nations gained political independence from their colonial rulers. Many writers writing during this time, and even during colonial times, saw themselves both as artists and political activists, and their works reflected their concerns regarding the political and social conditions of their countries. As nation after nation gained independence from their colonial rulers, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, a sense of euphoria swept through Africa as each country celebrated its independence from years of political and cultural domination. Much of early postcolonial writing reflects this sense of freedom and hope. In the years that followed, as many African nations struggled to reinvigorate long-subservient societies and culture, writers of postcolonial Africa began reflecting the horrors their countries suffered following decolonization, and their writing is often imbued with a sense of despair and anger, at both the state of their nations and the leaders who replaced former colonial oppressors. This sense of disillusionment, reflected in the works of African writers and poets, marked the beginning of a major change in African intellectual and literary development. Beginning in the 1970s, the direction of African writing began to change, with writers forging new forms of expression reflecting more clearly their own thoughts about culture and politics in their works. The writing of this period and later moves away from the subject matter of postcolonial Africa, and moves into the realm of new and realistic texts that reflect the concerns of their respective nations.

Political, economic, and social circumstances of postcolonial Africa formed the sensibility of most African writers. Thus, their works illuminate the various types of mentalities or ideologies that inform African literature. In addition, these works help the reader determine if a writer's portrayal of African society fully reflects its social relations, political arrangements, and economic factors.

Colonialism had denied Africa the right to cultural development and self-expression and set up a state of siege that it justified with theories about cultural assimilation. The colonialists impacted both the people's culture and their sense of selfhood. As a resistance to their centuries of exploitation, the black races, right from 1930s onwards began exploring their own heritage, tribal art, religious and community formations. They resented their invisibility in social structures and their marginalization in economic and political matters. The US witnessed an upsurge of black militancy in the 1960s. The newly liberated African people, at about the same time, began using their native narrative forms, dialects and cultural artefacts for projecting their distinctive cultures and identities. In short, African literature developed as a direct response to concrete historical conditions, which transformed the ideology of the African poets.

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### 13.3 ABOUT THE POET

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#### **Richard Carl Ntiru (1946-)**

Throughout the century, some of the most startlingly original poetry in the world has come from Africa, which displays the wide-ranging forms of African verse: from war songs and political protests to poems about human love, African nature, and the surprises and ironies of modern life. The years after 1970 witness a fresh upsurge of creative writings in East and Central Africa. New themes were dealt with and old ones reassessed with the result that perceptible steps were taken towards establishing a literature that is far from "standard" as African literature has been unfairly labeled. One of the most prominent promising young poets is Richard Carl Ntiru whose work *Tensions* reflects a thorough making of poetic genre. The poet Richard Ntiru from Ankole district of Uganda, deals with contemporary social, political and economic issues and most of his work is for mature audiences. He laments the decline of African culture because of western influences.

He is the product of an education in a literature department and his work shows many signs of it. He consciously echoes a variety of English poets from Blake and Eliot. He also echoes his immediate concern for Africans passionately. There is something poetic in his sensibility and something borrowed in the quality of his angst. He writes about contemporary Ugandan life and the grotesque situations it engenders. He detaches himself from the suffering of the participants and makes us observe as if from outside. What he communicates is not only the pain of those who suffer but also the pain that he himself feels that things are what they are. He

seems to be at his most detached as he generalizes the contemporary human condition. He communicates experiences far more directly when he dramatizes a particular confrontation in this instance confrontation with fear in its diverse form. The ironic mockery of the defeat of genuine human feelings by confrontation of reality is clearly discernable in "The Shapes of Fear".

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### **13.4 INTRODUCTION : "THE SHAPES OF FEAR"**

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Ntiru published his first collection of poetry *Tensions* (1971), which received considerable acclaim. "The Shapes of Fear" is one of the most significant poems included in this volume. The persona in this poem sees and experiences fear in several shapes and guises. He is unable to comprehend if those phantom voices and ghostly visions are paranormal, or if his eyes and ears are simply playing tricks on him. He is wary of these haunting voices. He hears strange voices and sees eerie mirages and shadows and wonders if he what has been experiencing is a figment of his imagination or reality.

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#### **13.4.1 Explanation**

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One of Africa's finest poets, Richard Ntiru's success lay in his ability to examine sensitive African issues from new perspectives. "The Shapes of Fear" is no exception. Written in 1946, the poem attempts to shed new light on colonial Africa. The poet's accent on superstition can be seen in its full importance. Superstition pervades the poem. It opens with the persona trying to hold his step while walking down a path and sees a mouldy piece of wood lying in his way. Fear is never eliminated, as his wary and cautious eyes cannot distinguish between a piece of wood and a supple and slippery snake. The formless fears emerge yet again as the persona now travelling a lonely road sees a mirage and his fears intensify as his senses foretell him of the danger of destruction in the form of Noah's Flood. Next he draws the image of an inmate waiting impatiently for a caller who never arrives and hope changes into hopelessness. Even homecoming is not safe as the fear of assassins all along the way scares the persona. Man is like the child innocent but any incidental slip of the tongue is a punishable crime in front of the roaring presence of a harsh parent. Any incident may cause the tenant to have to look for a new home such as the pane that falls from its frame. The poet reaches the conclusion that all this is due to the nauseating effect of what he calls human mockery. Ntiru presents the pathetic quality of life, and every black man's life, which is full of diverse forms of fears and terrors. Ntiru's fears of mockery represent the fears of the colonized and the suppressed. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that to the eyes the blacks whose human rights are denied, threatened or infringed, the whole scenario looks like mockery.

The poem portrays diverse forms of fears. The persona in the poem hears phantom voices in the sound of the wind singing while he tries to hold his own breathing

normal. He tries in vain to relax and to keep his own breathing in control but his fears accelerate his breathing and he pants, thus making the “silence imperfect”. His fears and phobias aggravate his condition so that he reaches a state in which the sound of the wind can easily be mistaken for a conspirator’s voice. He is unable to distinguish between the sound of the gushing wind and the sound of people conspiring against him. More than likely, a small branch snaps in the courtyard but in the dazed condition in which the persona is he feels it is the retort of a gun. Thus, he understands the report of a gun and equates the breaking of a twig with the sound of a gun going off.

The poem does an outstanding job of getting inside the mind of a black. One can clearly feel the fear experienced by a black in the poem. "The Shapes of Fear" features two primary entities: the persona whose fear is palpable from the poem’s opening lines, and the “clumsy presence”, whose sudden and foreboding presence evokes a succession of emotions from the persona, from fear when silence become “imperfect”, confusion when the “wary eye” cannot distinguish between real and fake dangers, despair at the realization that mirage on the road is nothing short of Noah’s Flood. Hope is now lost to him forever. Each stanza of the poem ends with a phantasmagoria of terrors—a benign assessment by the persona that there are reasonable explanations for the strange occurrences of the poem is impossible. The intensity of fear rises with each realization, culminating in the persona’s own tortured admission of “this nauseating odor of human mockery”. The physical setting of the poem—a dark night—as well as repeated references to the rapid beating of one’s heart in response to fear of the unknown, are all familiar motifs in Nturu’s poetry.

Nturu deals with death. Death is an abstract concept. Nturu has personified it giving it a ‘visible form’ that inspires fear. Death is thus a dreaded enemy who inhabits a pitch-dark place; the process of dying is likened to a journey through the dark night. The personification is sustained throughout the poem. The images of the wind’s singing, the clumsy presence, the Flood and darkness capture the fearful aspect of death. These word pictures serve to make an abstract concept like death into a concrete fact that can be easily visualized. The metaphor of the journey is extended to stand for the struggles of life as well especially in postcolonial situation.

The persona in the poem fears death to such an extent that the senses have lost their power to distinguish between sounds of nature and impending death. What does the poet suggest in the next few lines? He compares imminent death with a journey across the path even a mouldy piece of wood defies his sight and appears like a snake. As the lone traveller moves further on the road he comes across mirage. In the same way, a man passes through several trials and tribulations before he comes face to face with death. The poet continues with the image of man, as he feels imprisoned, and suspects more dangers. All turns dark and the

stark presence of death is felt closer.

Baringa at night make him see assassins all along the path, and the caller who is invisible as he is one who "does not enter". And who is this enemy that makes him shiver and turn into a timid child. What is the poet referring to? This enemy may be none other than the 'Arch Fear' death. Death is the enemy that's all human beings fear. The poet speculates on the stages that one must pass through before one's death. The darkness will intensify, and the hallucinations will increase as he nears the stronghold of death, the enemy of life. There he will actually see death standing in his fearful form. But even the strong and brave must finally succumb to him. Just as the journey ends when man reaches a time between the deed and the summons, the poet moves from images of darkness to "a new house".

When we read African Literature, we should, by obligation remember that, colonization was at its harshest in Africa. As history stands proof, it was highly exploited and savaged by the ambitious 'white man'. This experience is on the minds of all thinking poets. Despite getting 'uhuru' or independence, the bitterness returns again and again. The much-brutalized Dark Continent is tellingly depicted in the following lines of a poem named "The Shapes of Fear" by Richard Ntiru.

Like an arrested breath  
when breathing makes silence imperfect  
and the ear cannot differentiate  
between the conspiratorial whispers and the winds singing.  
... a twig in the courtyard snaps  
and report of a gun is understood.

We find the same sentiments of fear are echoed by Kenya's poet Joseph Kareyaku when the unforgettable colonial past comes angrily alive:

It is not as you suppose, your lands,  
your cars, your money, or your cities  
I covet...  
It is what gores me most,  
that in my own house and in my very own home  
you should eye me and all that's mine  
with that practiced, long-drawn, insulting sneer.

These sentiments are ruefully expressed by another poet Noemia De Sousa in a poem entitled "If yEvice of personification thus:

This is what I am  
empty sockets despairing of possessing of life  
a mouth torn open in an anguished wound...  
a body tattooed with wounds seen and unseen  
from the harsh whipstrokes of slavery  
tortured and magnificent



proud and mysterious  
Africa from head to foot  
This is what I am.

Ntiru's form helps divide the poem "The Shapes of Fear" into two perspectives: Nature and civilization (as represented by colonial Africa). Though he uses blank verse, the repetition of certain ideas carries the majority of the poem's rhythm. Stanzas one, three, five, seven and nine parallel each other with their beginnings: "Like the arrested breath" (line 1) and "like the suspended breath" (line 3), and finally "Like this and so much more" (line 9). The remainder of the stanzas continue the parallel rhythm of idea, pursuing the impact of the colonialism. (The reference is to the line in which the word/phrase occurs).

That the first two stanzas take the perspective of Nature is obvious from Ntiru's images. The naturally occurring "wind's singing" (line 4) and "twig" (line 5) give sharp contrast to the man-made "conspiratorial whispers" (4) and "retort of the gun" (line 6). In effect, the beginning of the poem seems devoid of humanity, as we perceive the fear felt by the persona but never is he brought before the reader. He refers to his "arrested breath" (line 1), "breathing" (line 2), "ear" (line 3), "conspiratorial whispers" (4), and "report of a gun is understood" (line 6), but never the African himself. The result is a reader who feels as if he were one of the people, observing the results of a colonial past.

He accurately observes their tradition, which "karibu" ceremonies—become the evidence of the African spirit. Concerned that their rituals are no longer useful the African in Ntiru mourns the emptiness of the moment. Their moment is now "drawn vacuum", lost when they become "inmate" of the colonialist. The idea of having "to look for a new house," foreshadows the second last stanza, where the reader sees how Western civilization, unable to understand the African culture, transforms the legacy into one of fear and evil. The natural perspective leaves the reader with mixed, but innocent emotion. The reader must empathize with the African's sorrow and fears, as he feels "Like the timid child" or the "tenant" compelled to look for a new house. The image brings to mind the forced migration of the Africans and the construction of Diaspora. The irony that the persona is a child of a world, the black world and the poet seems to insist that even a minor slip of the tongue is an unpardonable crime. He hints at the discrimination against the black and social segregation, which have been build into the structure of the society. He is clearly condemning racism here. What makes the anomalies in African society which Ntiru explains particularly unfortunate is that this is a society, where social justice and fellow feeling are missing, and all that pervades is a feeling of loneliness and sorrow.

Thus, the poem not only focuses on the realities of the hard urban present but also the past. Ntiru uses a single persona in his poem. He also makes efficient use of irony in this poem. Verbal irony features as his aesthetic epitome for it contributes

immensely towards the enhancement of his vision in the portrayal of social realities. The association of verbal irony with the presentation of social reality requires a different approach from the reader for in verbal irony the implicit meaning intended by the speaker differs from that which he ostensibly asserts. The poet's reference to "the child's time" and "harsh mother" emphasizes the reality of social stratification in which not all men are equal. If it were true that all men are born equal then there would be no need for anguish in face of the "roaring presence" of a harsh present. This image suggests the power of the privileged to keep the lower orders in perpetual subjugation. He chooses words, which are accessible but not simplistic. His simplicity is his strength. In his hands poetry rises beyond an ordinary collation of emotion and experiences and its artistic use enables him to range through the complexities of human nature in confrontation with fear, to cast insight on the intricacies of life and use his vision to warn the reader of "nauseating odor of human mockery".

The last stanza disturbs the reader in its exposition of Western stereotypes. Again, it is to be remembered that it is the fear of the African, which he defines as "Baringa". This fear can be interpreted in two ways. Examined from the perspective of the implied speaker, colonial Africa, there is an obvious association of the curse of "black night" with the black skin of the Africans. The fear, then, is a consequence of the Christian stereotype of the black man as murderer. Yet, "home comer" might also represent colonial Africa, which "suspects assassins all along the path". In this case, the "baringa" are a haunting reminder of all sorts of personifications of fear causing illusions experienced on a dark night, including death.

Nturu emphasizes the fear of a dark origin, epitomized in the myths of Adam and original sin, which the image of the snake brings to the mind, as well as Noah and the Flood. The African, far from being the source of this perceived evil, is only a mistaken symbol of the primitive evil inherent in the human soul, the poet seems to contend. A similar fear is perceived by the persona who is a black, seeks company to relieve the loneliness by welcoming the caller. Nturu calls him an inmate making him a prisoner or a fellow lodger. The pathos emerges as there is no one to enter and grief prevails.

"The Shapes of Fear" is a representation of psychological fears. No one can discount the issue of fear in the poem; fear actually determines the flow of ideas. Yet an understanding of the genesis of this fear might increase if one persisted in an analysis that allowed its perspective to be set for it by *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Jung's views help in explaining the nature of fear in both the personal and racial pasts of the persona. In brief, Jung's observations stress the existence of a collective unconscious, an instinctual life below the ready access of consciousness, which all men share in common. Instincts of a subliminal nature might be the communally-shared fear of night, or what Nturu terms as the "nauseating odor of human mockery". Jung's principal point—at least for

consideration of "The Shapes of Fear"—is the observation that the instinctual energies, robbed of ready release, do not dry up and dissipate; instead, they continue to exist in a repressed state and are forced to turn inward upon man, producing subsequent sieges of anxiety, fear, and projection. The poet as such digs at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it and displays a catalogue of fears. "The Shapes of Fear", therefore, may be seen as a demonstration of how the black race has failed to achieve continuity between unconscious, archetypal instincts and the conscious expression of those instincts. The terror of a fragmented self aggravates the fear. For this reason, the black man is an inheritor of fear, of a terror that is ongoing from his racial past as well as the whole humanity.

That fear is so quickly and so completely precipitated in the persona is a full representation of the Jungian picture of fear when man's unconscious instincts are internalized and given no conscious objectification. The persona thus becomes a representative of many black men. In the poem's entirety, Nturu does not represent any moment when fear can be overcome. He closes the poem still asserting that the black man's struggle, generally, will take him into the abyss of fears and phobias.

It is difficult not to appreciate Nturu's artistic portrayal of "Fear" in the poem. The vivid images impart a vibrant dramatic life to the poem. Nturu makes extensive use of alliteration also.

"Suspended step, supple slipperiness".

The sheer music of the s and p sounds used by him is praiseworthy.

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#### 13.4.2 GLOSSARY

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<i>arrested</i>	: to obstruct; delay; detain; check; hinder; stop; apprehend; seize; lay hold of.
<i>imperfect</i>	: not perfect; not complete in all its parts; wanting a part; deficient;
<i>differentiate</i>	: to distinguish or mark by a specific difference; to effect a difference in, as regards classification; to develop differential characteristics in; to specialize;
<i>conspiratorial</i> :	relating to or characteristic of conspiracy or conspirators;
<i>whispers</i>	: to utter in a low and non-vocal tone; to say under the breath; hence, to mention privately and confidentially;
<i>twig</i>	: a small shoot or branch of a tree or other plant, of no definite length or size;
<i>snaps</i>	: breaks;
<i>report</i>	: sound; noise; as, the report of a pistol or cannon;
<i>understood</i>	: comprehended;
<i>suspended</i>	: to cause to cease for a time; to hinder from proceeding; to interrupt; to delay; to stay. To hold in an undetermined or

	undecided state; as, to suspend one's judgment or opinion;
<i>mouldy</i>	: covered with mould;
<i>wary</i>	: cautious of danger; carefully watching and guarding against deception, artifices, and dangers; timorously or suspiciously prudent; circumspect; scrupulous; careful;
<i>separate</i>	: distinguish, differentiate;
<i>supple</i>	: gracefully slender; moving and bending with ease. slender;
<i>slipperiness</i>	: the quality of being slippery. smoothness;
<i>clumsy</i>	: without skill or grace; wanting dexterity, nimbleness, or readiness; stiff; awkward, as if benumbed; unwieldy; unhandy; hence; ill-made, misshapen, or inappropriate;
<i>mirage</i>	: an optical illusion in which atmospheric refraction by a layer of hot air distorts or inverts reflections of distant objects : something illusory and unattainable;
<i>Noah</i>	: the Hebrew patriarch who saved himself and his family and the animals by building an ark in which they survived 40 days and 40 nights of rain; the story of Noah and the flood is told in the Book of Genesis.
<i>drawn</i>	: subjected to great tension; stretched tight;
<i>vacuum</i>	: empty, void;
<i>inmate</i>	: one who lives in the same house or apartment with another; a fellow lodger; esp., one of the occupants of an asylum, hospital, or prison; by extension, one who occupies or lodges in any place or dwelling;
<i>karibu</i>	: a Swahili word meaning "welcome," "near," or "nearby";
<i>baringa</i>	: personification of all fear causing illusions experienced on a dark night;
<i>timid</i>	: shy;
<i>assassins</i>	: one who kills, or attempts to kill, by surprise or secret assault; one who treacherously murders any one unprepared for defense;
<i>the deeds</i>	: (Religion) performance of moral or religious acts. Salvation by deeds;
<i>the summons</i>	: a call by authority, or by the command of a superior, to appear at a place named, or to attend to some duty. A demand to surrender;
<i>incidental</i>	: happening, as an occasional event, without regularity; coming without design; casual; accidental; hence, not of prime concern;
<i>Ppane</i>	: sheet glass cut in shapes for windows or doors;

- tenant* : a dweller; an occupant;
- nauseating* : loathsome, offensive, sickening;
- odour* : smell;
- mockery* : deriding, and exposing to contempt, by mimicry, by insincere imitation, or by a false show of earnestness; a counterfeit appearance.

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### 13.4.3 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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- 1 Why can't the ear distinguish between the "conspiratorial whispers" and the wind's singing?
- 2 Explain the phrase "suspended step".
- 3 In which sense has the poet used the word "clumsy presence"?
- 4 How does the child feel when he is scolded due to the incidental slip of his tongue?
- 5 What is the meaning of "baringa"?
- 6 What are the fears that confront the persona in the poem?
- 7 What happens when the inmate welcomes someone saying "Karibu"?
- 8 How is the much-brutalized Dark Continent depicted in the poem named "The Shapes of Fear" by Richard Nturu.

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### 13.5 INTRODUCTION : BERNARD DADIÉ

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Bernard Binlin Dadié (or sometimes Bernard Dadie) (born 1916 near Abidjan) is a prolific Ivorian novelist, playwright, poet, and ex-administrator who uses the French language alongside various African tongues.

Dadié' published six volumes of poetry several of which were written in the 1950s. Many of the poems he wrote at the time had a patriotic, nationalistic flavor inspired by the political events of the day. "Dry Your Tears, Afrika!," originally written in 1956, falls into this group. The poem reads in part, "We have drunk of ill fortune and of glory/And our senses are now opened/to the *splendor* of your beauty/to the smell of your forests/to the charm of your waters/to the clearness of your skies/to the *caress* of your sun/And to the charm of your *foliage* pearly by the *dew*." Translated from French into English, the poem was included in an anthology entitled *3000 Years of Black Poetry*; Dadié also wrote several novels and short stories. Apart from this, Dadié's best-known works in the West may be his plays; dating from all phases of his career, they range from popular farces, to sharp satires of both Western manners and African political excesses, to full-blown historical tragedies that are uniquely African in their fusion of spoken word, dance, pantomime, and music.

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### 13.6 INTRODUCTION "I THANK YOU GOD"

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In the exquisite poem Dadie deals with the theme of Negritude, which in general begins with the recognition and the consciousness of blackness, then proceeds to an acceptance in which blackness is praised; the qualities of blacks are elaborated and a heritage is created. Negritude is neither racialism nor self-negation. Yet it is not just affirmation; it is rooting oneself in oneself, and is self-confirmation: confirmation of one's *being*. This theme is beautifully dealt with in the memorable poem "I Thank You God.

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#### 13.6.1 EXPLANATION

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Deification of Africa is a fit topic for many African poets. Perhaps this is their reaction to the self-glorification and the civilizing zeal of the imperial powers of Europe. Bernard Dadie's poem attains special significance viewed in that light. He says in a poem entitled "I Thank You God",

I thank you God for creating me black.  
White is the colour for special occasions  
Black the colour for every day  
And I have carried the World since the dawn of time  
And my laugh over the World, through the night creates  
The Day.

In this poem, Dadie voices his deep sense of gratitude to God for creating him black. He exhorts his people to take pride in the color of their skin, which he feels is the color for the every day, which brings along happiness. As happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude, he advises men to master the hardest arithmetic, which enables him to count his blessings, by thanking God for making him what he calls "porter of all sorrows".

Realizing that the deepest craving of human nature is the need to be appreciated Bernard Dadie's eulogizes the strength of the Blacks to endure through the telling phrase "porter of sorrows" which means the bearer of sorrows. (It also means to carry). Dadie alludes first to Atlas, who continues to be a commonly used icon in western culture as a symbol of strength or stoic endurance. He is often shown kneeling on one knee while supporting an enormous round globe on his back and shoulders.

Dadie next refers to the dark complexion of the Blacks and says they wear the Centaur's hide. The centaur is a mythological creature whose body consists of the head and chest of a man and the body and legs of a horse. In Greek mythology, the centaurs are a race of creatures composed of part human and part horse. This half-human and half-animal composition has led many writers to treat them as liminal beings, caught between the two natures, embodied in contrasted myths, and as the embodiment of untamed nature. Thus, he hints at the untamed nature of

the blacks as well as their immense strength. He states that he wears “the Centaur’s hide”. It must be remembered that the centaurs are the antithesis of the knight and the horseman. Instead of mastering or taming their instincts, these centaurs are ruled by them. They symbolize violent lust, adultery, brutality, vengefulness, heretics, and the Devil. By comparing the black’s skin to Centaur’s hide he implies the struggle within each heart between good and evil, moderation and excess, passion and propriety, forgiveness and retaliation, belief and unbelief, god and beast.

Dadie strives to modernize the ancient pagan symbolism with modern understanding, the combination of the spiritual and the animal natures in the centaur-archer causes this image to become a representation of the eternal struggle of man against evil. Here Dadie implies that the Blacks have both good as well as bad qualities. He further asserts that they have been entrusted with the formidable task of carrying the load of the world since the first morning and the first evening.

In addition to this, he informs the readers that white is the color for special occasions alone while black is a color that is used every day. He seems to be implying that the notion of judging people on the basis on the color of their skin is wrong. His views on Appearances are also very interesting and didactic. Dadie compares the color of the skin to that of clothes that are worn and in this way, he hints at the superficiality in judging people based on their complexion.

He feels glad to acknowledge that he is proud of the shape of his head, which has been made such as to be able to carry the weight of the world with ease. He feels a deep sense of contentment with the shape of his nose too, which can sniff the wind. He shows his heartfelt pleasure with the shape of his legs that are well equipped to run all the races of the world. He alludes to an athlete who is strong and is “Ready to run all the heats” which are preliminary races in which the winner advances to a more important race. He compares life indirectly to a series of races in which one race leads to another. And depending on the individual motivation or personal ambition, it could be a race for fortune, a race for fame, a race for excellence, or a race for affection or a combination of any of these. The truth is, in every race there will always be someone who would get to the finish line ahead of the pack. He feels elated to announce that the Blacks due to the shape of their legs have a better chance to run faster.

Dadie gives details about the ill fortunes that Africans had. In “I Thank You God”, he responds to the harshness of battles and wars by saying “Thirty-six swords have pierced my heart”, a poignant declaration of the agonizing past of the Africans. Dadie’s statement about his body being burnt several times hints at the cruel treatment meted out to the Africans. Here it is pertinent to mention that “Fire” since time immemorial has been known to purify the body with the flames of destruction; however, it is also capable of the renewal of life. Next Dadie hints at the stark reality of the gruesome battles fought in which even the snow was reddened by blood but he feels the sacrifices of the blacks have not been in vain as the

blood “ at every dawn has reddened all nature”. The sacrifice he believes heralds the sun at the beginning of each new day.

The very symbol of dawn traditionally brings with it the hope and freshness of a new day. Despite the symbolic hope and freshness of a new day, the images of the “swords”, “fires” and “cavalries” hint at the profound reality of a landscape flecked with causalities and devastation. Dadie presents a raw portrait of the soldiers and the war in which their blood has painted the snow red, which adds greatly to the pathos in the poem. Dadie also does a fantastic job of setting a gloomy tone through his use of diction. He describes anguish and distress, “Thirty-six swords have pierced my heart/ thirty-six fires have burnt my body”.

How can one help but be affected by such honest declarations ?

Dadie announces he has no regrets at having to carry the world and to bear the responsibilities of the world. He makes an emphatic declaration that he is glad of the shape of his arms that carry the formidable loads of responsibilities of the world as well as the thickness of his lips. The idea now is to take pride in Africa and start over on a brand new way of life with the confidence that throbs every black’s heart. The poet thus issues a stream of declarations in a vibrant dramatic manner, thereby giving the poem a dramatic tone. This dramatic tone inheres in the different moods, now of gratitude, now of pathos, and now of elation and confidence.

Although he does not use exaggerated descriptive language in this poem that he uses in his other works, he attempts to get across to the reader that Africans should be immensely grateful. The poem conveys to a certain extent the appeal that Africans possess, and it makes people take pride in what they are. For this purpose, he uses repetition of words and ideas in his poems. Repetition is used to make the main ideas solidify in the audiences mind and in doing so make them also feel the same way. For example in this poem, he repeats, “I Thank You God for Creating Me Black”. In the context of the sentence, he is saying that he has always been proud to be black and he always will be. Dadie asserts that blacks have carried the world since the “dawn of time” and their laugh and glee creates the Day.

Through this poem, Bernard Dadie does an exemplary job of furthering the philosophies of the Negritude movement. He brings into view the atrocities that Africans were put through as well as the beauty in which they should take pride. Here it is to be remembered that although his poems were not the only catalysts in starting the civil rights movements of the future, they played an integral part in shaping the attitudes that Africans have today about their freedom and their role in this world. In this poem, he does a wonderful job of portraying the agonies of the blacks. He talks of the responsibilities that they have to shoulder and the burden they have to carry with deep understanding.

In this poem, the poet uses the first person pronoun ‘I’ and describes the Africans,



as people who really need to understand their own identity, and inculcate a tremendous pride in themselves. In the end, he concludes that although the Africans are different in physical appearance from the other races, they have strength and qualities that help them not only to survive the stark realities of life, but also to sustain the world.

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### 13.6.2 GLOSSARY

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*porter* : a person employed to carry luggage and supplies  
*centaur* : mythical creatures, half-horse half-human.  
*hide* : dried skin  
*snuff* : smell  
*heats* : race

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### 13.6.3 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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- 1 Explain the phrase “Centaur’s hide”.
- 2 What does the poet mean by “heats of the world”?
- 3 What is the symbolic meaning attached to “color used for special occasions”?
- 4 Explain the image “Porter of all sorrows”?
- 5 Recall a few things that give rise to a feeling of deep contentment in the poet.

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### 13.7 LET US SUM UP

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Postcolonial African poets have made an enormous contribution to world literature. The language of poetry, for African poets like Richard Nturu and Bernard Dadie, is a powerful medium through which they conveyed to the world audience, not only their despairs and hopes, the enthusiasm and empathy, the thrill of joy and the stab of pain but also a nation’s history as it moved from freedom to slavery, from slavery to revolution, from revolution to independence and from independence to tasks of reconstruction which further involve situations of failure and disillusion.

After this brief glance at African poetry, we realize that it is not simply an offshoot of British literary tradition. Despite the many disadvantages such as a scarred past, colonial trauma, expression in a foreign medium, inability to travel abroad, unstable economic and political state of affairs in their respective nations, lack of educational opportunities, the African poet has effortless creative capacity. It is an enriching combination of rich oral literature, native experience and imported tradition of writing in English that made African poetry a tremendous success both at home and abroad. The ‘Black Orpheus’ (African Poets) is no longer an unknown or an unwanted quantity but a fascinating and often enviable and beneficent literary marvel from what was ignorantly termed as the ‘dark continent’.

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**13.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

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- 1 Write a brief note on the significance of the title of the poem, "I Thank You God".
- 2 What do you understand by term "Negritude"? Illustrated from the poems you have read.
- 3 Deification of Africa is a fit topic for many African poets. How does Dadie deal with this theme in the poem?
- 4 Comment on the pathos in the poem.
- 5 The poem is truly a work of a postcolonial poet. Comment.
- 6 Write a critical appreciation of the poem "The Shapes of Fear", commenting upon the imagery used.
- 7 Write a critical appreciation of the poem "I Thank You God", commenting upon its imagery.

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**13.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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1. Ian Adam, and Helen Tiffin., eds. *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.
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## **UNIT 14 : PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN : KAMALA DAS AND SHIV K. KUMAR'S POEMS**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 14.0 Objectives**
- 14.1 Introduction**
- 14.2 About the Age**
- 14.3 About the Author : Kamala Das**
- 14.4 Introduction to the Text : Spoiling the Name**
  - 14.4.1 Detailed Explanation**
  - 14.4.2 Glossary**
- 14.5 Self Assessment Questions**
- 14.6 About the Poet: Shiv K. Kumar**
- 14.7 Introduction: Indian women**
  - 14.7.1 Detailed Explanation**
  - 14.7.2 Glossary**
- 14.8 Self Assessment Questions**
- 14.9 Let Us Sum Up**
- 14.10 Unit End Questions**
- 14.11 Suggested Readings**

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### **14.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The present unit aims to engage you in a dialogue on the intercultural encounters inevitable in the reading and analysis of Postcolonial Indian Literature. The unit will prove an exciting journey to and through the thinking of the Indian people as you hear, and read the poems and the uttering of postcolonial Indian poets. This unit will have two phases: The first will introduce Kamala Das and her poem, and the second will focus on the poetry of Shiv K. Kumar. The objective is to motivate you and to elicit your enthusiasm about poetic language, allowing you to become acquainted with some dimensions of English Indian poets, helping you to focus on the new traits in modern English poetry, such as feminism, identity, and social issues.

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### **14.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The present unit deals with two major poems of Kamala Das and Shiv K. Kumar. The poems under discussion have some special traits, which distinguish them from other poems. One of the most significant traits is the uncanny honesty extended to

the exploration of Indian themes. In her poem “Spoiling the Name” from *Summer in Calcutta*, the narrator says, “I have a name, had it for thirty/ Years, chosen by someone else/ For convenience” mocking at the false significance generally attached to words and abstractions, including names which in a woman’s case are borrowed one. On the other hand, Shiv K. Kumar goes through life like a lens-man, capturing images that ordinary people fail to see. There is no subject that lies beyond the ambit of their scrutiny — it could be a question pertaining to identity, or the Indian women sitting beside a well. A small village, the dusty city streets or even an evening can stir their conscience to erupt into poetry. These Indian poets consistently refuse to accept their silence. In their poems the feelings of longing and loss are not confined to a private misery. They are invited into the public sphere and acknowledged. These poems are interesting as, the unmistakable trends of English Indian poetry are clearly discernible in them as a detailed discussion will reveal.

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## 14.2 ABOUT THE AGE

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Indian English Literature (IEL) refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is frequently referred to as **Indo-Anglian** literature. (*Indo-Anglian* is a specific term in the sole context of writing that should not be confused with the term *Anglo-Indian*). As a category, this production comes under the broader realm of postcolonial literature— the production from previously colonized countries such as India. Dom Moraes, winner of the Hawthornden Prize, for his first book of poems “A Beginning” and Nissim Ezekiel, who came from India’s tiny Bene Israel Jewish community, have created a voice and place for Indian poets writing in English and championed their work. Their contemporaries in Indian English poetry were Jayanta Mahapatra, Gieve Patel, A. K. Ramanujan, Rajagopal Parthasarathy, Keki Daruwalla, Adil Jussawala, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Eunice De Souza, Kersi Katrak, P. Lal, Kamala Das and Shiv K. Kumar among several others.

A major aspect of this period is the rather violent-like, unbuffered contact or clash of cultures as an inevitable result of former colonial times. This contradiction of two clashing cultures and the wide scale of problems resulting from it must be regarded as a major theme. For centuries, the colonial suppressor often had been forcing his civilized values on the natives. But when the native population finally gained independence, the colonial relics were still omnipresent, deeply integrated in the natives’ minds as well as resisted by them. Postcolonial English literature thus deals with conflicts of identity and cultural belonging. As Colonial powers colonized countries like India, they destroyed and overlaid native tradition and culture, continuously replacing them with their own, which lead to conflict when countries became independent. As generations had lived under the power of colonial

rulers, they had more or less adopted their Western tradition and culture. The challenge for these countries was to find an individual way of proceeding to call their own. They could not get rid of the Western way of life from one day to the other; they could not manage to create a completely new one either. This paradox seems to be what postcolonial literature deals with. The main target of postcolonial Indian poets remains the same: To review and to deconstruct one-sided, worn-out attitudes and to reveal the contemporary Indian situation.

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### 14.3 ABOUT THE AUTHOR : KAMALADAS

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(Has also written under the pseudonyms Madhavikutty and Kamala Suraiyya) Indian poet, short story writer, novelist, playwright, essayist, nonfiction writer, children's writer, and autobiographer.

Das is one of the best-known contemporary bilingual Indian women writers. Writing in two languages, English and Malayalam, Das has authored many autobiographical works and novels, several well-received collections of poetry in English, numerous volumes of short stories, and essays on a broad spectrum of subjects. Since the publication of her first collection of poetry, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), Das has been considered an important voice of her generation who exemplifies a break from the past by writing in a distinctly Indian persona rather than adopting the techniques of the English modernists. Das's poems are known for their unflinchingly honest explorations of the self and female sexuality, urban life, women's roles in traditional Indian society, issues of postcolonial identity, and the political and personal struggles of marginalized people. She has received many awards and honors, including the Sahitya Akademi Award for her poetry in English (1985). In 1984, she was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Das published six volumes of poetry between 1965 and 1985. Drawing upon religious and domestic imagery to explore a sense of identity, Das tells of intensely personal experiences, including her growth into womanhood, her unsuccessful quest for love in and outside of marriage, and her life in matrilineal rural South India after inheriting her ancestral home. Since the publication of *Summer in Calcutta*, Das has been a controversial figure, known for her unusual imagery and candor.

Das's poetry has been praised for its fierce originality, bold images, and intensely personal voice. Das has been called a "confessional" poet. Undeniably, Das is an important figure whose bold and honest voice has re-energized Indian writing in English.

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### 14.4 INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

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The poem "Spoiling the Name" first appeared in the *Summer in Calcutta*, the first poetry collection of Kamala Das. In the poem, she mocks at the significance

attached to words and figuratively to abstractions. A name for her is a mere abstraction and in a woman's cases even a borrowed one from her husband. It is nothing but a weight and a burden, as all abstractions are. In this poem, Kamala Das questions what's in a name? The significance of a name is found in its ability to confer affluence and reputation. If one has a famous last name, they are treated with respect and honor. If they have a last name that has been associated with ill repute, they will be disrespected and dishonored. But typically we use names as mere designators to distinguish one person from another. They do not have much significance to us, and any meaning attached to that name is either unknown to the bearer of that name, or the bearer is not concerned with such trivialities. This attitude towards names is questioned by Das.

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#### 14.4.1 DETAILED EXPLANATION

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Kamala Das feels her name is not a mystical formula. This becomes evident when she says that she has a name and had has it for thirty years in a slightly disparaging tone. Although a name can represent a personal or a social identity, signify a familial or a social relationship and confer social and professional status for her it is not significant or rather, it is immaterial. She states that she has had a name for the past thirty years. Someone else chose this name according to Kamala Das for her. The purpose of giving her a name was just the convenience of the people around her. She asserts that she is repeatedly told not to spoil her name. She is told that she should not damage or ruin her name in such a way that a quality such as the worth of the name is damaged. She feels like laughing at this advice. Although she knows, she has to live a life but she feels a nameless corpuscle in her blood stream also has a life to be lived and it exists without a name. The blood corpuscle does not have a name, it is anonymous and is just a small independent cell especially one in the blood or lymph, but still it can live independently. This fact compels Kamala Das to query the worth of her name in leading a life as she feels she has no independent existence.

Das feels the name is a burden as she questions why should her name, despite being very sweet sounding, enter the room where she has gone to meet a man. She feels that there is no need for the name as she meets him as a woman not as a name, as he gives herself nothing but himself. He does not call her by any name.

Kamala Das feels her name is quite insignificant when she walks the city's dusty streets on afternoons in search of old books, antiques or just in search for new thrills, which she feels might come her way. She wanders in search of Antiques, which are collectible old items or she looks for old books when she roams the dusty and dirty streets of the city. She is bored of her life and looks for some excitement and pleasure to kill the boredom of her day-to-day existence.

Das next questions why she should have to remember her name always and to bear it and carry it like a burden. She thinks that her name is sweet sounding but

still a load and she dislikes it because she feels it has been attached to her like a medal. She asserts that a medal is given to a winner when he proves he deserves it but unlike the winner of a medal, she feels she doesn't need it as she does not deserve it. She feels that the name has been conferred to her like an undeserving medal or award. She says she is unworthy of receiving benefits or awards in the form of a name. She thinks she had to acquire or obtain through efforts what has been pinned on to her unnecessarily. Kamala Das in this poem implies that a name must not be a label, or a tool to distinguish one person from another; a person's name must be viewed as equivalent to the person himself. A person's name must signify the person's worth, character, reputation, authority, will, and ownership.

The concluding stanza sums up her sincere conviction that the name is a useless burden she is being asked to carry. She feels she is being asked to do a silly thing when she is told to carry the name she ironically labels as a gift. Her name has become a heavy burden like a corpse and she is unable to bear the weight of her name and it is a heavy responsibility she feels unable to cope up with. She thinks the unbearable load makes her totter and she might ultimately fall under the load. She compares her name to a dead body, which is so heavy that it makes her walk unsteadily and wobble. Her greatest fear is that she might eventually succumb underneath the burden and fall. She loves her life more than anything else but her name and other false assumptions have made her life unbearable to such an extent that she feels she might not be able to cope up, as she fears her inability to carry the load.

The poem adequately shows Kamala Das's craftsmanship despite its rhetorical tone. Being a poet of moods, she attempts to capture a particular mood resultant from the awareness that names and their significance is nothing but a delusion. She shows her felicitous handling of the theme by an honest depiction of her true feeling, creating in her reader's minds the impression that her poetry is "as honest, it is as human, as she is." Being a confessional poet, she speaks lyrically about her name, one which she has had for the last thirty years and which was given to her just because of convenience. The stress on the purpose behind the name conferred to her shows that she feels it has nothing to do with love and affection on the part of her parents but was just a means to distinguish her from others. Kamala Das states that when exhorted not to spoil her name she feels an irresistible desire to laugh because she is well aware that she has to live with the name bestowed upon her just as each corpuscle in her bloodstream has a life to be lived. What makes the assertion ironical is that corpuscles are nameless and still survive and have their own life to be lived.

This search ends in alienation for Kamala Das. Religion, social and cultural alienation lead to a crisis of identity, which is compounded by the larger- and in many ways oppressive—awareness of the modern world, in general in which everything seems to conspire against her sensitive mind's search for the fullness of being. Finally

reducing it to the appalling conviction that she might not be able to carry the unbearable load and “Fall”. The Fall signifies sin of yielding to temptation, and the subsequent loss of grace. She is implying the loss of status, reputation, or a moral lapse. The fall symbolizes her inner turmoil by drawing parallels between their repression and the longing. One is reminded that the symbolic history of fall begins with nearly every culture’s creation story. Eden, as it is called in Christian theology, was a paradise created to house one man and one woman, perfect and without sin. Their souls untarnished, they were able to live in utopia until their inevitable fall, after which the garden became their veritable enemy. No longer were they able to cull food from it easily or to use it as they had before. Their sin had separated their souls, and therefore their entire selves from the garden. Kamala Das seems to be implying her fears of falling from the stature and the status she deserves as a result of her wrong doings.

The poem thus deals with the split self. The term split-self was first given significance for women’s poetry in Florence Howe’s Introduction to “No More Masks”. It describes an opposition women feel between essential aspects of the self am between what is socially prescribed on the basis of gender, between what a woman feels she *should be* and what she feels she is. Kamala Das has written this poem with the intention to explore this division. The dilemma imposed by the need or futility of having a name tagged to her-self becomes a compelling account of the presence of split. Kamala Das speaks out her heart on her own premises. She redefines herself and liberates herself both as a woman and as a poet when she claims there is no need for the name chosen by others, as she would rather like to have one she deserves. She struggles to cope with her problems and dilemmas laughing at the injunction that she must not spoil her name. She does not attempt to intellectualize nor does she attempt to spiritualize the condition. She makes a discovery of the futility of her name and narrates her experiences vividly and passionately. She rejects masks and roles and refuses to accept the limitations imposed by the society.

Kamala Das’s poetry originates from a situation, which functions like a poetic nucleus. An analysis of her poem reveal that the woman persona of her poems represents her ‘own self’ fluctuating between both past (thirty years) and present a time when “new thrill that might come my way”, resulting in deep sense of crisis. Kamala Das seems to find no way out and knows that there can be no easy solution. Her sense of identity is so fragile that she thinks there is no room for her name when she goes to meet the man who has nothing to offer her other than his self. One recalls how in another poem ‘An Introduction’ she proclaims “[...] I am sinner, I am saint, I am the beloved, and the Betrayed. I have no joys, which are not yours, no Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.”

Kamala Das protests against the marginalization of women and social injustices and communicates a powerful female sensibility in her poem. Her self-assertion is



clear in when she states that the man whom she meets in private hours calls her “By no name”. She craves for artistic and personal freedom of expression in the matters of language, form, subject and style: “Why should I remember or hear / That sweet-sounding name”. As the name is a kind of cage which makes one unable to express true emotions and feelings, one needs to choose a language for expression for self and in this way one’s own choice of words for self expression and self attainment. Naturally, there is rising tone of depression, frustration and anger against any control or restriction imposed on her. She utters firmly and confidently that she does not have to carry the name “pinned to/Me, a medal, undeservingly/ Gained at a moment when, all of/Me is ablaze with life?” Her claims to own a personal name of her own choice shows her self assertion of human right to speak in the language of her own choice, in her own natural voice.

Kamala Das uses English unselfconsciously, unaffectedly and naturally without the concern for correctness and precision, which characterized earlier modern verse and rhythm. Her assertion of her individual-self, her independent-self and her integral-self and her refusal to be weak, passive, and self-less, self-denying, sacrificing and compliant angel under a masculine value system becomes evident by her usage of the personal pronoun “I”. The use of the first person pronouns ‘I’ ten times and ‘me’ six times in comparison to the use of the second person pronouns only twice marks a strong note of self-assertion in her poem.

She documents the places she visits as she talks about the “the city’s dusty/Streets, where on afternoons/ I walk, looking for old books, antiques,/And new thrills”. She brings a case of locality to her poems. There are the rooms in which she lives, the homes she has left, and streets in which she searches for antiques. Here it is pertinent to mention that Das’s poem assumes location, and creates space by being set in situations rather than by observing or alluding to the environment.

A thought provoking phrase in the poem is her desire for “thrills”, against the nauseating awareness of the atmosphere of the “dusty streets”. Could it be that she is dissatisfied by her life and in search for new thrills and adventure or could it be a search for true love? Kamala Das articulated “the mute whispers at the core of womanhood” and “the endless female hungers”. Here she wanders in the dusty streets as if she was looking for something. In the poem too she is simply “every woman who seeks love” as she meets the man she gives her nothing but himself.” She becomes the supporter of women who have been oppressed and trampled for centuries. She crosses the patriarchal stronghold and tells boldly about her rampage into the city streets in search for thrills. Das once said, “I always wanted love, and if you don’t get it within your home, you stray a little”(Warrior interview). Though some might label Das as “a feminist” for her candor in dealing with women’s needs and desires, Das “has never tried to identify herself with any particular version of feminist activism”. Das’s views can be characterized as “a gut response,” a reaction that, like her poetry, is unfettered by other’s notions of right and wrong.

Kamala Das refers to the time she was born and was ablaze with life and vitality. At that time the name was given to her but now this has turned into an unwelcome burden as she will have to carry the name until she dies. The sharp contrast of the time when she was full of life and the corpse provoke a strong response from the readers. The reference to “corpse” adds pessimism to the poem and through the despairing rhythmical position of “I who love / This gift of life more than all!” which concludes the poem Das evokes a sharp response from her readers. Kamala Das also refers to the Indian custom of carrying the corpse on the shoulders for the final rite to be performed as such depicting Indian customs and traditions in her poem.

Alliteration is one of the poet’s most important sound techniques. It makes particular words stand out. It also connects the words to be emphasized such as Kamala Das uses the sweet phrase “sweet-sounding” twice in the poem. The use of very short lines is also functional: every word becomes important and emphatic.

Repetition is also found in her poem. She repeats the words "to be lived". The use of repetition heightens the emotional impact of a piece and adds to the irony in the poem. The poem has a dramatic quality and like Browning’s women, her persona sees herself in different situations against a clearly visualized scene and setting. The intensity of her lyrical utterance has a bold and ruthless honesty tearing passionately at the conventional attitudes to reveal the quintessential woman within who feels the futility of several things like a name tagged as a medal to her with vehemence.

In a nutshell, names and their usage reflect societal norms and institutions. In her feminist utopia, Kamala Das would like to use the act of naming as a social instrument to signify both social identity and community (given-name), individuality (descriptive-name) and progressivism (unique compound-names), with the desire to critique patriarchy, the nuclear family and the nature of identity and to seek to create a more humane and just society for all.

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#### 14.4.2 GLOSSARY

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<i>convenience</i>	: quality of being convenient: useful, or of increasing comfort,
<i>spoil</i>	: to damage or ruin something in such a way that a quality such as worth, beauty, or usefulness is diminished
<i>nameless</i>	: lacking name, anonymous
<i>corpuscle</i>	: a small independent cell especially one in the blood or lymph
<i>private</i>	: personal, secret or restricted
<i>antiques</i>	: collectible old items
<i>thrills</i>	: excitement, pleasure

<i>pinned</i>	: fasten something with pin: to fasten, attach, or secure something with a pin
<i>gained</i>	: acquire or obtain through efforts
<i>ablaze</i>	: burning strongly
<i>totter</i>	: walk unsteadily, wobble

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#### 4.5 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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- 1 Explain the lines:  
I have a name, had it for thirty  
Years, chosen by someone else  
For convenience
- 2 What does the phrase “each nameless corpuscle” signify?
- 3 Explain the phrase “Pinned to me, a medal, undeservingly”.
- 4 What is the poet’s attitude towards “the sweet sounding name”?
- 5 Try to explain what Kamala Das thinks about her relationship with the man and her name.
- 6 Does the poet agree with the significance attached to names and abstractions?
- 7 Enlist the images and symbols used in the poem.

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#### 4.6 ABOUT THE POET : SHIV K. KUMAR-1921

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Literary critic, professor, poet, novelist, short story writer, playwright and translator, Prof. Shiv K. Kumar has authored numerous works of literary criticism (published in the USA and the UK) besides five novels, two collections of short stories, eight collections of poems, plays and a translation of Faiz Ahmed Faiz poetry. In 1978, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and in 1987 he received the Sahitya Akademi (National Academy of Letters) award for his collection of poems *Trapfalls in the Sky*. In 2001, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan for his contribution to literature. Notable among his work are *Articulate Silences* (1970), *Cobwebs in the Sun* (1971), *The Last Wedding Anniversary* (1975), *The Bone’s Prayer* (1979), and *Subterfuges* (1976). Kumar gives a distinct touch to Indian sensibility. A quote from him neatly sums up his recurring theme. “In view of my extensive travelling in the West, I seem to be constantly returning to the theme of cultural interaction. I feel, unconsciously, I guess, that with me contrast is almost a mode of perception. It is this awareness that compels me to recapture my days in New York as a kind of life-in-death.” A remarkable and welcome feature of his work is the pervasive ironic humor. This is clearly discernable

in “Indian Women” too where he captures the plight of Indian women in expectation in a male dominated society.

Kumar’s poetry has been praised for its originality, bold images, and tendency to freeze the moments. Scholars have found powerful feminist images in his poetry, focusing on contemporary reality, love, and the roles women are expected to adhere to in traditional Indian society. Thus he deals with a wide variety of subjects ranging from personal loss and to impersonal and objective observation of contemporary life. Critics have praised his compelling images and original voice. Kumar deals with national and international themes in his poetry with an open mind. Poverty, injustice, and boredom of contemporary life are brought within the purview of his poem. Even “Indian women” shows this quality. One perceives the silent suffering of women in their personal life. Kumar does not glorify tradition, on the other hand, he lays emphasis on reality. In his poems, landscape becomes the locale and he writes animatedly about it. The landscape is not there merely to set the scene but primarily to lead to an illumination. The landscape is integrated with life. The humanist in him is clearly perceptible, he is a learned poet and undeniably one of the most renowned postcolonial Indian writers.

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#### **14.7 INTRODUCTION: INDIAN WOMEN**

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In this exquisite poem, taken from the anthology *Cobwebs in the Sun*, Shiv K. Kumar portrays the rural life, which has been a central and defining aspect of India; the term “rural life” broadly describes the lifestyle of residents of nonurban areas, such as villages, small towns and country areas. Shiv K. Kumar in the poem "Indian Women" brings the rural life of Indian women to life with a few deft strokes.

Traditionally a “good woman” is always synonymous with a good wife and a good wife must be chaste, faithful and virtuous. In the patriarchal pattern of society, authority emanates from male in the family. In this male dominated society, the inflated male tends to neglect the female. This male dominance in life is a natural phenomenon in patriarchal Indian villages and the consequent relegation of the women to secondary position might have prompted Shiv K. Kumar to focus on the issue of identity of those who are doomed to remain marginalized. The poet shows the helpless suffering of the rural women and takes up a feminist issue as the theme of the poem. Women have a stereotypical role to play that is the silent suffering, sacrificial role. Their silent agony finds expression in the “moisture in their eye”. The portrayal shows Kumar’s attitude towards the traditional roles played by these women.

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##### **14.7.1 DETAILED EXPLANATION**

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Kumar in Indian Women calls Indian continent “triple-baked” which means baked three times in a row. The first turning out the 'White' man, the second the 'Black'

and the third the 'brown'. In the poem, it is a phrase innovatively used for the third world countries. He states that women do not design an image of angry eyebrows on the mud walls when they are decorating their homes, as that would be highly inauspicious. He implies that they show no sign of anger or wrath as they are always told to repress their true feelings. This is an Indian tradition of fortitude and gratitude. He again commemorates their patience and forbearance, when they sit on the mouth of the village well like the empty pitchers they are carrying. They have to wait for a long time to get water but they sit there with great deal of patience and never complain. He implies that they are instilling hope when they pleat their hair, which are very long. He feels they braid and weave together strips or strands of hair they are not only plaiting hair but also are braiding hope. They look deep into the water of the well, which acts like a mirror reflecting their image. They can see the moisture in their eyes.

Despite all the sorrow and pathos in their lives, they make designs on the sand and draw the zodiac on the floor. The zodiac is astrologically significant part of sky. It is a chart linking twelve constellations to twelve divisions of the year, used as an astrologer's main tool for analyzing character and predicting the future. The poet implies that the women are ironically caught in a set of things or a sequence of events that repeats itself cyclically. Moreover, the fact that they are doodling the drawing shows that they are scribble drawings or designs and are making them aimlessly or absent-mindedly, probably while waiting for the men to return. They guard their purity and wait patiently for the men to return. They make tattoos on their thighs and guard them. The women wait late until night when even the shadows roll up their contours and are no longer visible. Thus, they wait until darkness descends and the shadows are no longer seen.

Being a postcolonial Indian English poet he refers to the folk paintings of India, which have enriched our art heritage. The poem relates the folk paintings to the traditions. These paintings are usually bright and simple, well adapted to their purpose, to cheer up the cottages. The women seem to have sought relief in the etching of eyebrows on the mud walls. Referring to the art he states that the women folk resist from etching angry eyebrow on the wall, as their aim is to protect the home and hearth as well as to welcome gods into the house. The depiction of anger or wrath in any form may be regarded as going against the auspicious tradition. On the mud walls only auspicious diagrams are drawn. Thus, he implies that women have to repress their emotions, passions and anger and have to put on a happy face. The triple-baked continent is a reference to the Third World, of which India is a part. The women of the village, the author seems to suggest, are patient, and he likens them to those big mud or brass or copper vessels left by the side of the village well. These rural women are as patient as the earth itself, and as enduring as the great rivers of the land.

The image of the village women pleating hope in each braid is especially evocative

of the timeless quality of life in rural India, and especially the stoic acceptance of the women. What a perfect picture we get from the image of the simple beauty of the long hair. The reference to the Mississippi brings to the mind the flowing waters of a river.

A variety of hairstyles come to the mind, when Shiv K Kumar refers to the braided hair of rural women. In Mississippi, mature women generally wear their hair brushed back from the forehead and tied or fastened with a comb at the back of the neck, while younger women and girls wear theirs parted in the middle and falling loose over the shoulders, a tradition also found in India. Younger women and girls in both places sometimes wear two braids, probably a reflection of sentiments. Thus, not only does a reference to Mississippi long hair bring to mind the image of the second longest river with its rippling waters, it also alludes to the women folk of the place, thereby generalizing the particular and expanding the whole experience and including the women of other places into the scene.

The poet here makes us see the women of rural India as creatures of the earth, loyal only to her family and to the men. We can almost see her, hear her. Here, we see a village woman though from a distance, but this woman acquires an immediate presence—flesh and blood and has all the desires that are felt in the hearts of any ordinary woman such as the desire to look beautiful for her man. Thus, she looks deep into the waters, which here take the form of a mirror, reflecting her image. The image is very moving, as the reflection also shows the moisture in their eyes. Those lines are highly evocative of the mood of a painful existence, as the women are compelled to live at the margins. The women see their reflection in the water that acts as a mirror. As such the Indian women become the possessor of a magical “water mirror,” a mirror whose surface is water, which portrays a true image of reality.

Shiv K. Kumar refers to the art of floor painting “Rangoli” when he mentions “With Zodiac doodling on the sands.” Art in India was a form of worship. It was never art for art’s sake. Its practice (sadhana) was a part of a spiritual process. The belief that decorating the floor on auspicious occasions will create a feeling of well-being seems to be at work behind the practice of the art. It is to be remembered that these paintings are also signs of welcome. The zodiac signs are common themes for floor painting. Layered with symbolism is the poem as Kumar commemorates the various practices of Indian women, especially as they are drawn aimlessly or absent-mindedly, as signified by the word “doodling”. The temporary nature of the artifact so created was also something that fitted in well with Hindu notions of Impermanence. After so much effort and creative ability brings forth a beautiful object it is wiped out in no time, and in this way it becomes an enduring metaphor for life. Moreover, Kumar refers to the zodiacs that are made on the sands implying the effect of the planetary forces, which govern human energy and emotional cycles. Ironically, the very same zodiacs control the destiny

of the people who are helpless in front of their immense power. Nevertheless, the art made by the women is a thing of beauty— imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete; it is a beauty of things— modest and humble. Kumar seems to be saying that impermanence is the nature of the human condition, a truth that the women realize with moist eyes.

Kumar next refers to the ancient tradition of tattooing as which is widely practiced among the womenfolk. They treat the tattoo marks as worthy of social importance. For the womenfolk the desire to attain status in their respective communities is an anthropomorphic concern. Tattooing serves as an expression to derive satisfaction through the symbolic confirmation of their group codes. Tattooing gives her a feeling of security. Women are used to thick tattooing on visible parts of their bodies. Here Shiv K. Kumar talks about tattoos on the thighs, thereby giving the image a slightly different meaning, as these tattoos are to be guarded from strangers. Thus, the women guard themselves until their men return way into the night. The tattoos become a symbol of sanctity and purity. Tattoo imagery is filled with good luck symbols and the Indian women use it with the underlying desire to find luck and good fortune.

The image of the night fall as the shadows roll up their curved outlines and are gone beyond the hill is very vivid and bring to the mind the Indian nightfall. Kumar implies that the Indian women are waiting for their men's return, yet no one takes any notice of them for that is their "karma" and women must attend to themselves, to their own salvation, to look after themselves properly. On a world scale, the "shadows roll up their contours" offers the greatest symbolism of the shadow creating vast shadows over sections of the earth. It is as if Kumar is saying that it is the rolling of the shadows beyond the hills was caused by the universal suffering of the female sex as they wait patiently for the men to return.

"Indian Women" reveals Kumar's commitment as a postcolonial poet. India lies in her villages, said Gandhi and rightly so, and the poem is evocative of the spirit of true India. He makes an effort to evoke a typical Indian atmosphere by describing the village folk, their mundane life and thus recreates an actual scene very close to reality. This attempts to build a lively atmosphere out of the surroundings and evoke a scene of "nativism" which is part and parcel of the strategy of post colonial poet. The postcolonial writers seek to describe the indigenous culture and thereby assert their nationality that is both lovable and enduring. Kumar gives a distinct touch to Indian sensibility and moral values. Here he tries to assimilate the abstract qualities found in rural India like patience and perseverance and hope with a sense of detachment and objectivity. As a postcolonial poet, he attempts to come to terms with contemporary reality. The picture of the village life with all its boredom and ennui is brought to the fore by mentioning that they are like "empty pitchers". To read the poem is to know the silent patience of the women, "plaiting hope in each braid" and it is to see it inside out. Kumar's treatment of love in terms of

elements of Indian landscape has the poetic reconciliation of the spirit and the country. He incorporates the heat (triple-baked), the mud walls, the well, the water, the sands, hills along with the sense of deprivation into the texture of his mood. Images of rural India are handled with consummate skill and keenness of intellect in his poem. He gives vent to the deep lying desires and passions of the Indian women who guard their tattooed thighs with resignation. Here it is pertinent to emphasize that his poetry as already mentioned is image oriented, falls into the category of “oblique poetry”, in contrast to “direct poetry” which yields meaning at the surface level. His poem makes sense at the deep level and irony becomes an important mode in the poem as women wait till “even the shadows roll up their contours”.

Kumar is unafraid of drawing aside the drapes of hypocrisy and sham that seem to safeguard rural ethics. The innate nobility of the human spirit that fights against baser instincts becomes the bastion on which these women guard their tattooed thighs. The cynicism of the poet compels him to question why they should suffer and he paints a poignant picture of the Indian women. The Keatsian sensuousness in “angry eyebrows”, “Mississippi-long hair”, “eye”, “tattooed thighs”, is a treat to poetry lovers. Kumar’s favorite triplet stanza offers reflections on life. Apart from the thematic contents, the language is highly evocative of the scenes depicted. The choice of words and images is appropriate. He makes use of compound words and epithets such as triple-baked bring a freshness in his expression. He uses comparisons and metaphors, which greatly add to the beauty of the poem.

In short, Shiv K. Kumar’s poem Indian Women is very detailed and perceptive portrayal of ordinary women’s lives, preoccupations and beliefs.

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## 14.7.2 GLOSSARY

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- triple-baked* : baked three times in a row, a phrase innovatively used for the third world countries
- etch* : to cut, bite, or corrode with an acid or the like; engrave with an acid or the like, as to form a design in furrows that when charged with ink will give an impression on paper, or to produce (a design, image, etc.) by this method, as on copper or glass.
- patiently* : with patience and forbearance.
- braid* : to weave together strips or strands of; plait
- pitchers* : a containers, usually with a handle and spout, for holding and pouring liquids
- zodiac* : astrologically significant part of sky: a narrow band in the sky in which the movements of the major planets, Sun, and Moon take place, astrologically divided into twelve sections named for the



major constellations, astrologer's chart: a chart linking twelve constellations to twelve divisions of the year, used as the astrologer's main tool for analyzing character and predicting the future, recurring set: a set of things or a sequence of events that repeats itself cyclically (literary).

*doodling* : scribble drawings or designs: to draw something aimlessly or absent-mindedly, usually while doing something else such as having a telephone conversation or attending a meeting

*tattoos* : to color, as the flesh, by pricking in coloring matter, so as to form marks or figures which can not be washed out.

*contours* : general nature: the general character or nature of something, an outline, especially of something curved or irregular

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#### **14.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

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- 1 Why don't the Indian women etch "angry eyebrows on mud walls"?
- 2 Explain the phrase "Like empty pitchers".
- 3 What does the phrase "Pleating hope in each braid" suggest?
- 4 Try to explain how Kumar universalizes the condition of rural women.
- 5 How are the imagery and symbols used to heighten and deepen our perceptions of the life of Indian women?

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#### **14.9 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit, you have gained a perception of the varying worlds of Kamala Das and Shiv K. Kumar. You have come across striking experimentation in form, devices, voices and motifs as you perused modern Indian poetry. Kamala Das and Shiv K. Kumar have used images which describe Indian people, landscape and situations, while at the same time catering to Indian heritage. Again, their poems pertain to the rhythms of village life and city life of postcolonial India.

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#### **14.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

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- 1 How does Kamala Das portray her dislike for names and abstractions?
- 2 What sort of fears haunt the mind of Kamala Das in the poem "Spoiling the name"?
- 3 Write a note on the postcolonial features of the poem "Indian Women", which set it apart from other poems.
- 4 Compare the attitudes of Shiv K. Kumar and Kamala Das towards women. What is it that makes them different ?

- 5 Comment on the poetic personals search for an identity in the poem "Spoiling the Name".

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**14.11 SUGGESTED READING**

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1. Mittapalli, Rajeshwar and Pier Paola Piciuccio. eds. *Kamala Das: A Critical Spectrum*. New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2001.
2. Dwivedi, A.N., *Kamala Das and Her Poetry*. New Delhi, 2006.
3. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*. Routledge, 2002.
4. Talib, Ismail S., *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures : An Introduction* Routledge, 2002

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**UNIT 15: ARUN PRABHA MUKHERJEE “RACE  
CONSCIOUSNESS OF A SOUTH ASIAN  
(CANADIAN, OF COURSE) FEMALE ACADEMIC”  
(*OPPOSITIONAL AESTHETICS*, 1994)**

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**STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

**15.0 Objectives**

**15.1 Introduction**

**15.2 Author**

**15.3 Background**

**15.3.1 The Ideology of Empire**

**15.3.2 Diversity**

**15.3.3 Canadian Postcolonialism**

**15.3.4 Postcolonialism, Femenism and Poststructuralism**

**15.3.5 Postcolonialism and the Context of Teaching**

**15.4 Detailed Explanation**

**15.4.1 Immigrant Perspectives on Racism**

**15.4.2 Power Structures ad Binary Relationships**

**15.4.3 Theorizing "Difference"**

**15.4.4 Multiple Identities and Hyperenated**

**15.5 Glossary**

**15.6 Critical Analysis**

**15.7 Self Assessment Questions**

**15.8 Let Us Sum Up**

**15.9 Unit End Questions**

**15.10 Suggested Readings**

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**15.0 OBJECTIVES**

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- To analyse the postcolonial issues in the chapter titled “Race Consciousness of a South Asian (Canadian, of course) Female Academic” [*Oppositional Aesthetics* (1994)]
- To understand how postcolonial theory is shaped from personal experiences of immigrants.
- To look critically at the dominance of Euro-American theory that has governed our thinking as the indigenous peoples of the former colonies.
- To reflect on the specific issues of racism in modern Canada from a South Asian feminist perspective

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## 15.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit you will study a chapter from the work *Oppositional Aesthetics* by Arun Prabha Mukherjee. The essay discusses why postcolonial theory should take an “oppositional” approach to the west and advocates an “aesthetics” rooted in one’s race, body and cultural mindset. Mukherjee makes us aware of how history, gender and our location in time affect the way we interpret literary texts and culture in general.

Our consciousness as Third World individuals, as Mukherjee argues in her essay, needs to be “oppositional”, as in the process of colonization many aspects of our cultural traditions were violently disrupted. The oppositional stance challenges the tendency of the west to take us for granted, insisting that we think against the grain. For Mukherjee oppositionality consists in activating a new critical mindset located in ones gender, academic location or the syllabus one is teaching. This “aesthetics” of Third World resistance which Mukherjee advocates, evaluates and judges artistic productions such as literature and cinema through the parameters of “difference.” Briefly, Mukherjee’s literary theory of “oppositional aesthetics” demands that we produce different ways of seeing and reading based on our consciousness of time, location, history and the philosophy gathered from the real-life situations of Third World immigrants.

Mukherjee states in the “Introduction” to this text that it was an unexpected success even though early readers rejected the book as being “too angry” (vii). In her postcolonial theory of the processes by which racism penetrates the classroom as well, Mukherjee challenges the thrust of colonialism to mould and control the attitudes and perceptions of various groups of people, such as feminists or racial minorities. This leads her to take, as she states, an oppositional stance “to the dominant ideologies of literary and cultural analysis in Euro-America” (vii).

As a Third World woman located in Canada, Arun Mukherjee resists being assimilated into the consciousness of European racism and patriarchal (male-dominated) systems as she is “a non-white woman who was born in pre-independence India.” Mukherjee’s quest is for “equality” and the preservation of “difference” – cultural and intellectual values that are of crucial importance to postcolonial nations. In “Oppositional Aesthetics” Mukherjee works out her theorization as a South Asian Canadian feminist critic of South Asian literature and film. She questions and protests the erasure of her gender and cultural identity. Her theorization is relevant not only to her personal condition but to other racial minorities in white Canada.

Mukherjee advocates that the critical response to literature should take into account the hard facts of its social realities. Traditionally, Mukherjee observes that her generation was expected to respond only to the formal aspects of literature, a response directed by western approaches of reading and analysing a text. This

resulted, as she points out, in a “split-consciousness” where one cannot respond with one’s true self or authentic voice.

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## **15.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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Arun Prabha Mukherjee is a critic, translator and academician based in Canada. Her migration to Canada in 1971 for study, and her professional experience as a teacher made her examine her Canadian experience from a non-white or a Third World South Asian perspective. Mukherjee is the author of *Oppositional Aesthetics: Reading from a Hyphenated Space* (1994); *Postcolonialism My Living* (1998); and has translated *Joothan* by Om Prakash Valmiki (2003). She has also edited *Sharing our Experience* (1993), an anthology of writings by women of colour and aboriginal women.

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## **15.3 BACKGROUND**

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The history of the growth of postcolonial departments in the West is a double edged phenomenon. While it looked as if the West was acknowledging the literatures of the former colonized peoples, it proved to be just a token acknowledgment rather than an acceptance of the equality of these literatures. Postcolonial authors from Africa or South Asia were often slotted under academic programmes such as gender studies, women’s writing, Third World literatures or ethnic literatures that resulted in a damaging position, as such slotting merged the difference between one Third World writer and another. This merger also obliterated the cultural density and internal diversity of each of the national literatures, quite different from one another, but collectively classified as Third World literatures.

On the other hand postcolonial academicians, critics and writers were becoming more aware of this strategy of the West and began to shape their postcolonial theory to resist being “assimilated.” They began to recognize that their radical protest against the dominance of English and Europe, generated disapproval and even rejection by the West. Postcolonial theorists, therefore, started emphasizing the miscomprehension of Western critics and readers that resulted in wrong interpretations of the cultures of former colonies. You will notice as you listen to the voices of writers of the former colonies that they are now trying to explain their cultural situations from their own perspective, protesting against these faulty interpretations. Postcolonial theory, continues to be shaped in the West and by the Western academy even today. Many postcolonial critics are uncomfortable with this practice and therefore write back to the West in a conscious way, openly declaring their resistance to the West dominating and interpreting the direction postcolonial thinking should take.

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### **15.3.1 THE IDEOLOGY OF EMPIRE**

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The ideology of empire as postcolonial theory now understands it, has always

been to cast itself in a paternalistic role, claiming supremacy for European culture, literature, educational systems and for the English language. In this scheme of things, non-European colonized nations are regarded as incompetent to manage their nations and their institutions without the enlightened leadership of the colonial masters. Once the former colonial peoples have been conditioned in this colonial ideology, it becomes difficult for them to believe in themselves and their cultural values. Without their conscious desire to do so, they find themselves giving assent to the paternalistic attitudes of the former colonizers.

The former colonized peoples continue to carry these negative images in their minds and in their spirit. They are co-opted into the civilizing and controlling mission of colonialism and neo-colonial practices, that insist on a demarcation between the whites and non-white immigrant peoples, as Mukherjee finds, in Canada. It is the West that interprets India or Africa or the Caribbean, seeing these former colonized countries through its own eyes, rather than letting the Third World populations interpret their own realities.

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### 15.3.2 DIVERSITY

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Postcolonial theory is not based on any one theoretical foundation or practice. However, critics have pointed out that there is a binary dependency between the terms colonial and postcolonial. The various theories of postcolonialism took birth in the context of the political movements initiated to overthrow the colonizer and in the act of giving shape to such resistance, the concept of postcolonialism was born. The concept of postcolonial is not a static concept and has evolved in response to the internal political conflicts of the former colonized nations, the influx of immigrants into the First world and the strategies of the West to discipline and control the rise of the Third World. Gregory Castle (ed. *Postcolonial Discourses*, 2001) points out that there is “a strong tendency in postcolonial studies in the last two decades of the twentieth century toward an increasingly regional or national (if not always nationalist) approach to the legacies of colonialism” (xi). Castle states also that there are common elements in postcolonial studies – “...the notion that identity is constituted in a struggle between indigenous and colonizing forces is well-nigh universal in postcolonial studies ... (xv).”

Elleke Boehmer (2006) finds that when we speak of the postcolonial “we are broadly concerned with experiences of exclusion, denigration and resistance under systems of colonial control. Thus the term *postcolonial* addresses itself to the historical, political, cultural, and textual ramifications of the colonial encounter between the West and the non-West, dating from the sixteenth century to the present day. It considers how this encounter shaped all those who were party to it: the colonizers as well as the colonized. In particular, studies of postcolonial cultures, texts, and politics are interested in responses to colonial oppression which were (and are) oppositional or contestatory, and not only openly so, but those

which were subtle, sly, oblique, and apparently underhand in their protests” (340). Boehmer also points to two traditions of postcolonial thinking – “the theoretical post-structuralist and the practical political” (340). She summarizes the thrust of these two traditions by stating that “postcolonialism therefore refers to those theories, texts, political strategies and modes of activism that engage in such questioning that aim to challenge structural inequalities and bring about social justice” (341-2).

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### **15.3.3 CANADIAN POSTCOLONIALISM**

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Canadian postcolonialism should be studied with reference to not only Third World immigrant theorists and writers, but also take into consideration the Canadian First Nations peoples and their literature. The term First Nations refers to the aboriginal people in Canada who have been deprived of their rights and are trying to assert their diversity and equality in the face of dominance of Anglophone and Francophone Canadian literature. The First Nations peoples too are now telling their own histories of being exploited by the European colonizers in Canada, the erasure and near-extinction of their indigenous cultures and the imposition of colonial residential system of education in schools, in order to assimilate them into the European culture.

You will find that Arun Prabha Mukherjee is primarily interested in how colonialism in Canada has affected Third World immigrants and their powers and rights. Further, her focus is on how immigrants are affected by policies related to the sphere of academics. In order to evaluate other aspects of Canadian policy especially in the context of Canada’s official policy of multi culturalism, you will also need to consider Third World immigration, both legal and illegal from the lower socio-economic strata.

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### **15.3.4 POSTCOLONIALISM, FEMINISM AND POSTSTRUCTURALISM**

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Many postcolonial theorists find that drawing support from other theoretical positions such as feminism or poststructuralism helps them to carry out their political agenda of obtaining equality across races and cultures. You will find that Mukherjee’s essay on “Race Consciousness” draws on the existing structures of gender inequality that marginalized women from occupying positions of power and denied them visibility in society. The feminist concept of valuing the “difference” of women by which they resist the force of patriarchy (i.e. male dominated family and institution structures) is used by Mukherjee to understand racial inequality in Canada. Similarly in the poststructuralist theory of Derrida we find a deconstruction of many so-called fixed meanings and values that go with truth and rationality. The theory of deconstruction like postcolonialism breaks up the centres of knowledge which the West claims as absolute truth, whether it is the colonial idea of the best identity, culture or philosophical system.

Postcolonial writing has adopted different paths to work out decolonization. Writers in Africa like Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) have rejected the idea of writing in English as that would add to the power of the Anglo-centric tradition, preferring to write in native African languages. In India, Raja Rao worked out the idea of an "oppositional aesthetics" commencing with his novel *Kanthapura* (1938), not only resisting the intellectual domination of the West but drawing on the very different rhythms and cadences of Indian languages such as Sanskrit and Kannada to offer an alternative postcolonial aesthetics of language, style and narrative techniques. In his "Foreword" to *Kanthapura*, Rao located himself within the indigenous Indian philosophical tradition, whose aesthetics is located in a different concept of time and timelessness.

In another contemporary postcolonial writer and academician based in the U.S., Meena Alexander (1996), writing about her immigrant location, states – "The shock of arrival forces us to new knowledge. What the immigrant work must work with is what she must invent in order to live. Race, ethnicity, the fluid truths of gender are all cast afresh. Nationality, too, that emptiest and yet most contested of signs, marks us" (1). For Alexander, English itself as a colonial language for the post-independence Indian writer, belonging to a multilingual tradition, was problematic. Realizing this, she unfolds her approach to decolonization of the English language: "It was as if a white skin had covered over that language of accomplishment and I had to pierce through it, tear it open in order to make it supple, fluid enough to accommodate the murmurings of my own heart" (4).

The division of racial identity created by colonization – between Europe as the "self" and the colonized as the "other" is a practice that has never really ended as postcolonialists point out, by observing cultural practices, especially with the immigrant peoples who have relocated in the West. As the immigrants find, he/she is denied the right to interpret reality. The West's practice of essentializing the Third World immigrants has bothered the immigrant consciousness and went unquestioned for a long time. To essentialize, as you will understand after studying Mukherjee's essay, is to reduce the indigenous culture of the immigrant to something unchanging, basic and limited in complexity. As Mukherjee perceives, no culture or individual can or should be reduced to a single essential identity.

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### 15.3.5 POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE CONTEXT OF TEACHING

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We often take the syllabus we study in an academic programme for granted. We rarely question who designed the syllabus and the forces that operate in including certain texts on the syllabus and leaving other texts out. Another contribution of postcolonial theory, is to look deeply into all the institutional practices such as teaching/learning, the development of specific new programmes and whether they have been modelled on Western programmes, the role of the teacher in contributing to "consciousness-raising" about Western domination, and the freedom that may



or may not be there for learners to interpret these conditions. You will be able to apply these insights in critically understanding your own context of teaching/learning.

Another related question that concerns the identity of postcolonial peoples, especially in the Western sphere is the question of “representation”. Many forces such as the print and visual media, book publishing that exercise control over a certain kind of imaging of the Third World, is behind the problem of representation. Are we allowed to represent ourselves as we are, with all our differences and complexities or is the West fitting us into its own representations that are likely to be *distorted* representations? Postcolonialism, as has been pointed out by critics, is intended to make the colonizer confront these realities, delivered from the postcolonial perspectives. As a result the postcolonial awakening makes its impact in the modern global scenario, to a lesser or greater extent on the lives of the whites too. The new approach to writing their own histories, to set right the faulty picture projected by colonial histories is another direction where postcolonial theory claims its own right to intervene in the monologue of the West. To summarize, the cultural politics written in terms of superiority vs. inferiority at that Mukherjee’s theory deconstructs within the Third World immigrant Canadian situation, has a corresponding impact on the classroom too. Mukherjee uses the location of the Canadian classroom to open up postcolonial issues relating to hegemony, essentialism, representation, marginalization and interpretation of knowledge and discourses.

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#### 15.4 DETAILED EXPLANATION

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Through many former countries such as Africa and India had suffered under colonial rule and won their independence after prolonged struggles, the West i.e. Britain, Canada and the US were seen as attractive destinations for both immigrants and intellectuals wanting to make their futures and fulfil their ambitions. As part of the second wave of immigrants to Canada in the 1970s, Arun Prabha Mukherjee’s narration of her growing “race consciousness” in Canada, as a student and later as a teacher in a Canadian university, will make you reflect on many issues that you may not otherwise consider deeply. These are issues pertaining to the human rights of immigrant people, their acceptance and recognition as equals, their stereotyping as a race and the marginalization of their literature and aesthetics.

*Oppositional Aesthetics: Reading from a Hyphenated Space* is a collection of writings by Arun Prabha Mukherjee on South Asian Canadian literature. In the first part of the book, “The Colour of Theory-- a Non-White Reader Reads,” Mukherjee discusses the relationship between ideology and the classroom, her own developing “race consciousness” and the division between the representation of Third World in Western cinema critiqued through the eyes of a Third World viewer. She reflects on the continuing “cultural imperialism” of “Western literary criticism.” In the second part of the book she examines the concept of hyphenation

which she interprets through the writings of the Third World diaspora in Canada, namely, Michael Ondaatje, Cyril Dabydeen, Rohinton Mistry, Neil Bissoondath and M.G. Vassanji amongst others literary writers. For Mukherjee, her position as a South Asian Canadian creates a “hyphenated space” which needs to be theorized, as this hyphenated identity is separate from the European identity. She conveys her desire to empower herself by resisting the Western tradition of literary criticism which she was compelled to accept as a student in India. Mukherjee conveys her disagreement with the universalising currents of the Western academy.

The Western literary critical tradition has taught her only to concentrate on the formal aspects of text whereas for her the more important issues are the pleasure obtained from reading these works and the social realities such as poverty or racism that are contained in these works. As she states, it is the “social consciousness” of the writer that matters to her as a literary critic.

In tracing her journey as a non-white woman, Mukherjee traces the journey of finding her own voice as a critic, an oppositional voice. She writes about her “struggles with the dominant cultural discourses” and the shaping of her postcolonial theory. The theory leads to her contestation of Canadian nationalism, multiculturalism and a critiquing of the ideology of Canadian whiteness.

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#### **15.4.1 IMMIGRANT PERSPECTIVES ON RACISM**

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Mukherjee’s observations on her self in resisting Canadian racism, reflects the political and psychological condition of immigrants who continue to confront the reality of racism and exclusion even today despite gaining independence in their native countries. In “The Race Consciousness” of a South Asian (Canadian of course) Female Academic, Mukherjee dwells on the sense of privilege she began to enjoy when she was given a full-time job in a Canadian university, as women academicians, especially those from South Asian countries were generally not given such appointments. Mukherjee critiques the policies and practices in Canadian universities that most often offer only part-time, temporary appointments to Third World citizens.

In an immigrant situation, Mukherjee states, various “identity cards” (10) such as “people of colour” (10) and “visible minorities” are used to distance non-whites from whites and exclude them from power.

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#### **15.4.2 POWER STRUCTURES AND BINARY RELATIONSHIPS**

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Mukherjee discusses how “the binary relationship of power” i.e. the equation that places the privileged whites vs the excluded non-whites, operates in Canada and her commitment to carry on the “ongoing struggle” (10) against racism, that will ensure the rights of the immigrants from the Third World in Canada.

The discussions between teacher and student in Mukherjee's classroom, centred on South Asian texts, are about the "real" issues of hierarchy and marginalization. Any discussions that leave out the social realities of the Third World immigrant situation in Canada or create literary portrayals of only White people as the most powerful, or the best people, are unacceptable in Mukherjee's approach to postcolonialism.

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### 15.4.3 THEORIZING "DIFFERENCE"

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Postcolonial theory and literature addresses issues that relate to the "difference" and "identity" of the former colonized peoples. It bases its interpretation of these issues in the political struggle for independence from European colonizers, of the cultural traditions and values that were condemned or erased by the machinery of colonialism and the attempt to rebuild the real identity by carrying out various practices of resistance. In the essay you are now studying, Mukherjee shares with us how problematic a Third World identity is for her as a woman and an Indian, who despite her status as a Canadian citizen simply cannot fit into the identity of "just Canadian."

In "Race-consciousness" Mukherjee begins by citing her own experience of being denied the senior academic positions in the Canadian university and also shares her feeling of loneliness even when she is given a full-time prestigious appointment as she is a solitary example of a South Asian who has "made it." Questioning the denial of equal rights to Third World citizens who have the necessary "merit" but are "marginalized," she explains the development of her race consciousness after migrating to Canada in the 1970s.

The awareness of race or race-consciousness – "the fact the I am non-white in a white country" as Mukherjee states paves the way for her understanding of the ground reality that as a South Asian, her colour and race will always lead to a segregation from the whites.

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### 15.4.4 MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AND HYPHENATED IDENTITIES

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Mukherjee's discussion on "multiple identities" will enable you to see that the Europeans stereotyped the coloured races by giving them just one fixed identity of being for example, either barbaric or childlike or irrational, as Edward Said states in his book *Orientalism* (1978). However each of us, white and non-white have cultural histories and regional bases, and our gender identities that add multiple facets to our identities.

We speak about "hyphenated identities" in postcolonial theories and Mukherjee uses the intellectual position she has gained by entering Canadian universities to interpret the racism of colonization and the attempt to maintain control over the Third World immigrants in Canada. Mukherjee's decision to contest the arrogance and the superiority of the West come across powerfully in her critical attitudes to

racism in Canada, and the US, racism that she finds informs the selection of only white authors, on courses like American Literature, Gender Studies, and the distorted reading of Third World Cultures such as India in Canadian school textbooks.

The sense of “difference” Mukherjee carries with her as a South Asian woman results in a blend of postcolonial and feminist insights that she then shapes as “strategies” of resistance in the classroom. Her goal is to achieve equity for “all Canadians.” You will observe her determination and commitment to remember all acts of racism and thereby serve the cause of Third World Immigrants in these words from her essay - “I won’t forget them until I see Canadian universities open their door to all Canadians and teach and produce research about all Canadians” (14).

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#### 15.4.5 RESISTING UNIVERSALISM

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Mukherjee makes a strong protest against the Eurocentric trend of “universalism” i.e. holding European texts, cultural principles and values as being the best and valid “for all times and all places” (14).

The feminist slogan of “the personal in the political” is well illustrated by Mukherjee’s theoretical approach in the chapter on “Race Consciousness.” As an academic, she establishes the classroom as the site for dismantling the invisible power struggles of European colonialism and neo-colonialism in the specific contexts of Canada and the local conditions that need to be addressed. Equally, you will see that Mukherjee is attentive to racist language and takes care to deconstruct the discourses that continue colonialist practices even in the present.

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#### 15.5 GLOSSARY

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<i>nondescript:</i>	having no interesting or unusual features or qualities;
<i>compatriot:</i>	a person who was born in or is a citizen of the same the person who is speaking;
<i>contrition:</i>	feeling of regret for something one has done;
<i>tenure-stream job:</i>	the right to stay permanently in a job, especially as a teacher at a university;
<i>equity:</i>	a situation in which everyone is treated equally;
<i>essentialisms:</i>	reducing peoples or nations to their minimum basic features that result in stereotypes, with a refusal to look at their versity and complexity;
<i>Paki:</i>	an offensive word, conveying racist overtones, for a person from Pakistan, especially one living in Britain;

<i>binary relationship:</i>	based on only two categories (e.g. binary mathematics uses only 0 and 1);
<i>existential:</i>	connected with the philosophical theory of existentialism. The theory gives prime importance to human existence;
<i>canon:</i>	a generally accepted rule, standard or principle by which something is judged;
<i>dissemble:</i>	to hide one's real feelings or intentions, often by pretending to have very different ones;
<i>discourse:</i>	the use of language in speech and writing in order to produce meaning;
<i>extinct:</i>	no longer in existence;
<i>invoking:</i>	To mention a person, a theory, an example etc. To support your opinions or ideas or as a reason for something;
<i>Charlotte Perkins Gilman:</i>	a prominent American novelist, writer of short stories, poetry, and non-fiction. She was a utopian feminist and served as a role model for future generations of feminists through her unorthodox concepts and lifestyle;
<i>Nellie McLung:</i>	born as Nellie Letitia Mooney (1873 – 1951), she was a Canadian feminist, politician, social activist and a writer of fiction and non-fiction. She was a part of the social and moral reform movements prevalent in Western Canada in the early 1900s;
<i>narcissism:</i>	attitude of self-love from the Greek myth in which Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection in a pool;
<i>ethnocentrism:</i>	Practice of basing one's ideas and beliefs on one particular culture and using these to judge other cultures
<i>Komagata Maru:</i>	the Japanese steamship that sailed from Hong Kong to Shanghai, China; Yokohama, Japan; and then to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, in 1914, carrying 376 passengers from Punjab, India. The passengers were not allowed to land in Canada and the ship was forced to return to India. This was a result of a exclusionary policy of the West to keep Asian immigrants out;

*skewered:* from skewer: a thin piece of metal or wood that is pushed through pieces of meat or vegetable and holds them together. The analogy drives home the dependence and bondage imposed on the former colonized people by Europe.

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## 15.6 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

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In "Race Consciousness of a South Asian (Canadian of course) Female Academic", Arun Prabha Mukherjee focuses on dismantling the binary relationship of power that gives superior status to Euro-America over the Third World. She discusses the practices of colonialism with particular reference to its control over the domain of education – and points out how the new practices of exclusion of Third World immigrants in Canadian universities, work in multicultural Canada.

“Race Consciousness” destabilizes the notion of Western norms and a Western canon of “great” texts and their universalistic value. In the sphere of knowledge, reading practices and production of literary texts, this essay takes the position that the gender and race of Third World citizens should be part and parcel of their critical response. Mukherjee is of the opinion that we need to be vigilant about both conscious and unconscious racism in order to restore to Third World peoples their rights and dignity. Her ideas illustrate the perspective that postcolonial thinkers take about incorporating “difference” and constructing “alternative approaches” in critical theory that represent the diversity of non-European cultures.

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## 15.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. Describe the “ nondescript encounter” between the South Asian male and the author of “Race Consciousness”, in the opening section of the essay.
2. What are the two factors in the opening section of the essay that Mukherjee identifies as being responsible for her race consciousness in Canada?
3. Are white Canadians conscious of their whiteness? Why not?
4. Explain the difference between the terms “just Canadian” and “visible minority.”
5. Explain the phrase “Multiple identities.” What are some of these identities that Mukherjee finds in herself?
6. Why is Mukherjee’s critical of the syllabus in English and American literature she has studied?
7. Give an example of Mukherjee’s feminist perspective and its applications.
8. Why does Mukherjee regard the teacher in the classroom as “an authority figure”?
9. What are Mukherjee’s observations on *Sunlight on a Broken Column*?

10. What does Mukherjee's tell us about the "servants" in *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse*?
11. Why do you think the Komagata Maru incident was not recorded in Canada's history books?
12. What are the changes Mukherjee would like to bring on Canadian campuses?

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## 15.8 LET US SUM UP

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You have studied Arun Prabha Mukherjee's essay on "Race Consciousness" in which she defines the methodology of "oppositional aesthetics." Postcolonial thinkers like Mukherjee believe that it is necessary to understand opposition between white and non-white, where the white is given the highest status and the non-whites are excluded from knowledge and denied equal professional rights.

In Canada, Mukherjee finds evidence of racism at work within universities, in the selection of texts that exclude non-whites, in the absence of references to non-white coloured women, as well as in the false picture of an inferior non-white South Asian society, projected in text books by whites.

Mukherjee emphatically conveys her decision to support the cause of non-whites by raising unpopular questions about the whites, that will lead you to question one of the leading myth of colonialism – that it serves the interests of the Third World and that the whites care about the human condition in general. Mukherjee exposes the selfish interests of the West that is the reality behind their so-called universalism. Mukherjee is an advocate of cultural diversity that accepts and appreciates the principle of "difference," in this case the difference of Third World or South Asian peoples and the literature they produce. She advocates the creation of a new "centre" of Third World cultures, rejecting the notion of the Third World as "margins."

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## 15.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Explain the phrase "unconscious racism" as presented in the context of Canadian education in Arun Mukherjee's essay.
2. Discuss some of the important suggestions Arun Prabha Mukherjee makes, to challenge the "arrogance" of "the West."
3. What makes Mukherjee feel that teachers have an important role to play in resisting Euro-American control over the syllabus and knowledge formation?
4. "Racism has a long reach" – Explain and comment on Mukherjee's view.
5. Explain the concept of "universalism." Does Mukherjee accept this principle?
6. Discuss the concept of "difference" outlined in Mukherjee's essay. Why is it important to the postcolonial perspective?

7. What do you understand by the phrase “cultural diversity” in the Canadian context on the basis of the essay you have read? Do you think it is idealistic to hope for cultural diversity to be implemented in white societies?

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### 15.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## UNIT 16 : PARTHA CHATTERJEE: "WHOSE IMAGINED COMMUNITY? - I"

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### STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 About the Author
- 16.3 About the Subaltern Studies Group
- 16.4 About Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and its Fragments*
- 16.5 A Background to Partha Chatterjee's 'Whose Imagined Community?'
- 16.6 Glossary
- 16.7 Annotations to the Text
- 16.8 Self Assessment Questions
- 16.9 Let Us Sum Up

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### 16.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objectives of this unit are to provide you with a background to Partha Chatterjee's essay and specific details about it to help you understand it. After reading this unit you will be able to

- (a) appreciate the postcolonial discussions about nations and nationalism;
- (b) understand the historical and political context of Partha Chatterjee's essay;
- (c) comprehend Partha Chatterjee's basic premises in the essay with reference to postcolonial thought.

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### 16.1 INTRODUCTION

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Partha Chatterjee's essay "Whose Imagined Community?" is the opening chapter of his volume titled *Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993). This volume is significant since it explores the cultural history of India in the pre and post- independence years, focusing on the marginalised sections of society including the minorities peasants, women and others, and their contribution to India's freedom struggle and to the development of the country in the postcolonial era. The essay in particular discusses the one-sided view of the traditional histories retelling India's history from the colonized to the postcolonial stage through a western lens. Chatterjee argues in the essay that nationalism is not merely a political movement, and that cultural, literary, educational, artistic developments play an equally important role in the success of anti colonial nationalism. The writer refers to examples from the Bengali theatre, art, culture, and literature of the mid-twentieth century to support his point.

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## 16.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Partha Chatterjee is an anthropologist who has written extensively on Subaltern Studies. He is a multi-disciplinary scholar, with special interests in political science, anthropology and history.

Born in Calcutta in 1947, he had his early education in Calcutta before moving on to USA for his PhD. He is presently a Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University in New York. Chatterjee was also the Director of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta from 1997 to 2007.

Partha Chatterjee also teaches in both Calcutta University and Jadavpur University. He has been a Founder-Member of the Subaltern Studies Collective. He is a Joint-Editor of *Baromash*, a Bengali literary journal published biannually from Calcutta.

Amongst Chatterjee's well-known publications are *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (1986), *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1993), *Texts of Power* (1995), *A Possible India* (1995), and *The Present History of West Bengal* (1997).

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## 16.3 ABOUT THE SUBALTERN STUDIES GROUP

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Partha Chatterjee was a founder member of the Subaltern Studies Group of historians established in the early 1980s. This group included prominent South Asian members like Sumit Sarkar, Ranajit Guha, Gyan Prakash, Gyan Pandey, Dipesh Chakravarty, Susie Tharu, and for some time Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak. This group researched on the postcolonial and postimperial societies, especially of South Asia. This group adopted a Marxist approach and was strongly influenced by the French theory of poststructuralism.

The word subaltern was originally used by the Italian Marxist and political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) in his writings *The Modern Prince* and *The Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci used the term subaltern for those classes of people who were subordinated by the hegemony and were denied a legitimate role in the intellectual and power-wielding circles in the society. Though Gramsci referred to the working class through it, the term has acquired great significance in the present time. The term subaltern has been expanded to include all those social groups which are deliberately, yet subtly excluded from positions of power. These groups include women, tribals and people from the disadvantaged sections of society. The Subaltern Studies Group argued that the subaltern – the non-elite, were the agents of social and political change.

The members of the Subaltern Studies Group applied a postcolonial approach to the problem of the history of the suppressed. It had been realised at the time of

independence that the history of the colonised countries had been appropriated by the historians of the colonial forces. The Subaltern Studies Group engaged itself in uncovering the misconceptions and the hidden agendas in this kind of thinking. They questioned the historiography written from the perspective of the imperialist rulers. The postcolonial thinkers re-examined the historical records to bring to light authentic facts about the pre-colonial period in India's history. They took up the task of rewriting history, in revealing the past, and in presenting it from the point of view of the suppressed, the subaltern. The informed and academic postcolonial historians as those in the Subaltern Studies group made a noteworthy contribution to the creation of a new and true image of India.

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#### **16.4 ABOUT PARTHA CHATTERJEE'S : *THE NATION AND ITS FRAGMENTS***

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Chatterjee's work *The Nation and its Fragments* which includes the essay "Whose Imagined Community?" as the opening chapter of the book, discusses the development of the Indian nation-state with a focus on its local, its subordinate, its fragmentary aspects for a more refined understanding of how cultural processes influence nationalist forces. Chatterjee in his book rejects the 'subject-centred rationality characteristic of post-Enlightenment modernity' (xi) and draws attention to the marginalised, the objectified reality of colonial and post-colonial India. So while on the one hand Chatterjee discusses the colonial state, the rule of colonial difference of the British, the nationalist elite including the educated Bengali middle class, he also discusses the suppressed histories of the people, the women, the peasants, the caste divisions, the religious communities, and their role in India's freedom struggle. In the volume, Chatterjee thus retells the history of India not with a focus on the powerful and the authoritarian, but on the suppressed, the subjugated sections of society.

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#### **16.5 A BACKGROUND TO PARTHA CHATTERJEE'S : "*WHOSE IMAGINED COMMUNITY?*"**

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We shall now examine Partha Chatterjee's views in the essay "Whose Imagined Community?" Since Chatterjee's book *The Nation and Its Fragments* was published in 1992, the writer refers to the historical events which had occurred in the world at that point of time. In the opening paragraph of the essay Chatterjee refers to the momentous event of the breakdown of Russia or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic in the year 1991, a historical event which underlined the significance of nationalism and the failure of communism as a unifying force. With the disintegration of the one of the world powers, nationalism once again attracted the attention of people, as a force which posed a threat to world peace. Nationalism was discussed as a dangerous force both by area specialists and by the common man.

Chatterjee expresses his disagreement with the manner which nationalism is being discussed in world politics. He states that in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, when many countries were struggling to break free of colonial rule, and were gradually gaining independence, nationalism was considered to be an essential part of the successful anticolonial efforts in Asia and Africa. As countries became free and started developing with a stable economy and political workings, nationalism became a thing of the past, a historical force which had been part of the colonial empire before it was liberated. The histories of the colonial empires formulated by the ruling colonialists represented nationalism as fake patriotism, with secret agendas, selfish motives and manipulations being practised in the name of nationalism. In the 1970s, the wars between Third World countries were attributed to 'ethnic politics' i.e. politics resulting from the ethnic origins of the people, their unwillingness to accommodate people of other origins, religions and backgrounds and their demand for independence, which again was caused by nationalism. These wars either took the shape of civil wars, which continued for extended periods of time, or that of terrorist activities which were not easy to control. The countries which had gained independence through nationalistic efforts now diverted to selfish pursuits. African leaders as in Nigeria who had brought their countries to independence themselves adopted the ways of the colonialists, with corruption, injustice and internal strife pervading in their country. Mahatma Gandhi's policy of non-violence was discussed in terms of pacifism and vegetarianism. Ho Chi Minh in his pursuit of independence for Vietnam was also deterred by the complex workings of the Cold War.

Chatterjee avers that in the present time, nationalism is seen as a destroying force which has the power to disturb peace and calm. The strife caused by nationalism is spreading once again to Europe, though it had earlier remained in the Third World Countries. It is one of the forces like drugs, terrorism and unlawful migration which the developed countries in the west do not support but are also unable to control.

Nationalism however, had originated in Europe and was considered a gift given to the world by the European countries. Chatterjee reminds us that the First and the Second World War which had gradually spread all over the world had in fact been caused by the ethnic nationalisms in European countries. Whether seen as a good force or a bad one, the fact that nationalism developed in Europe cannot be ignored. In the present scenario, when there is a political consensus in Europe, and dissenting countries have been unified, people have forgotten that nationalism was a product of Europe and may get out of hand again.

As the histories of the colonial countries examined old records of reports and correspondence with the colonized countries, it was acknowledged that nationalism had come from Europe, though in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s it was debated who was responsible for the degradation of nationalism into the current form.

However these debates which took place between the nationalist historians and the colonialists were bitter and ironical and were largely ignored by the others.

Chatterjee then refers to Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* in which Anderson argued that nations were not shaped by the language, race or religions of people, but were imagined into existence. Institutions like print capitalism facilitated this imagination to grow and the nations to be formed. Anderson also suggested that the nationalism practised in Russia, America and Western Europe paved the way for nationalism in other countries. It provided them a modular form from which the nationalist leaders in Africa and Asia chose the ones suitable for them. Chatterjee acknowledges the fact that Anderson's book has influenced academic writings but criticizes Anderson's attempt to treat this as a universal phenomena of the modern world.

Chatterjee then moves on to the key point of his essay. He objects to Anderson's statement and argues that colonized nations have not been given the choice even to choose their nationalism. If Anderson's theory holds true, colonized countries were denied freedom by the imperialists, and even after independence, they have not been given the freedom to imagine their nationalism in the postcolonial era.

Anderson points out that the anticolonial struggles have been based on a 'difference' from the 'modular' forms of nationalist thinking as seen in the West. Consider for example Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela whose strategies of peaceful resistance were unequalled in western history. However Chatterjee believes that our tendency to consider nationalism exclusively as a political movement is responsible for the erroneous argument. Chatterjee's argument stems from his belief that India's nationalism was a composite product of political social, academic, cultural and spiritual transformations.

Chatterjee points out that the traditional histories focus only on the political developments in pre-independence India beginning with the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. They also describe that from the 1820s to 1870s the customs, beliefs and institutions of the Indian were being modernized as an influence of being enlightened by the knowledge brought by the colonialist rulers in India, while in the 1880s, political associations were being formed. These histories according to Chatterjee, do not represent the true emergence of nationalism in the late nineteenth century.

Chatterjee points out that anticolonial nationalism, i.e. the nationalism which aims to strengthen its own frontiers by overthrowing the colonial powers, develops its own sovereignty within itself before struggling with the imperial rulers. Chatterjee here brings in an important aspect of his argument, that the nationalist forces divide the world outside with its institutions and practices into two parts – the material and the spiritual. The material involves the parameters of external progress, the economy, the administration, the developments in science and technology, areas

in which the West had outsmarted the East. These achievements of the West needed to be acknowledged and emulated in order to come at par with the West.

The spiritual, according to Chatterjee, is the 'inner' domain which includes the innate spiritual culture of the East. While the progress in the external domain might be carefully studied and imitated, it becomes essential to protect and preserve one's cultural identity for that is what separates the colonised from the colonialists, the East from the West. Chatterjee foregrounds the fact that this has been the essential characteristic of the anticolonial struggle of the nationalist forces both in Asia and Africa.

Chatterjee explains that in this process, the nationalist forces do not allow the colonial forces to interfere in their spiritual domain. In India the nationalists in the earlier phase of social reform depended on the colonialists to reform traditional customs and institutions, while in the latter phase, they strongly resisted the attempts of the colonial forces to interfere in matters related to their culture. According to Chatterjee, this was the period of nationalism in India.

However, Chatterjee points out that despite strong attempts to preserve their spiritual culture, nationalism nevertheless designs a modern national culture which is reformed and progressive, and yet not markedly western. It is in this self reform, this sovereignty of the spiritual domain that the nation as an 'imagined community' is created, despite being controlled from the outside by the external powers. Chatterjee argues that in traditional histories retelling the nationalist struggle for independence, the fight for political power dominates the entire narrative.

Chatterjee then discusses in brief the elements of the spiritual domain which are reformed in the course of the nationalist struggle. The first important area which Chatterjee takes up is that of language, Chatterjee endorses Anderson's argument about 'print capitalism' which facilitated the development of the national language. However Chatterjee points out that Anderson's recounting of the development of the European countries cannot be simply applied to the colonial situation. In Bengal, the earliest printed books in Bengali were printed at the end of the eighteenth century, and prose narratives were produced in the beginning of the nineteenth century. During this period, English became the language of the bureaucracy and of the elite Bengalis. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Bengali became more developed, and appropriate for the modern culture. As the print medium became popular, printing presses, newspapers, magazines and literary societies were established all over Bengal which enabled Bengali to be standardized and modernized. The cultural identity of the colonized was thus shaped by the development and propagation of modern Indian languages.

Anderson's thesis about modular influences of European languages and literature on the colonized nations was not applicable to the Bengali literary scene. While European theories of literary criticism influenced Indian critical discourse, the native

literature could not be evaluated on the basis of European theories. He discusses the example of Bengali drama to support his point.

Chatterjee states that Bengali drama developed mainly during the middle of the nineteenth century and was influenced by the modern European drama of Shakespeare and Moliere as also by the classical Sanskrit drama which had recently been praised by Orientalist scholars. While European modular forms of plays shaped Indian drama, yet those criteria could not ensure the success of Bengali plays. The present Bengali theatre is a modern, urbanized theatre which has progressed clearly from the rural folk theatre and does not follow the aesthetic conventions of European modular forms of theatre.

While discussing the development of the novel in Bengal, Chatterjee argues that the influence of the modern English novel and classical Sanskrit narrative was still strong. However Bengali writers modified the form of the novel from narrative prose to almost a recording of live speech. Thus the novels became similar to plays in their basic style. The colonized imagination reshaped the modular forms of the novel to suit its own requirement. Similarly the Bengal School of Art as developed in the early twentieth century again struggled with the norms established by the interaction between Western artists and Indian sensibility. Though Bengali art was modernized, it was distinctly Indian in its aesthetic sensibility.

Another important area in which nationalism chose to strengthen itself was that of secondary education in schools. Chatterjee refers to the example of Bengal and states that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the elite class of people made efforts to start schools all over Bengal and to prepare the required educational materials. The state was not allowed to intervene in this decision and together with print capitalism, this major step allowed standardized language and literature to be propagated and accepted. The University of Calcutta was also transformed from an institution offering colonial education – education which aimed to maintain the distinction between the ruling class and the subjugated class, into a national institution meeting the academic requirements of Indians.

The family was an important area where the nationalist forces sought self-reform, while discouraging the state to intervene. While the Europeans had criticized the Indian traditions as barbaric, their focus was mainly on the situation of women. Yet the family was a part of the Indian cultural identity and was not to be influenced by the policies of the state. Nevertheless, due to cultural influences from outside the position of women and the status of family improved, and a new patriarchal social system came into existence, which was different from the traditional system, and yet did not resemble the concept of the Western family. Gradually Indian women emerged who were modern in their outlook yet they maintained traditional beliefs and value systems, and were thus different from the Western women.

Chatterjee then moves on to the progress of nationalism in the outer domain of the material world, of the state, and of politics. In the external domain, nationalism sought to bring about a difference in the colonial policy of maintaining a distinction between the rulers and ruled. The British, in the various aspects of public policies, had formulated laws which upheld this distinction. Indian nationalism insisted on an equal treatment of the Indians in the external domain, as opening administrative posts for the Indians as well as the right of free speech to the Indian newspapers.

One aspect of the process of colonization is the difference between the rulers and the ruled. The British, through the process of making laws and rules, defined the areas of administrative participation and freedom in clear terms. Gradually, under pressure, the terms were relaxed, yet the gap between what the British considered liberal and what the Indians considered their right was fairly wide.

But the intellectual spiritual leadership by making a clear distinction between the inner world (of religion, custom, culture and domesticity), and the outer world (of politics, economics and ideas), made it difficult for the state to rule out the differences or reduce the conflicts lurking in the issues of race, religion and culture. This has resulted in an increased use of western models in the outer world where nation formation is concerned, rather than enabling the community to be imagined in terms of the nation i.e., the way we imagine the nation and the way we imagine a community are at odds with each other. The gap between them exists.

Partha Chatterjee describes this gap with the help of an incident narrated by Bipin Chandra Pal. Pal describes his hostel life where strict control was exercised over the food and the life in the hostel. This discipline was accepted by one and all. One rule was laid down that only vegetarian food would be brought or consumed in the house. But it was also very clear that there was no restriction on what one ate outside. It is this gap which has become the basis of caste, gender and economic discrimination, not allowing the sense of a 'nation' as an integrated whole to come into existence.

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## 16.6 GLOSSARY

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<i>agenda</i>	:	the matters of business to be discussed, especially at a meeting, or a list of these;
<i>analyst</i>	:	a person who is skilled in making analyses, i.e. the study of something by examining its parts and their relationship.
<i>resurgence</i>	:	the reviving of something after a period of little activity, poor performance, lack of popularity, etc.;
<i>arcane</i>	:	secret; mysterious;
<i>polity</i>	:	1. the form or process of government. 2. a society as an organised state;



<i>rubric</i>	:	a title, or instruction or a rule printed in a document or book, usually in a different style from the rest of the text;
<i>relegate</i>	:	to give somebody or something a lower or less important rank, task or state;
<i>unprepossessing</i>	:	not making a good or strong impression; not attractive;
<i>archives</i>	:	a collection of historical documents or records of a government, a family a place, an organisation etc;
<i>emancipatory</i>	:	setting somebody or something free from political, social or legal restrictions;
<i>protracted</i>	:	lasting longer than expected or longer than usual;
<i>fractious</i>	:	bad-tempered or easily irritated;
<i>polarity</i>	:	the state of having two opposite tendencies, opinions, etc.;
<i>genealogy</i>	:	the study of family history, including the study of who the ancestors of particular people were and how they were related to each other;
<i>primordial</i>	:	existing at or from the beginning, especially of the world or the universe;
<i>engulf</i>	:	(of the sea, flames, etc.) to surround somebody or something so that they are completely covered;
<i>amnesia</i>	:	partial or total loss of memory;
<i>musty</i>	:	damp and smelling stale or of mould in a fine soft growth like fur that forms an old food;
<i>acrimonious</i>	:	(especially of arguments) angry and bitter;
<i>subtlety</i>	:	the quality of being subtle i.e. organized in a clever and complex way;
<i>ingeniously</i>	:	in a clever and original manner;
<i>modular</i>	:	using a module i.e. any one of a set of parts or units that are made separately and can be joined together to construct a building or a piece of furniture, on the basis of design or construction;
<i>élite</i>	:	a group considered to be the best or most important because of their power, talent, wealth, etc.;
<i>exoticization</i>	:	to make a thing or practice appear unusual attractive and at times, also distant. This distance could be in terms of physical distance or historical distance;

<i>posit</i>	:	to suggest, assume or put forward something as a fact;
<i>corroborate</i>	:	to confirm or give support to a statement, belief or theory;
<i>purview</i>	:	the scope of somebody's activities or influence;
<i>intelligentsia</i>	:	people within a community who are of high intelligence and are interested in culture, learning, the arts, etc.;
<i>hiatus</i>	:	a pause when nothing happens, a break;
<i>corpus</i>	:	a collection of written and /or spoken texts;
<i>orientalist</i>	:	a person who studies the language, arts etc. of Oriental countries i.e. those countries located in the East, especially Japan or China, in order to understand it, as opposed to the Anglicists who attempt to disparage and dislocate it;
<i>literati</i>	:	educated and intelligent people who enjoy literature;
<i>dissemination</i>	:	the act of spreading ideas, beliefs, etc widely;
<i>inviolability</i>	:	that must always be respected and not broken or ignored;
<i>liberal (politics)</i>	:	favouring or based on policies that promote free trade, freedom of choice for individuals and moderate social and political change;
<i>hegemonic</i>	:	involving control and leadership especially by one country over others within a group;
<i>bourgeois</i>	:	supporting the interests of capitalism, not communism;
<i>recalcitrant</i>	:	resisting authority or discipline;
<i>heterodox</i>	:	not conforming with accepted standards or beliefs;
<i>incongruous</i>	:	strange because not in harmony with the surroundings;
<i>anomaly</i>	:	a thing, event or situation different from what is normal or usual;
<i>imbrications</i>	:	overlappings.

Note : Look up a dictionary for other words you do not fully understand.

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## 16.7 ANNOTATIONS TO THE TEXT

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1. Nationalism : ideology based on the belief that the individual's foremost loyalty should be to the nationstate, and not to other individual or group interests. It is a fairly modern movement which became recognized at the end of the 18th century mainly with the American and French revolution. Spreading to the countries of Latin America, it moved to central Europe in the early 19th century, to eastern and southeastern Europe in mid 19th century. In Asia and Africa, it became powerful in the early 20th century. The global expansion of western Europe in the late

eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century was a form of nationalism, wherein the agenda of the imperialist countries like Britain, Spain and France was to expand their empires by forming colonies. Indian nationalism, in the early and middle twentieth century was, a struggle for independence, to be freed of the British colonial rule.

2. “The collapse of communism” : Communism is a system of political organization in which property is owned by the state or community and the common wealth of the state is shared by all citizens according to their need. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republic also called the Soviet Union consisting of 15 Soviet Socialist Republic existed from 1917 to 1991 and communism was adopted and practised there. The political system in USSR was authoritarian, and highly centralized and the economy of the country was again state–owned with a series of five year plans that set targets for all forms of production. However, with increasing ethnic nationalism of its constituent republics, and the demand for autonomy and independence, in August 1991, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which had been the nucleus of its political system, was abolished and by December 1991, USSR had also ceased to exist, and some of its republics like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania achieved complete independence.
3. Anticolonial struggles in Asia and Africa : Nationalism began appearing in Asia and Africa after World War I. Anticolonial struggle in the countries of these continents continued. After World War II, India, Pakistan, Ceylon Burma and Malaya in Asia and Ghana in Africa achieved independence nonviolently from the British Commonwealth, while other countries struggled hard to achieve independence, like French Indo China and French North Africa.
4. Colonial empire : It was a political economic system whereby various European nations explored, conquered, settled in and exploited large areas of the world. Countries like India, remained the colonial empires of the western world for a long period of time.
5. Ethnic group : A social group or category of population in a larger society, which shares a common race, culture, nationality or language. Ethnic diversity is commonly present in contemporary societies. Historically, people of different ethnic origins have lived together as communities due to various reasons, political or economic. In the 20th century, ethnic diversity has caused problems in the nationstate, when diverse ethnic groups demanded an independent political identity as in USSR. In the pas, many nationstates have attempted to solve the problem of ethnic diversity by eliminating or expelling ethnic groups. Some wellknown examples of such policies are Nazis extermination of Jews during the Second World War, the expelling of Arabs and East Indians from the newly independent countries of Africa in the 1960sd and 1970s.

6. Pacifism : The belief in peace, and in the opposition to war and violence as a means of settling disputes. Pacifist beliefs were contributed by Buddhism, Christianity and had some degree of political influence.
7. Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969), the Vietnamese leader, was founder of the Indo–China Communist Party (1930) and its successor Viet Minh (1941). He was President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) from 1945 to 1969. A staunch believer in communism. Ho Chi Minh was a leader of the Vietnamese nationalist movement against the French rule over their country and was one of the prime revolutionary during the post–World War II anticolonial movement in Asia.
8. Cold War : The open yet controlled conflict that developed between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies after World War II. Throughout the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union avoided direct military confrontation in Europe and engaged in actual war only to keep allies to their sides or to overthrow them if they had defected to the other side. The Cold War came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.
9. Hapsburg empire : Also called the House of Austria royal German family, which was one of the principal sovereign dynasties of Europe from the 15th to the 20th century.
10. Ottoman empire : One of the most powerful empires created by Turkish tribes in Anatolia during the 15th and 16th centuries The Ottoman empire continued for more than 600 years and ended in 1922, with the creation of the Turkish Republic and other states in southeastern Europe and the Middle East.
11. Print-capitalism : Capitalism is the economic system which is dominant in the West since the breakup of feudalism. In a capitalist society most of the means of production are owned privately and the production is guided and the income distributed largely through the market. Through the term print-capitalism Anderson refers to the sudden spurt in privately-owned printing presses in society and the production of printed material of different types – books, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, journals, etc.
12. Moliere : (baptized in 1622 in Paris – died in Paris in 1673) French actor and playwright, the greatest of all writers of French comedy. Some of his masterpieces are *Tartuffe (The Imposter)*, *L'École des femmes (The School for Wives)*, *Le Misanthrope (The Misanthrope)*, and many others.
13. Liberalism : The political doctrine that professes that power is mainly abused by governments or by others like the wealthy and the powerful like monarchs and aristocrats with inherited authority and privileges. Liberalism originates from two essential characteristics of Western culture: the West's preoccupation with individuality as compared to the importance of caste, status or tradition in other

cultures, and the practice of competition and opposition in European political and economic system as a means to create social order. In historical terms, liberalism has come to mean two rather different things. The doctrine originated as a defensive reaction to the horrors of the wars of religion of the 16th century and then divided into two strands, the first a narrowly political doctrine emphasizing the importance of limited government, the other a philosophy of life emphasizing individual autonomy, imagination, and self-development.

14. Bipin Chandra Pal (1858–1932) : A teacher, journalist, orator and writer, Pal was famous as one of trio of the militant patriots of the Congress – the ‘Pal’ of ‘Lal Bal Pal’. the trio were responsible for initiating the popular revolt against the British colonial policy in 1905 during the partition of Bengal. The trio advocated extremist measures to convey their opposition for the British, like boycotting British manufactured goods, burning western clothes made in the mills of Manchester and the strikes and lockouts of British owned businesses and industries.

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### **16.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

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1. Why is nationalism seen as a negative term?
2. Why does Chatterjee find fault with the Western model of nationalism?
3. What is implied by inner domain?
4. When, according to nationalist histories, did anticolonial nationalism begin?
5. Does Partha Chatterjee agree with this belief?
6. What does he say about the Bengali novel?
7. What does he say about nineteenth century drama in Bengal?
8. Why does Chatterjee consider the ‘Social Reform’ period as the beginning of anticolonial nationalism?

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### **16.9 LET US SUM UP**

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1. The concept of nationalism is today looked upon as negative. But it is on the resurgence once again.
2. At one time it was considered a very important idea in Europe.
3. The two World Wars rose out of Europe’s failure to manage its own ethnic nationalisms.
4. Benedict Anderson de-linked race, religion and language from the concept of nationalism and considered it an imagined community.
5. In India, it is commonly believed that nationalism began in and around 1885 when the consciousness emerged of being a nation.

6. Chatterjee does not agree with this idea. He defines another category as 'anticolonial nationalism' which was gradually developing long before 1885.
7. Focussing on Bengal, he examines its socio-cultural history of the nineteenth century when (a) Orientalist scholarship (b) revival of Sanskrit dramatic forms (c) European practice of ticketed performances and Western drama converged to create a new culture. The form that emerged was different from the Western.
8. Indian elite divided its world into the 'inner domain' and 'outer domain' along gender lines. The first was the spiritual and the domestic world, the second the material world of economy and progress.
9. It is here that the idea of community and nation became separate worlds. This is a postcolonial problem – where separate communities are part of a nation.
10. A way has to be found to link the imagined community of the nation to the imagined communities of its different fragments.

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## UNIT 17 : PARTHA CHATTERJEE: "WHOSE IMAGINED COMMUNITY?- II"

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### STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Ernest Renan's Concept of Nation
- 17.3 Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*
- 17.4 Postcolonialism and Partha Chatterjee's "Whose Imagined Community?"
- 17.5 Nineteenth Century Nationalism in the West
- 17.6 The Beginnings of Anti-colonial Nationalism
- 17.7 Cultural Developments in Pre-Independence India
- 17.8 Separation into Two Worlds: The Inner Domain and the Outer World
- 17.9 Difference between Western Nationalism and Indian Nationalism
- 17.10 The Gap between the Community and the Nation, and Chatterjee's Stance
- 17.11 Unit End Questions
- 17.12 Suggested Readings

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### 17.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objectives of this unit are to provide you a background to the critical thought about nation and nationalism. The unit will also give a historical overview of the nationalist struggle in pre-Independence India and will discuss the postcolonial elements in Partha Chatterjee's essay. After reading this unit you will be able to

- (a) appreciate the postcolonial discussions about nations and nationalism
- (b) understand the postcolonial perspective in Partha Chatterjee's essay
- (c) evaluate your own understanding of postcolonial thought with reference to Chatterjee's views about nationalism

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### 17.1 INTRODUCTION

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Ernest Renan, in the late nineteenth century, when discussing the concept of nation, emphasized the spiritual nature of the idea of nationality in which geographical, linguistic, racial, dynastic and religious factors were not binding principles. Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* further developed this point when he discussed the nation as an imagined community, in which the fellow-feeling and the implicit oneness of the people in a nation united them especially in difficult times.

Partha Chatterjee, in response to these critical discussions, examined the concept of nation from a postcolonial perspective. In his book *The Nation and its Fragments*, Chatterjee examined the rise of nationalism in India in the early nineteenth century, and explored its differences from Western nationalism. He looked at the multicultural nature of Indian society, and explored if the Western model of the nation was suitable for a multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic country as India.

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## 17.2 ERNEST RENAN'S CONCEPT OF NATION

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The concept of nation was discussed by theorists with a focus on its cultural, social, political and historical characteristics. One of theorists in this area was Ernest Renan, who, in as early as in 1882, discussed in a lecture the problematic question of what is a nation. He begins by questioning about the status of certain countries which are nations but not states and vice versa. The foremost point he discusses is that of the nation as a dynastic principle, which has now become outdated. He argues that several of the present-day nations had a feudal origin, the people tied up to the land through a contract. Examples of such countries were Holland, France and the union of England, Ireland and Scotland. The dynastic origin did not apply to countries like Switzerland and the USA. Renan also points out that the nations created by dynasties could be separated from them without themselves ceasing to exist.

Renan draws attention to the proposition put forward by other theorists that nations are derived from race. The race of the population remains fixed though divisions caused by feudalism, from aristocratic weddings, from diplomatic unions are not permanent. The right of people to belong to a nation due to their ethnic origin becomes an important principle, as suggested by other writers. However, Renan believes that though race was important in the tribes and old cities, in the formation of larger provinces like the Roman empire, which were formed through acts of violence, yet maintained through common interest, the importance of race no longer existed. Similarly, in countries formed by barbaric invasions, ethnographic origins did not hold any importance, for the invaders were indifferent to the race of the people they had subdued. Renan foregrounds the fact that several leading nations like England, France, Germany, and Italy have people of mixed racial origin and therefore this theory about the importance of race and ethnography in the formation of nations is refuted.

Renan then moves to the role of language in the creation of the nation. Renan believes that though language may be a cause for people to unite, it is not a binding principle. Countries like USA, England, Latin America and Spain may speak the same language, yet are different nations. Switzerland has 3 to 4 different languages, yet it is one country. Race and culture and origin are of greater importance than the language people speak. People are not forced to form nations on the basis of the language they speak.



Renan then discusses the point of religion and its role in the formation of nations. Renan argues that earlier, religion was related to the social group, which was an extension of the family. Religions were state religions and people were not respected if they did not practice their religion conscientiously. However in the modern nations, religion became a personal matter, depending on the conscience of the people. The importance of religion has decreased with time. Countries like Belgium which were formed on the basis of the religion of the people have moved ahead, and religion no longer binds its people into one nation.

The final element which Renan takes up for discussion is geography of the country. Renan asks if rivers and mountains are so crucial in the formation of countries. Rivers help the civilization to progress and mountains limit it. But natural frontiers have not affected the formation of political frontiers. Soil may be important but does not become the causative agent for nations. Renan argues that it is the people who are sacred and who lead to the formation of the country. Ernest Renan states that 'a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle', and material, cultural, religious, linguistic, geographic and military necessities do not suffice for the creation of a nation.

Renan explicates that there are two essential components of this spiritual principle – one is the 'rich legacy of memories' which the people of a nation possess, and the other which belongs to the present is the desire to live with each other and the desire to share and pass on the cultural heritage which the people of a nation have received. Each nation has a history of 'endeavours, sacrifice and devotion'. Nations are founded upon their rich heroic past and the common will in the present. The will to be together in times of crisis and to perform great deeds together forms the concept of the nation. Renan points out that the sacrifices made by the people, the grief, the suffering they have experienced as a whole unifies people for they share responsibility and make a collective effort in times of crises. A nation is formed when people let go of the individual, and act in terms of the advantage of the community. Thus a large number of people develop a kind of collective moral conscience which forms a nation.

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### **17.3 BENEDICT ANDERSON'S *IMAGINED COMMUNITIES***

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Partha Chatterjee's essay was a reaction and response to the theorist Benedict Anderson's work titled *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; 1991). In this book Anderson examined the rise of nationalism in the last few centuries in the world, and its spread in the recent years. Anderson's work was considered a breakthrough in the study and research on nationalism.

In the introduction to his volume, Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). He discusses the signification of the terms nationality and nation-ness and suggests

that the concept of nation is a cultural product formed towards the end of the eighteenth century as a result of several important historical events.

Anderson draws attention to three important yet paradoxical characteristics of the concept of nation: (a) the comparative modernity of the term from the point of view of historians and its antiqueness from the perspective of nationalists, (b) the universality of the concept of nationality, the fact that every individual can, should, and will have a nationality, just as every individual has a gender, (c) the political importance of the concept of nation, and yet, the lack of philosophical theories about nationality, and of thinkers who have theorised about this significant concept.

Anderson then moves on to explain the key ideas of the definition of 'nation' as proposed by him. Anderson argues that the nation is imagined because the idea of the nation sustains itself by being imagined by the members of the community. Even the people of a small nation never get to meet all the others or to know them or hear of them, yet they visualize and imagine the image of their community and nation. Anderson draws attention to the fact that all communities that are larger than a village or involving face to face contact are imagined.

Anderson states that the nation is limited because every nation is imagined to have specific boundaries beyond which lay other nations. These boundaries are finite, though they may be elastic and may extend further or recede. The nation is limited because no nation ever imagines that its boundaries will extend through the whole world, that all mankind will constitute one nation.

Anderson believes that the nation is imagined as sovereign because the concept of nation was formed in the age when Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution were undermining the concept of rule by aristocracy. Until then the European countries had been ruled by the members of aristocratic dynasties which were hierarchical and this was believed to be divine will. The idea of religion was being questioned and its fixed nature was being challenged as being a plural one. The people of nations consequently believed that they were free and they had the right to be free.

The nation, according to Anderson, is imagined as a community because the people of a country have a fellow-feeling, a strong feeling of comradeship for other people of that country. Though in reality there may be inequality or exploitation of people of some classes in the nation, yet a feeling of belonging to a community exists among all people of a nation. It is this inherent communal feeling which inspires them even to kill and also to sacrifice their lives for the nation. One cannot ignore the fact that such a momentous act is motivated by the imagining of the concept of nation, and not by any concrete reality of this concept.

Anderson argues that the practice of print-capitalism contributed significantly to the imagining of the nation. As books were published in large numbers by the

printing presses, vernacular languages in print created a common medium of communication which was accessible to everybody. People could read about their countrymen, and share their views and language. The publication of books in the regional languages gave permanence to the languages and provided the feeling of a common past to the people. It also gave prominence to some languages that were easily printable. Dialects that were closer to print languages were commonly used as a result of print capitalism.

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#### **17.4 POSTCOLONIALISM AND PARTHA CHATTERJEE'S : "WHOSE IMAGINED COMMUNITY?"**

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As the term indicates, one of the key features of postcolonial theory is the examination of the impact and continuing influence of the European conquest, colonisation and domination of non-European lands, peoples and cultures. In short, postcolonialism examines the creation of foreign empires by powerful European countries such as England and France. Postcolonialism analyses the inherent ideas of European superiority over non-European peoples and cultures that formed the basic premise of such imperial colonisation.

In addition to critically examining the assumptions that the colonisers propagate of the colonised, postcolonial works also attempt to uncover the damaging effects of such ideas on the self-identity of the colonised. Another feature of such critical examinations is the analysis of the role played by representation in perpetuating such notions of European superiority. In other words, how does colonial representation carry forward negative stereotypes of non-European people and cultures and how do such stereotypes negatively affect the identity of those stereotyped?

Furthermore, with the decolonisation of these lands following the Second World War and the development of independent nation states, what is the role of representation in the construction of new postcolonial identities?

Benedict Anderson's influential book, *Imagined Communities* stated that the nation is imagined in three ways. Firstly it is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of nations have boundaries beyond which lay other nations. Secondly, a nation is imagined as *sovereign* as a result of Enlightenment ideals that questioned the legitimacy of divinely-ordained monarchy. Finally, the nation is imagined as a community, for irrespective of inequality that may nevertheless exist among the citizens of a nation, essentially there is a horizontal relationship among the masses who will never actually know each other personally.

Anderson's book is based on the emergence of the European nation. It was the countries of that continent that engaged in the exploitive political-economic system of colonialism whereby the European countries used the countries of the Americas, Africa, and Asia as a source of raw materials to be processed in Europe and

shipped back to the colonies. This system forced the colonies to be dependent on the European countries for finished goods. Europe thus became the centre while the colonised countries remained at the periphery in this system.

Such a core-periphery colonial relationship existed between Great Britain and India. India first came into contact with Europe after the establishment of trading stations by Holland and England in the early seventeenth century. After an initial period of Dutch dominance, the British East India company came to control trade, and eventually established control over India. After a failed mutiny against the British East India Company, India came under direct rule of the British monarchy in 1858.

Ironically, it was colonialism that introduced the idea of a nation to India which, initially, did not have such a concept. It was this idea of a nation that would be mobilized for the people's welfare by Indian independence fighters, including Mahatma Gandhi.

Partha Chatterjee, working in the area of the emergence of nationalism particularly in the study *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, raises the question that if outside of Europe and the Americas, all nations are based on modules that arose in those two areas, what is left to be imagined in the rest of the world? According to Anderson the peoples outside of Europe and the New World are forced to develop along established patterns of nationness. Chatterjee does not question the idea of "imagined community" *per se*, but he does reject the idea that the only way they can be imagined is in the form taken by European and American nations.

Chatterjee's central argument is that we have mistakenly come to think of nationalism exclusively as a political movement. Instead, he sees the development of two domains in colonial India during the struggle for independence, one material and the other spiritual. The material domain includes the outside world of the economy and of administration, of science and development, while the spiritual domain is that of cultural identity – the traditions, religious beliefs, the value system, which distinguishes all Indians from people of other nationalities.

Chatterjee argues that Indian nationalism in the spiritual domain emerged prior to that in the political domain. According to Chatterjee, this strong possessiveness for one's culture, and the resistance to external interference in one's cultural traditions was a necessary precursor to political national consciousness.

Chatterjee outlines several examples as evidence of the development of this cultural national consciousness. In the world of art, he cites Bengali drama, which was based on classical drama in Sanskrit but reflected a new national consciousness in the nineteenth century. Even in the form of the novel, which Anderson found to be

an expression of the European model of the nation, Chatterjee finds traces of nationalism different from that of Europe.

Chatterjee also cites the change in the construction of the family and especially the role of women as a indication of the new cultural nationalism. To be sure, the new family structure was still patriarchal, but it rejected the western notion of family.

Despite his claim that there developed a cultural consciousness of the "nation", Chatterjee acknowledges that this consciousness had to introduce itself to the political domain according to models developed in Europe as a means to secure independence. Chatterjee's basic argument is that by adopting the structure of the modern state, colonial states restricted how they were to develop after securing independence. The western model of the state does not take into account the presence of communities which form a society (especially in a multicultural country as India). Consequently a gap is discerned between the imagined community of the nation and the imagined community of the different fragments which constitute the nation. This is a postcolonial problem, where the idea of the community and that of the nation do not overlap, and it becomes difficult to bridge the gap between the two.

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## **17.5 NINETEENTH CENTURY NATIONALISM IN THE WEST**

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In earlier times, people of the elite classes only could hold positions of power and the common man had no say in matters of administration. People were expected to show their loyalty to different forms of political organizations as religious groups, feudal lords, and monarchs belonged to particular dynasties, or to city-state. Religion was an essential controlling force and determined the boundaries of the civilization. However, with the increase in scientific knowledge, old beliefs and principles were gradually questioned, the concept of loyalty and love for the state emerged. Nationalist sentiment developed in the West in the eighteenth century. But Western nationalism was linked to the concept of imperialism. As nationalism became stronger in the European countries in the nineteenth century, it resulted in a heightened competition among individual nations in Europe for power and status. Power could be acquired by the expansion of territory and countries like France, Germany, Britain, Portugal, Belgium, Russia and Holland sought colonies in different parts of the world to establish their supremacy.

The process of colonization involved violence, disputes and subjugation of the weak. Western nationalism emphasized racial purity and used forcible deportation or destruction of people of other ethnic backgrounds to achieve ethnic cleansing. In the 1920s, elected leaders – Benito Mussolini in Italy and Adolf Hitler in Germany rose to power. Their ideas of nationalism included inequality of races, nations and people, and in their dictatorship Fascist squads, killed and tortured people of other ethnic origins in the name of nationalism. Hitler also invaded and conquered

neighbouring countries like Czechoslovakia, Poland and Austria. Nationalism as developed in the West was thus militant, purist and violent. The ethnic conflicts within European nations and their race for more colonies led to the World Wars and caused immense destruction all over the world.

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## **17.6 THE BEGINNINGS OF ANTI-COLONIAL NATIONALISM**

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Anticolonial nationalism was a sentiment which sought to strengthen the country against colonial forces. It aimed to remove internal dissent and weaknesses so that the external powers could be thwarted. Anticolonial nationalism worked from the inside and struggled to free the nation of the colonial rule.

According to Chatterjee, anticolonial nationalism in India attempted in the beginning to fortify internal unity before confronting the imperial rulers. It achieved this by dividing social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual. The inner domain was identified with the community and the outer domain with the nation. The material domain included the systems of administration, economy, scientific development and growth, while the spiritual domain formed the cultural identity of the people – the traditions, religious beliefs, cultural norms which were the distinguishing marks of all Indians. While the social domain had been developed by the west, and needed to be studied and imitated by the nationalists, the spiritual domain needed to be strictly protected from outside influences and from the interference of the colonialists.

The spiritual domain was strengthened in the beginning by social reform by using the power of the colonial authorities and by formal measures, to reform traditional institutions and customs. Social activists thus tried to bring about a change in society by reforming age old practices like sati and the dowry system, and by developing awareness about the evil inherent in such traditions. In the next phase, however, strong resistance was shown to the colonial state for its unnecessary interference in matters related to the national culture.

Anticolonial nationalism began around the 1820s in India, when knowledge from the West enlightened the people and encouraged them to work for reforming the society in collaboration with the colonial powers. This period of social reform to strengthen the inner core of the nation continued until the 1870s. However a strong nationalist feeling at a political level emerged in the Indians in 1885, with the formation of the Indian National Congress.

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## **17.7 CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE INDIA**

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The cultural influences of the British rule were far-reaching. As Indians grew interested in the causes of the growth of the British powers, some Europeans also developed an interest in Indian culture. Sir William Jones in 1784 founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal to encourage Oriental studies. Until Jones's death in

1794, the Asiatic Society was a means to convey his views about the importance of Hindu culture and learning, and the importance of Sanskrit among all the Aryan languages. Important literary works in Sanskrit like the *Bhagwadgita* and *Abhijnanasakuntala*, and Persian works as the *Aien-e-Akbari* were also translated.

Reforms in the Indian society were advocated by Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833). Roy denounced Sati and supported the cause of the Indian women – wives, and widows. He argued for the acceptance of some features of Western beliefs and supported English education as a means to bring Western knowledge and developments to India. He was not in favour of idol worship and supported monotheism. His plea for including Christian ethics in the Hindu society was severely criticized. Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj, a reforming organization in 1828. Roy worked for the spread and popularity of English education and borrowed from the Western principles and beliefs for the welfare of the Indians. Roy laid the foundation of a modernized Hinduism, freed of its regressive tradition and practices.

English education was promoted by the British as well as by the orthodox Hindus who discerned that knowledge that could be acquired through a western system of learning. English as a language became popular as it offered scope for employment and power. The Hindu College in Calcutta was promoted, which later was renamed as Presidency College. English schools were also patronized by the Hindus of the urban middle class. Hindu College as well as Alexander Duff's Scottish Church College in Calcutta became centres of Western education and fostered the Young Bengal Movement. Macaulay's Minute of 1835 was also instrumental in this as it supported as the medium of education.

The Hindu revival and reform movements of the 19th and the early 20th centuries were strongly linked with the growth of Indian nationalism and struggle for independence. The Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-83) in 1875, again aimed to reform the Indian Society, to rid it of the corrupting excesses including idol worship, child marriage and the caste system, and to the original pure life of the Vedic age. Influential mainly in the Punjab, the Arya Samaj became that province's leading nationalist organization. Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission though were neutral and took a non-political stand they promoted the movement for self-government. Vivekananda stressed the need to transform the emotion of *bhakti* for god to the welfare of the suffering poor of India.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak combined religion and politics to arouse the nationalist sentiment in Indians. An orthodox Maharashtrian, Tilak used the annual Ganesh Chaturthi festival for nationalist propaganda. He also interpreted the *Bhagwadgita* as a call to action for nationalist struggle. In the historical novel *Anandmath*, the Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, again allegorically presented the contemporary situation

of colonial India. The anthem *Bande Matram* ('I revere the Mother') referred to both the goddess Kali and India, the motherland, and was adopted by the Indian nationalists. Shri Aurobindo, the revolutionary leader also used *Bande Mataram* as a slogan to invoke his countrymen to struggle for the freedom of India with a devoted spirit.

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## **17.8 SEPARATION INTO TWO WORLDS : THE INNER DOMAIN AND THE OUTER WORLD**

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The development of the nationalist consciousness in India before Independence was marked by a dichotomy into two domains – the spiritual domain and the material domain. The spiritual domain encompassed the community and its beliefs and needs, while the material domain was identified with the functions and working of the nation. The material domain included the outside world of economy, administration, scientific development and other machinery while the spiritual domain involved the religious beliefs, the value system, the tradition – the indications of cultural identity.

Chatterjee argues that Indian nationalism in the spiritual domain emerged prior to the political domain. While initially in the early 1800s, the Indian intellectuals sought to reform the society by curing social evils like dowry and sati, they later exhibited a strong resistance to any colonial interference in matters pertaining to the national culture. According to Chatterjee, this strong possessiveness for one's native culture, and the resistance to external interference in one's cultural traditions was a necessary precursor to the development of political national consciousness.

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## **17.9 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WESTERN NATIONALISM AND INDIAN NATIONALISM**

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Western nationalism as manifested in the European countries during the nineteenth century revealed itself through the efforts of the nations to build their empires. Since this involved a gradual and subversive control of the less powerful countries, Western nationalism brought violence, bloodshed and exploitation of the weak. Forms of extreme nationalism like Fascism insisted on the concept of racial purity, and all immigrants were systematically destroyed in order to achieve ethnic cleansing. The European scramble for colonial expansion triggered by the nationalist sentiment to achieve supremacy in the world catalysed the World Wars. Western nationalism aimed to widen the frontiers of the nations to establish or maintain their position and power in the world. Colonial expansion involved the denial of freedom to the natives and was thus exploitative and oppressive.

Indian nationalism, on the other hand aimed for the freedom of the country. It was sacrificing, selfless and was meant for the welfare of all Indians. Instead of looking towards the outer world, Indian nationalism looked inward, its own strengths and



weaknesses, and focused on strengthening itself by self-reform. There were no ulterior motives which dominated the nationalist leaders. The only motive was freedom from the exploitative rule of the British. Therefore, in contrast to Western nationalism, Indian nationalism avoided violence and the use of force and adopted peaceful methods of resistance. Partha Chatterjee stresses on the inward looking aspect of Indian nationalism when he draws attention to the two domains, the spiritual and the material through which Indian nationalism took shape. The phase of social reform in the spiritual domain, and the strict preservation of Indian culture and tradition were important aspects of Indian national struggle.

The concept of nationalism in India varied from that of the West in its basic principles. It had not been totally borrowed from the West. Western nationalism had emphasized racial purity as one of its aims, and had no room for immigrants or people of other origins. Race, religion and language were important markers of the identity of the people, and thus Western nationalism attempted to create homogeneous a society by exterminating or banishing people of a different racial on cultural background. In India, however, there was no homogeneity in terms of race, religion or language, and Indian nationalism was inclusive for all. People of several ethnic and cultural backgrounds were a part of India, and the nationalist struggle did not aim for any kind of homogeneity in society.

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#### **17.10 THE GAP BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY AND THE NATION, AND CHATTERJEE'S STANCE**

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Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* discusses the nation as an imagined community in which its people share a common understanding and belief about it. Partha Chatterjee titles his book *The Nation and its Fragments : Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* and in its various chapters draws attention to the fact that India is a multicultural country with people of several religions, races, languages and cultural traditions. India is thus formed of several fragments – of minorities, of women, of the elite, of the peasants. Each of these fragments has its own history. If a nation is an imagined community then for India, with its innumerable communities, whose imagination constitutes the nation? Chatterjee goes on to discuss the varied communities in India, their pasts and their contribution to the freedom struggle in his book. Chatterjee thus points out that the concept of nationalism of the West cannot be applied exactly to Indian nationalism. With the multicultural nature of Indian society, and with the interests and aims of the different communities sometimes overlapping and sometimes clashing with those of the others, it becomes very difficult to decide whose imagination shapes the nation. The differences of caste, class, religion and language among the Indians cannot be ignored when deciding about matters of the state. But India's postcolonial past forces it to surrender to old forms of the state instead of developing a new form in which all the communities in India have an equal role and participation. Chatterjee

thus underlines the gap between the community and the state in India and the need to bridge this gap.

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### 17.11 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss the role of the Subaltern Studies Group in exploring the pre-colonial past of India.
2. How does Chatterjee respond to Anderson's concept of Western nationalism as a model for the rest of the world?
3. Explain the term 'anticolonial nationalism' as discussed by Chatterjee in his essay. How does it differ from Western nationalism?
4. Discuss the terms inner and outer domain explained by Chatterjee with reference to Indian nationalism.
5. What according to Chatterjee is the difference between community and nation? Why does Chatterjee title his essay "Whose Imagined Community"?

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### 17.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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1. Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments : Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1993.
2. Mongia, Padmini, ed. *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*. New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 2000.
3. Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London : Verso, 1983.
4. Bhabha, Homi K., ed. *Nation and Narration*. London : Routledge, 1990.
5. Partha Chatterjee : Colonialism, History and Civil Society <<http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/chatterjee/chatterjeeov.html>>

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## **UNIT 18 : ASHIS NANDY : *THE INTIMATE ENEMY* - I**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

#### **18.0 Objectives**

#### **18.1 Introduction to *The Intimate Enemy***

##### **18.1.1 About the Author**

##### **18.1.2 About the Book**

#### **18.2 *The Intimate Enemy*: An Overview.**

##### **18.2.1 Preface: A Brief Summary**

##### **18.2.2 Analysis of Part I: ‘The Psychology of Colonialism’**

##### **18.2.3 Analysis of Part II: ‘The Uncolonized Mind’**

##### **18.2.4 Conclusion**

#### **18.3 Discussing Postcolonialism**

##### **18.3.1 What is Postcolonialism?**

##### **18.3.2 Defining Postcolonialism.**

##### **18.3.3 Imperialism and Postcolonialism**

#### **18.4 Why Read Postcolonialism?**

#### **18.5 What is Postcolonial Discourse?**

##### **18.5.1 Postcolonial Literature**

##### **18.5.2 Postcolonial Literary Theory**

#### **18.6 Self Assessment Questions**

#### **18.7 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **18.8 Unit End Questions**

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### **18.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The aim of this Unit is to introduce you to Ashis Nandy and his book *The Intimate Enemy*. Further, we shall discuss the need to study colonialism and postcolonialism. By the end of the Unit you will be able to:

- (a) understand the significance of *The Intimate Enemy* as a postcolonial theoretical text;
- (b) know the historical, cultural and political implications of colonialism and postcolonialism;
- (c) place postcolonialism in relation to colonialism and imperialism;
- (d) define postcolonialism.

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## 18.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE INTIMATE ENEMY

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*The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (published by Oxford, New Delhi in 1983), views colonialism and postcolonialism in the light of psychology. It is a vividly written account of the growth of colonialism in India and its psycho-social implications.

The book has two essays: 'The Psychology of Colonialism' and 'The Uncolonized Mind.' It also has an exhaustive and elegantly written 'Preface.' The first essay was published in *Psychiatry* in 1982 and the second was a presentation at a meeting on Culture, Power and Transformation, held in Poona (Pune) in 1978. It is the second essay which is prescribed for you.

This work is the first ever attempt to understand colonialism and postcolonialism in India from a psychological perspective.

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### 18.1.1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Ashis Nandy is a respected name in academic circles not only in India but also throughout the world. As one of the leading political, cultural and social thinkers he has held several coveted fellowships and chairs in international universities. What is unique about his writings is his blending of psychology and sociology to understand power politics and other political situations.

Born in Bhagalpur, Bihar in 1937, Ashis Nandy is the eldest of the three sons of Satish Chandra Nandy, a Bengali Christian. His mother was a teacher in La Martiniere School, Calcutta who became the first Indian Vice Principal of the school. After his schooling in Calcutta, Ashis tried to study medicine but somehow it was not to his taste. He joined Hislop College, Nagpur and did his Masters in Sociology. Later, shifting to clinical psychology, a subject much near his heart, he did his doctorate degree from Gujarat University, Ahmedabad.

Ashis Nandy was just ten when he witnessed the partition of the country and the resultant exodus, atrocities and bloodshed. This experience became the foundation of his personality and directed his thoughts to political psychology, nationalism and culture. These are the fields on which he has written extensively.

As a young scholar he joined the Centre for the Study of Developmental Societies, Delhi. It was during this period that he developed his own methodology to study culture with clinical psychology and sociology. This is a unique perspective which not only gives a convincing reading of the socio-cultural-political set-up but also gives an in-depth understanding of the present problems generated by historical realities.

Nandy has written extensively on the colonial/postcolonial issues, human rights, violence, and other social aspects. He is recognized as an intellectual of international standing and has won awards as well as earned high academic positions. Besides writing he has been actively involved in movements for peace and cultural survival.

*The Intimate Enemy* is a vivid account of the growth of colonialism in India and its psychological ramifications.

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### 18. 1. 2. ABOUT THE BOOK

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*The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* holds an important place in colonial and postcolonial theory because this work discusses the psychological aspects of colonialism and postcolonialism and gives an indigenous interpretation of the historical situation. Nandy provides specific examples and references to the problems faced by Indians during the colonial period; he also discusses our culturally-oriented approach to the colonial and postcolonial situations.

Nandy views colonialism as a two-way flow — if the colonizer (British) influenced the colonized (India), the colonizer himself was influenced by the indigenous (Indian) culture. He does not view colonized Indians as innocent and hapless victims of colonialism, but as participants in the ventures against oppression.

The author makes it clear that the British spread their influence in India with psychological skills and not with military power. That is why the occupation of India by the British came smoothly, without much resistance. The colonizers brought with them their modern scientific ideas to India. These were inducted through the English education. These ideas impressed the Indian intellectuals and they tried to implement some of these in Indian social thinking. The British, on their part looked at the non-west as barbaric and advocated the theory that the uncivilized non-west (India) will benefit only through colonialism. These views were not restricted to the social and cultural life of Indians; these were reflected in literature also.

Ashis Nandy's theory can be applied to both British and Indian writings. Nandy gives examples from Rudyard Kipling's life and works to show the sense of guilt and shame Kipling felt for his Indian identity; so he negated it. Nandy also discusses Indians like Ishwar Chander Vidya Sagar, Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo to illustrate the impact of colonialism on the Indian psyche. He shows how the 'Sahibs' as well as the 'Natives' felt a sense of guilt for their political, racial, social and communal acts. The feeling of guilt is connected with the need for punishment. With the need to punish there are also other trappings like confession, repression and 'scapegoating' which one can find in the colonial as well as postcolonial literature. The works of Paul Scott, John Masters, R.K. Narayan and many others can be read with the concept of superiority-inferiority notions. This in simple terms can be called the "Mai-Baap" aspect of the colonial situation. In postcolonial writing such concepts are resisted.

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### 18.2 THE INTIMATE ENEMY: AN OVERVIEW

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In Part I of *The Intimate Enemy*, Ashis Nandy discusses the psycho-political

conditions generated by colonialism in India. He uses the concepts of depth psychology and sociology to understand the psychological structure and cultural forces which supported or resisted colonialism. Using the concepts of childhood, femininity and reward and punishment, he creates the image of India under colonial rule. This leads him to show the postcolonial psychology also.

Broadly, his theoretical framework claims that:

- (i) colonialism gives rise to a shared culture;
- (ii) colonialism and postcolonialism are states of consciousness;
- (iii) colonialism affects both: the colonizer and the colonized and is both an internal and external condition;
- (iv) to wipe out its effect, it is necessary to defeat it psychologically, i.e. in the minds of men.

In Part II entitled ‘The Uncolonized Mind: A Post-Colonial view of India and the West,’ Nandy carries forward the discussion citing examples from the real life experiences of Rudyard Kipling and Sri Aurobindo. Both were the products of India and England jointly and their psychological responses were alike yet different. This was because of the historical impact of colonialism which affected the colonizer as well as the colonized. From the specific, the author goes on to analyze the cultures in general.

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### 18.2.1 PREFACE : A BRIEF SUMMARY

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In the Preface Ashis Nandy briefly traces the psychological reasons that led to the establishment of the colonial rule. In the beginning, the British colonizers’ aim was economic gain through trade. So, they managed to establish themselves without resistance. Later, when the British middle-classes came to administer the land, they justified colonial rule on the grounds that the superior races must conquer and rule over the inferior races. We can understand their philosophy of colonization thus:

SUPERIOR	INFERIOR
Human →	Non-human/subhuman
Masculinity →	Femininity
Adult →	Child
Historical →	Ahistorical
Modern →	Traditional
Progressive →	Non-progressive/Savage

Accordingly, the non-western world was subhuman, feminine, childish, savage and inferior. Thus, the ancient cultures and civilizations like India were reduced to the status of inferior societies. Further, the colonizers exploited these colonies economically and culturally to establish their superiority. Violence and greed were legitimized on the doctrine of salvation, progress and modernity. Simply put, it means, it was the colonizers' mission to civilize the uncivilized; progress and modernity would bring salvation to the savage societies. This is termed as 'colonization of the mind' which means exercising psychological control over the mind of the subjugated races. The effect of psychological control is deep and long-lasting and infiltrates into the postcolonial period. That is the reason why postcolonialism cannot be separated from colonialism.

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## **18.2. 2 ANALYSIS OF PART I : 'THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLONIALISM'**

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In the first essay Nandy recounts the basis on which the British colonized India and perpetuated their rule. The mainstay of their political dominance over the weaker societies was the belief that the strong or the powerful are justified in dominating the weak. This philosophy was based on the metaphors of masculinity and femininity whereby the superior (masculine) rules over the inferior (feminine). They used this sexual stereotype to exploit other cultures and also to justify slave trade.

In the early decades of the colonial rule i.e. from 1757 to 1830, the Britishers who came to India tried to assimilate with the culture. Ashis Nandy argues that most of them were in awe of the Indian gods and goddesses and were committed to Indian ways of life. Thus, under them the traditional Indian life style remained untouched and it was the Indian culture that dominated the culture of the British Indian politics. But once the British middle classes and the missionaries started coming for the purpose of administration and for spreading religion, the trend changed. They ascribed cultural meaning to their dominance. The introduction of English language for educating Indians speeded up the change. On the one hand, the British Raj consolidated its power and its hold on Indians, on the other, Indian intellectuals who were exposed to the western education adopted the notions of liberty and started implementing their reformist ideas. The impact of the English education was two fold and contradictory: firming up colonial control and resentment to it.

The author uses the psychological concept of "identification with the aggressor" to explain how and why the colonizers and the colonized formed a relationship and how it gave rise to a shared culture. The Indians saw the British as agents of progress and started imitating them. They identified with their victors, the aggressors. In order to imitate them Indians resurrected the traditional ideals of *Kshatriahood* in order to match the British idea of the martial races as the hyper-masculine, courageous and superbly loyal. These and many such factors resulted

in the change in consciousness. Many early revolutionaries took to violent means to defeat the British to redeem the historical memory of their humiliation of defeat. In that they were defeated because they became copies of the masters.

There were other psychological ramifications. The sense of guilt, fear of the colonized, and fear of being rejected all worked on the psyche of the British colonizers and impelled them to consolidate their power by drawing parallelism between primitivism and childhood. They separated India's past and its present. India of the past was civilized but it was dead; they rejected the present India as decrepit and feeble. Either way, India required to be ruled by a superior power. Thus they justified domination. They also postulated that India's degradation was not due to colonial rule but due to its traditional past.

With such psychological implications at work, a time comes when colonialism becomes a "shared culture" and it becomes impossible to segregate the colonizer from the colonized and the colonial period from decolonization.

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### **18.2.3 ANALYSIS OF PART II : 'THE UNCOLONIZED MIND'**

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In Part two (which is in your prescribed syllabus), Ashis Nandy discusses the search for identity. Since there was an exchange of ideas and collision of cultures a shared culture sprung up. It was necessary to get cultural assertion for both the British and the Indians. The author explicates his theory using the lives of Rudyard Kipling and Sri Aurobindo. Their experiences were alike yet different. Born and brought up in colonial India and educated in England they both suffered psychological displacement. But this displacement was in a way energizing feature because it led them to interrogate and subvert the imperial cultural formations – each in his own way.

The essay is divided in six sections. In Section I and II, the author recasts the early life of Rudyard Kipling to understand his split personality and links it with the cultural problems. Kipling was a staunch believer in British imperial supremacy. He held that it was India's destiny to be ruled and it was Britain's right to rule India. This came from a man who should have been indebted to India and Indians for giving him the happiest period of his life, of love and warmth he received from his Indian ayahs and loving servants. But though one side of his psyche loved India, the other upheld India's subjugation. This was a great enigma of his personality which needs to be understood psychologically.

Ashis Nandy traces his split personality to the psychological impact on his growing up years. Kipling was born in India and was looked after with affection by the Indian servants. That was the happiest period of his life. Later, he and his sister were sent to England for their education. There was nothing unusual in their situation because many British officers sent their children to England to protect them from the Indian influence. For the Kipling children, however, this turned out to be a traumatic period.



During his growing up years when Rudyard started socializing with his English peers in his native land he learnt to admire his native country and its culture as strong, superior and masculine. England was the victor all the way, India was the victim. On the contrary, he found that through English culture was admirable, it was not lovable. Lovable was India, though not admirable. Kipling, however, had another identity problem. His looks were Indian and he was promptly marginalized as a peculiar bi-cultural boy. On his return to India, he found himself a misfit in the English society located in India. He loved one part of India, yet hated westernized Indians.

Kipling's dilemma was that he could not be both western and Indian simultaneously. But, the dilemma of Kipling was also the dilemma of the western culture. When the colonial culture could not understand India, what it did was it reversed the self-image of India.

In Section III, Nandy argues that the westernized Indians wanted to rectify their effeminate image. They thought *Kshatriyahood* was an answer to it. They took to violent means to overthrow the colonial rulers. This baffled the colonizers, particularly when they saw the contradictions in Indian culture—spiritual yet materialistic, weak yet strong and pacifist yet violent. Nandy makes a neat distinction between these facets. He admits that the Indian mind is both materialistic (this-worldly) and spiritual (that-worldly). But the two facets—spiritual and material—are well-integrated into our psyche.

In section IV and V, Nandy focuses on Sri Aurobindo and contrasts him with Kipling. If Kipling was culturally the child of India, Aurobindo was culturally the child of Europe. But while Kipling imbibed the political superiority of the colonial masters; Aurobindo grew up to imbibe the spiritual values of India. Kipling could not own up his Indianness; Aurobindo could own up his Indianness and yet keep his western mind intact. Both were the offshoots of colonialism but Aurobindo's response was more universal.

This does not mean that Aurobindo had accepted colonization. He resisted it by finding alternatives. One of the alternatives was his mysticism. After his acquittal in May 1909 (from a legal case of revolutionary activities), he diverted his energies to spirituality, withdrew into mysticism and retreated to Pondicherry. The Mother, a westerner Mira Paul Richard, accepted Aurobindo, an Indian, as the supreme Guru; for her he was the key to salvation. This was Aurobindo's answer to the emptiness and inner separations induced in him by the West. He was now no longer the 'Other'; he was the center and the West was the 'Other', looking to him (through the Mother).

For Nandy, Aurobindo symbolized the suffering of the Indian society. In order to protect its self-esteem in the face of defeat, indignity, exploitation and violence, Indian society has indeed evolved a model of autonomy. It has also evolved a theory of suffering to affirm intellectual and spiritual superiority. The answer to

victimhood is not masculinity versus femininity of culture but an androgynous approach. In that the Gandhian approach of resistance appears convincing.

Gandhi created a powerful androgynous image to fight the British. This image was consistent with the philosophy of Hinduism. Gandhi was sure that once imperialism loses out on ethical grounds, it will be a lost force. If people like Kipling were votaries of the superiority of the colonial culture and the inferiority of the other, there were the others like Gandhi who knew how to turn tables on them. Gandhi pitched his battle on two planes. “He admitted that colonialism was a moral issue and took the battle to Kipling’s home ground for judging colonialism by Christian values and declaring it to be an absolute evil” (p. 100) Thus, he won on moral grounds.

Nandy concludes his discussion with the assertion that Indian culture may look weak and insane, but it is universal and ethical.

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### 18.3 DISCUSSING POSTCOLONIALISM

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In order to understand Ashis Nandy’s theories put forward in *The Intimate Enemy*, we need to have some working knowledge of postcolonialism. Let us understand and define postcolonialism.

#### **What is Postcolonialism?**

In simple language postcolonialism is the period after the end of the colonial rule. But is that really so? No. Colonialism and postcolonialism are facts of history and the states of mind of the colonizer and the colonized both. Colonialism does not necessarily begin with the process of the establishment of the alien rule nor does postcolonialism take shape immediately after the political freedom of an erstwhile colony. The roots remain intertwined and give rise to what Ashis Nandy calls a “shared culture”.

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#### 18.3.1 DEFINING POSTCOLONIALISM

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Postcolonialism has no fixed definition. It is a highly debated term, precisely because it evolved as a concept and not as a theory. A concept is a mental construct and is usually vague and uncertain. The term postcolonialism can be applied to a wide variety of fields—cultural, historical, social, psychological, economic, military and many others.

The main thrust of postcolonialism is to centre on the question of how should we understand European colonialism as a cultural, historical and political phenomenon; how to interpret the influence and impact of colonialism after it was over; how the cultures/communities responded to it; what has been the reaction? Postcolonialism studies both—the colonized nations and the colonizing nations—to assess and analyze the effect of colonialism and imperialism.

Some critics and theorists have tried to provide working definitions of postcolonialism. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin et al. contend that

postcolonialism involves discussions on “migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. None of these is ‘essentially’ postcolonial but together they form the complex fabric of the field.”

Ania Loomba says, “to think of post-colonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism.”

Another critic, Stephen Slemon, looks at postcolonialism in relation to anti-colonial cultural practices; some others define it in relation to power and resistance to power. Jasbir Jain calls it a process of history, human psychology and the positioning within power relationships; and Meenakshi Mukherjee avers that postcolonialism is ideologically an emancipatory concept.

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### **18.3.2 IMPERIALISM AND POSTCOLONIALISM**

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‘Imperialism’ is a political ideology under which an empire forcibly extends its domain over other countries and peoples. ‘Colonialism’ is the practice of one country holding another in subjugation by force with or without the implication of an ‘empire’. ‘Colonialism’ needs the establishment of colonies, that is, the settlers coming and setting up homes in the new lands. ‘Imperialism’ does not require settlers, it can rule from a distance. Colonialism is essentially an economic situation in which the colonizer conquers and controls the land and the economy along with exercising political control.

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### **18.4 WHY READ POSTCOLONIALISM?**

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Postcolonialism became an intellectual discourse holding together a set of theories in the disciplines of culture, literature, social sciences, philosophy and even films. These theories projected the erstwhile colonized subjects’ reaction to the legacy of colonialism and in a way, these theories became liberating as these gave visibility and self-esteem to the students of literature from the non-western world, enabling them to interpret texts in their own terms.

It must also be taken into account that every erstwhile colony (which is now an independent state/nation) has had a pre-colonial geographical space with a history of its own and its socio-cultural formations. A lot of these formations or pre-colonial arrangements were upset by the colonial rulers. In India, it was the partition of the country which tilted the balance completely. Postcolonial studies, therefore, look back to the roots; they resist the overshadowing of their basic culture; they try to negate the binary oppositions like self/other, center/margin, civilized/savage and the like. They re-write their past, assert national identity; and reject the master’s language. These are all part of postcolonial discourse.

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## 18.5 WHAT IS POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE?

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Postcolonial discourse seeks to explore issues like the formation of the empire; impact of colonization on postcolonial societies, their history, culture, religion and economy; marginalized communities; the relations between feminism and postcolonialism; the questions of national identity; the postcolonial conceptualization of the nation; and the status of the postcolonial country/countries in contemporary economic and cultural contexts.

We know that colonialism affects colonizers and the colonized both but it a fact that the colonized suffers more because it is the colonized whose history, culture and the politico-socio-economic matrix has been ransacked by the so-called “superior” colonizer culture. As Frantz Fanon puts it:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s head of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.

The victims of this historical process suffer loss of identity and undergo psychological conflicts.

In the postcolonial era, then, the most urgent need of the society is to repossess its own past and take control of its own reality. The writers in the postcolonial situation write with an informed awareness so as to redefine themselves and their identity in the context of their past and to assert the images of identity, of community, of myths, of history, of culture.

The process is generally called “writing back”. This term became popular after Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin provided an elaborate interpretation of the postcolonial resistance impulse from various angles in their work *The Empire Writes Back*. Literature shows how the daily realities of people’s lives were influenced by colonialism.

Postcolonial studies as an intellectual discourse gained prominence in around the 1970s with Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). But the real take-off point came with the publication in 1989 of *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. Prior to this, however, Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1967, had offered new perspectives on nationalism, national consciousness and anti-nationalism, which later postcolonial theorists found useful for the development of postcolonial debate. Slowly, terms like ‘Commonweath’, ‘Third World’ or ‘post-independence’ came to be replaced by the more sophisticated ‘postcolonial’.

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### 18.5.1 POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE

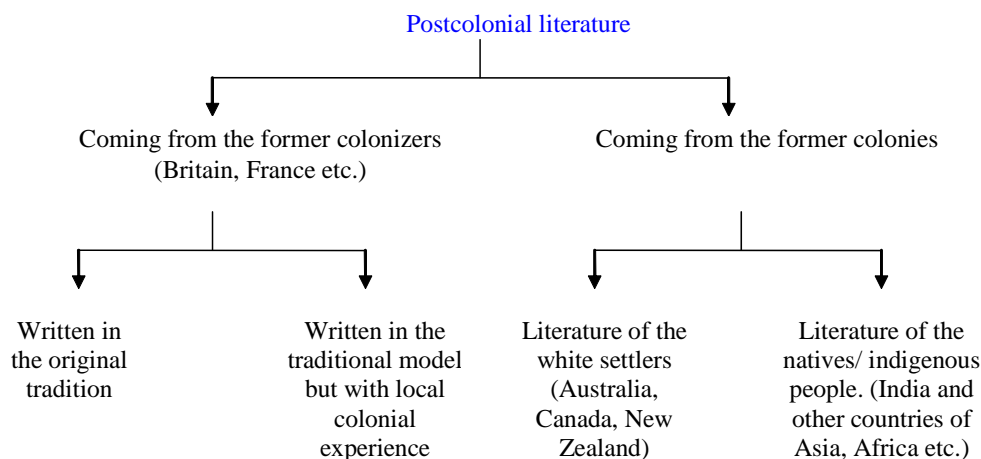
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Postcolonial literature is the literature coming from countries like India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Ghana and in fact, all the countries of Asia, Africa, South America and other island countries like the Caribbean that were under the European colonial rule. We now know that the experiences of these peoples were different. So the literature too cannot be similar. Even then postcolonial literature is born out of the tension generated by the historical-political conditions of imperial power; and so it has similarities of experience; it writes back and it tries to reclaim its lost image.

The first important task of this literature was to break the hegemony of the imperial power. The colonial masters always looked at the native literature as off-shoots of English literature which relegated it to the margin. Indigenous literatures began incorporating the native idiom, reverting to their own traditions – like use of indigenous myths, legends, proverbs etc and made changes in the pattern of language even when they were using English. This is how they started rejecting the Eurocentric models.

Postcolonial situation is one of alienation and the crisis caused by dislocation resulting from migration or transportation as indentured labor or the experience of slavery. Dislocation is also caused by obliteration of culture, oppression or devaluation. Therefore, the shared discursive practice in all postcolonial writings to get over the sense of alienation is the construction of ‘place’. The dialectic of place and displacement becomes a significant feature of postcolonial literature.

The following chart will give you a bird’s eye-view of postcolonial literature springing from various sources.



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### 18.5.2 POSTCOLONIAL LITERARY THEORY

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Postcolonial theory deals with the reading and writing of the literature coming from the erstwhile colonies and also from the colonizing cultures. It focuses on

two main aspects: first, how the literature coming from the colonizing culture distorts the realities of the colonized community by inscribing its inferiority as against the colonizer's superiority; second, how literature by the former colonized countries attempts to articulate their identity and try to reclaim their past.

Here we need to identify the western notions of "the universal" because Ashis Nandy refers to it in his *The Intimate Enemy*. The notion of "the universal" assumes that only the western philosophy, epistemology, historiography, language and literature are universal and have the authority to apply across time and space. Postcolonial writing refuses to agree with this view. It attempts to rediscover the indigenous theories of cultural values, literary practices and historical fact. In doing so postcolonial literatures reclaim their national and cultural identity.

Another concept is that of the 'Other'. Postcolonial literature is concerned with the question of the 'Other'. Colonization is based on the superiority/inferiority syndrome viz. the West is rational, ordered, masculine, and good; the East is irrational, chaotic, feminine and bad. Thus everything is reduced to good and evil, white and black. This way, the colonized becomes the 'Other' of the colonizer. He is at the margin. Postcolonial literary theory tries to break this stereotype.

Postcolonial theory gives us tools to understand the new trends like revision, reappropriation and reinterpretation of history. The silent and the invisible become vocal and visible in postcolonial situation. Literary criticism classifies and categories these shaping forces, evolves methodology and applies it to the works of literature.

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## 18.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. What is the subject of *The Intimate Enemy* ?
2. The British viewed their culture as masculine. How did they view Indian culture?
3. What do you understand by the term 'identification with the aggressor'?
4. How is the colonizer's sense of guilt and fear of the colonized expressed by the typical response/reaction of Rudyard Kipling?
5. What is postcolonialism?
6. Colonialism is "shared culture." Who said this? What do you understand by this term?
7. How, according to Frantz Fanon, do the colonizers obliterate the identity of the colonized?
8. What are the various issues/contests that postcolonial literature seeks to examine?

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## 18.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we tried to evolve an elaborate discussion of postcolonial theory and literature. We proceeded on the following lines:

After discussing Ashis Nandy's place as a postcolonial critic and his contribution

to theory, we discussed *The Intimate Enemy*. We learnt how colonialism affects the psychology of both the colonizer and the colonized. This equipped us with two facts: (i) colonialism is a state of mind, and (ii) the effect of colonialism does not end with the end of alien rule. We then studied postcolonial theory and its relevance to interpret literature.

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## 18.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Write a critique of Ashis Nandy's *The Intimate Enemy* to show your acquaintance with it.
2. What is the significance of postcolonial literary theory? How does it help us to analyze postcolonial literature?
3. Define postcolonial literature.
4. Write short notes on -
  - (i) national identity.
  - (ii) the 'Other'
  - (iii) Rudyard Kipling
  - (iv) Sri Aurobindo

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## **UNIT - 19 : ASHIS NANDY'S - *THE INTIMATE ENEMY*– II**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 19.0 Objectives**
- 19.1 Understanding the Title**
- 19.2 Section I: Rudyard Kipling— The Making of an Imperialist**
  - 19.2.1 Happy Childhood, Traumatic Boyhood.**
  - 19.2.2 Kipling's Writings**
- 19.3 Section II: Understanding the Postcolonial Psyche**
  - 19.3.1 The Non-Eastern Westerner**
  - 19.3.2 India as Non-West**
  - 19.3.3 Non-modern India**
- 19.4 Section III: Two Indias: Spiritual and Materialistic**
  - 19.4.1 Selling Indian Spirituality and Materialism**
  - 19.4.2 Psychology of Resistance**
- 19.5 Section IV: Aurobindo's Life**
  - 19.5.1 Traumatic Growing Up Years**
  - 19.5.2 Asserting Indian Identity**
  - 19.5.3 Synthesis of the East and the West**
- 19.6 Section V: Countering the Inner pain of Colonialism**
  - 19.6.1 Gandhi's Androgynous Vision**
  - 19.6.2 What is Non-modern India?**
  - 19.6.3. The Strength of Indian Culture**
  - 19.6.4 Conclusion**
- 19.7 Glossary and Annotations**
- 19.8 Self Assessment Questions**
- 19.9 Let Us Sum UP**
- 19.10 Unit End Questions**
- 19.11 Suggested Readings**

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### **19.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The aim of this unit is to analyze Part II of *The Intimate Enemy* which is in your course. At the end of the unit you will be able to understand:

1. The reason behind Rudyard Kipling's split personality and his staunch imperialism;
2. Aurobindo's efforts to find alternatives to the oppressive culture;
3. Colonization of the mind of both the colonizer and the colonized;



4. Elements of Indian traditions that saved the culture from being overwhelmed by the colonial culture.

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## **19.1 UNDERSTANDING THE TITLE**

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Let us first take into consideration the title of Part II: 'The Uncolonized Mind: A Post-Colonial View of India and the West.' The words 'uncolonized mind' show that the mind is not 'decolonized'. Nandy believes that the roots of colonialism go deeper. The ruler and the ruled, the colonial power and the colonized victim develop a kind of relationship that cannot be wished away. The influence of one culture over the other culture continues even after the political end of colonial rule. In the postcolonial period, the 'uncolonized' Indian mind needs to achieve dialectic between modern Western values and the non-Western Indian values to evolve a conscious self-definition and get an autonomous world view which is inherent in our secular universalism and spiritualism. The second part of this title suggests that the postcolonial consciousness can be understood by juxtaposing the East and the West together and not by isolating them. Thus, he emphasizes on his idea of "shared culture." This, as you know is the title of part-II and as such is a subtitle. The title of the book is *The Intimate Enemy*. This covers both the parts of this book, 'Intimate' is one who is close and what can be closer than one's own consciousness or mind? As Ashis Nandy is discussing the impact of colonization, on the human mind in this work, it is this which is the 'intimate' enemy. Our inner conscious and subconscious responses impact our way of thinking and relating to each other. They impact our idea of self as well as the other. It is through a process of "un" colonizing this 'intimate enemy' that one can bring about a change in power relationships as well as the relationship between our self-imate and how we perceive the 'other'.

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## **19.2 SECTION I: RUDYARD KIPLING – THE MAKING OF AN IMPERIALIST**

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According to Ashis Nandy, Rudyard Kipling is a befitting case-study of the psychological impact of colonialism on the colonizer master race. Kipling loved India and yet he was a staunch upholder of imperialism. This rift in his personality was puzzling to Kipling's biographers and his readers. Why did he believe that it was India's destiny to be ruled and it was Britain's duty to rule her? The answers to these questions can be found in the psychological development of the 'boy' Kipling.

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### **19.2.1 HAPPY CHILDHOOD, TRAUMATIC BOYHOOD**

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Rudyard Kipling was born in India in 1862 when the British rule was at its zenith. Little Rudyard was looked after by doting ayahs and loving servants. He was always in their company and even learnt to speak Hindustani. This period of his

life provided him sense of security and belongingness which is one of the basic childhood needs.

As opposed to this was his relationship with his parents — loving but remote. The Kipling household was sternly Victorian, matter-of-fact and devoid of emotional closeness. At six he was sent to England for studies. In fact, there was nothing unusual in his parents' decision. British officers in India preferred to send their children to their native country to shield them from Indian influences. But in this case it proved disastrous. Rudyard and his sister felt miserable with their aunt Rosa Halloway who was a stern disciplinarian. Her son was also a bully. This was a world of restrictions, persecution and harshness and Rudyard suffered a nervous breakdown.

Later, in the public school he encountered more rough and tough atmosphere. Effeminate and weak Rudyard could not cope with the tensions of outdoor activities, ragging and bullying. Further, his tanned complexion and black hair made him feel like an outsider and he became a loner.

These growing-up years showed him three sides of his culture – the emotionless attitude of his parents, the harsh authority of his aunt, and the intimidating and terrorizing practices of his peers. This subculture, though harrowing and intolerable to the sensitive boy, was the culture from where the stern and efficient colonizers came to rule over the far off lands. Slowly, Kipling learnt to admire this culture; to belong to it was to assert his superiority. Kipling could admire England but he could not love it. He loved India but was wary of his Indianness. Thus he remained on the margins of both cultures. Marginality created two Kiplings: the one who loved India but could not identify with it; the other who prided being English but could not connect with his countrymen.

Let us consider the deeper implications of his situation. First, he was a victim because he was weak and conversely, because he was weak he was victimized. India too was a victim of the hard, harsh colonizing culture. If he identified with India he would be identifying with the victim inside him. The easiest way was to uphold his British self with its values of aggressiveness, authority and violence. He did that but hated the West within him. He loved India's warmth and affection but he hated his self-image as an Indianized Westerner. Kipling's writings reveal this uncertainty of his personality.

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### **19.2.2 KIPLING'S WRITINGS**

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In his works Kipling has all admiration for aggressive, self-confident and openly defiant fighters as the 'ideal victim'. On the contrary, he hates the victim who fights through passive methods because he is a 'weak victim'. Violence is generated by both the fighters but the violence of the former is strong and masterly, of the latter cowardly.

By implication, the first kind of violence is the victor's violence; the second kind is of the subjugated race. Since the colonial power stood for progress and social evolution, Kipling thought that it was perfectly justified in its use of violence. He upheld imperialism on the basis of the doctrine of progress. Through glorification of the victor, Kipling glorified his British 'self' and disowned his victimized self.

Ashis Nandy calls it Kipling's "moral blindness". Kipling avoided looking within because of his deep-rooted dread of victimhood but he did not realize that the real self within was his soft and creative self. By negating it, he hampered the creative edge of his writing. His works created ethnic stereotypes not real human beings because instead of depicting human problems and person-to-person relationships he gave more importance to race and blood.

The two selves of Kipling were perpetually at conflict within him. One Kipling was violent and self-righteous; the other was in awe of India — an ancient and complex culture. One Kipling who glorified masculine values was forever in fear of madness and death. The other Kipling who was fascinated by India's androgynous vision but did not have guts to identify with it. His British self overpowered his Indian self and forced him to uphold imperialism. But inside his heart he remained in search of the India he loved — the India of masculine valour. He wanted this brave India to compete with the West on her own principles; he did not want it to copy the West. He despised the Westernized Indian because he was a copy of the West; he dreaded the 'Brown Sahib' because he was a reminder of his own self which he wanted to forget.

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### 19.3 SECTION II: UNDERSTANDING POSTCOLONIAL PSYCHE

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In this section, Ashis Nandy draws a parallel between Rudyard Kipling's love-hate relationships with India and the British colonial administrators' love-hate attitude. Let us remember that Kipling was unable to own his identity as an Indianized Westerner. The fear of his self-destructive drives forced him to stick to his Western self. By rejecting his Indian self he saved himself from being overwhelmed by his bicultural image.

Colonialism worked on the psyche of the white colonizer much in the same way as it did in Kipling's case. It required the Western man to shake off his wholeness as a white man and acquire a new self definition. Those who came to run the administration of the colonies became parochial and universal simultaneously — 'parochial' in the sense that they doggedly pursued their cultural values assuming them to be superior; 'universal' in the sense that they did not remain confined geographically and went to far off places as representatives of the empire. In order to legitimize the empire, they justified violence; in order to justify violence they identified with the masculine, superior culture. This hard outer face was a psychological ploy to save the 'self' from self-destructive fear.

Colonialism moulded the Western man's psychology to suit the requirement of the politics of administration and gave the colonizers a new self-image: they could not remain wholly Western nor could they be Eastern; so they were seen as 'Non-Eastern'. In their hearts they feared and respected the East as a source of knowledge. But they had to make their choice precisely because they could not accept multicultural living; they could not merge the Eastern and the Western values. They took the easy path: highlighting the negative aspects of the East they managed to distance themselves.

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### 19.3.1 INDIA AS NON-WEST

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The 'non-Eastern' man failed to understand the East. He constructed his own image of the orient as a bundle of contradictions – superstitious but religious, uneducated but wise, violent but cowardly. According to it India was just an antithesis of the West; it was 'non-West'. This was an erroneous image. India was not non-West, it was (and is) India. Except for a handful of Westernized Indians who were under the influence of the West, the ordinary Indians were away from it. They were sustained by the Indian cultural values of all-encompassing universalism and a holistic view of man. Forcing on India the identity as a non-Western country meant constricting the free-flow of its culture. The colonizers saw the two cultures as absolutely at two ends; like Kipling they believed that the twain shall never meet. But Kipling and his compatriots overlooked the fact that colonialism itself brings the East and the West together.

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### 19.3.2 NON-MODERN INDIA

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When the colonizers failed to understand India they created a negative view of the country dubbing it as pre-modern or anti-modern. According to Nandy, the apt metaphor for India should be 'non-modern'. This 'non-modern' India had the capacity to assimilate tradition and modernity; it also incorporated the West within its folds and made it her own subculture. This subculture, though meaningful, was not all-important to her.

At the root of Kipling's dislike for the 'brown sahibs' was the residue of the above fact: while the Indian 'babu' did not have to compromise his Indian self to become his Western self, the Westerners could never be both – Western and Indian. On the contrary, he liked the martial Indian — strong, open, manly and reckless. This Indian was a *kshatriya* who followed the principles of the Gita in confronting violence with counter-violence. This image was consistent with the colonial world view of man because it stood for open defiance instead of pacifism. Pacifism was seen as cowardly.

Let us ask an important question: why were Kipling and his fellow colonizers afraid of being overwhelmed by India? And why was India free from the fear of being overwhelmed by the West? These points can be understood with the help

of two terms – Apollonian and Dionysian. These two terms represent polarities of the human personality: Apollonian is the logical, orderly side; Dionysian is the intuitive, spontaneous side. Drawn from the characteristic of the Greek gods, they stand for contradictory attributes and generate fear of assimilation. Since the Western philosophy upheld these views and subscribed to these polarities, it could not reconcile to the idea of assimilation. For them, this meant being overwhelmed. On the contrary, Indian culture was free from such notions. Its universalism is all-encompassing and does not generate fear of being swamped over and obliterated by outside forces.

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#### **19.4 SECTION III: TWO INDIAS: SPIRITUAL AND MATERIALISTIC**

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In this section Ashis Nandy discusses Indian spiritualism which is unique to Indian culture and difficult for an outsider to comprehend. Such a culture does not yield to easy interpretation and consequently, the interpreter ends up by creating a world of his own fantasy and gets confused. The British encountered two divergent philosophies in India: this-worldly, materialistic attitude and the other-worldly or spiritual leanings.

The emerging image was contradictory: material but spiritual; real but unreal. The British were puzzled and they created an India of their own imagination. To them this-worldly India was cunning, greedy, self-centered and not dependable; the other-worldly spiritual India was unfit for the world of progress and science. The colonizers hated both and adopted oppressive measures to create an India as per their requirement.

Actually, the real India was neither wholly spiritual nor fully materialistic. Socio-cultural and empirical studies reveal that spirituality is an important aspect of Indian society but it is not an overwhelming feature. Spirituality and materialism both fit well within the Indian framework. The picture is simply this: an Indian is spiritual and hence unrealistic but he is materialistic enough to know where his interest lies; he is also this-worldly yet always ready to be spiritual. Any outsider would consider this as hypocrisy.

In fact spiritualism and materialism are not traits; these are ideologies and are interrelated. These are aspects of Indian selfhood and denote levels of living. A living culture makes living possible by finding some solution to the emerging problems. A living culture cannot be static; it is accommodative. By accommodating different ideologies the culture is able to find its solution to man's existential problems. There is, therefore, no point in declaring one of the two Indias as false.

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##### **19.4.1 SELLING INDIAN SPIRITUALISM AND MATERIALISM**

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In the postcolonial, modern India, these two ideologies continue to have their supporters and detractors. The spiritual gurus sell spiritual India as true India and commodify themselves in the Western market thus exposing themselves to ridicule.

The ‘this-worldly’ gurus declare materialistic India as an answer to the West and in their enthusiasm become copies of the West. They are reduced to being comic figures. Both these cult-gurus harm the culture as one set trivializes spirituality; the other projects second-rate materialism. In the bargain, the culture loses its credibility and is judged as contradictory, unreliable and hypocritical.

Nandy says that individuals can be hypocrites, not cultures. Indian culture has learnt to adjust and adapt during its long march of history. It has experimented with values, ways of life and the modes of survival. It has countered victimhood by various self-preservative methods like imitation, use of power, adapting to the master’s system, resorting to abject servility, sycophancy and an overt other-worldliness. These behavioral patterns do not denote weakness; they may be indications of the secret desire to resist the powerful.

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#### 19.4.2 PSYCHOLOGY OF RESISTANCE

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Let us understand the psychology of resistance with the help of the following chart:

**Chart 1**

<b>Colonial Ruler →</b>	<b>→Situation of the Victim</b>	<b>→Motive of the Victim</b>
Oppressive, intimidating, professing a powerful ideology of modernity, and progress	Inescapable/ trapped	Self-preservation/ survival strategies

**Chart 2**

<b>Methods of self-preservation</b>	<b>Obvious behavioral pattern and result</b>	<b>Psychology of Resistance</b>
imitation→	Comical figure	Reveals the ridiculousness of the powerful (master)
Use of power→	Looks superior to his fellowmen	Denies master’s culture by rejecting his values like work, masculinity etc.
Adaptation of master’s system→	Values personal growth, creativity, achievement, intelligence	Uses subversive tactics
Pleasing the master→	Sycophancy, adulation	Indirectly limits him own self ingratiation
Other-worldliness→	Aggressive materialism	Disarms the ruler

After dealing with the Indian culture as seen from the Western angle and as interpreted by the Kiplings, Ashis Nandy analyses the important events of Sri Aurobindo's life to probe how materialism and spiritualism can work together to form a self-affirming personality.

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## **19.5 SECTION IV: AUROBINDO'S LIFE**

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Aurobindo's life provides a counter-point to Kipling's. Aurobindo was born in India; by birth he was an Indian child but culturally, a child of Europe. He grew up to uphold Indian values and yet he managed to keep the Western side of his personality. Kipling's case was just the reverse — in order to be a Westerner he had to reject his Indian personality. Kipling and Aurobindo were both split personalities balancing/imbaling the Western and the Indian cultures within themselves. Both were the products of the psychopathology of colonialism and both had a mixture of 'sickness' within. But Kipling's was the 'sickness of the soul'; Aurobindo's was the 'sickness of the mind'. Kipling could not see beyond imperialism; Aurobindo saw the West from the angle of Indian universalism where there was no division. For him, India and the West could remain together in love and in hate ; identification or counter-identification.

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### **19.5.1 TRAUMATIC GROWING YEARS**

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We now try to understand Aurobindo's mind in relation to his early life. His full name was Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose. The middle name was English given by his father who was highly westernized. Aurobindo's mother Swarnalata came from a reformist family but she did not approve of her husband's western ways. This generated muted tensions. Swarnalata developed psychological problems while the children were still very young. She would be extremely violent when she was under seizure. This disturbed her sensitive youngest son, Aurobindo, who became mute and withdrawn.

Aurobindo's schooling started in an elite convent in Darjeeling. He was unhappy there and felt isolated amid the all-white, bullying children. While at Darjeeling he saw a vision of darkness descending on him. This vision was to stay with him for the next fourteen years.

At the age of seven he was sent, along with his brothers to England. This was again a traumatic period. The Drewetts with whom they were living were instructed by their father to keep them away from Indian influence. The children felt lonely and miserable and Aurobindo suffered 'inward depression.' Though a brilliant student, he was a failure in interpersonal interactions.

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### **19.5.2 ASSERTING INDIAN IDENTITY**

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Aurobindo could not glorify England and English culture. He secretly wished to denigrate everything that his father identified with and started looking for alternative

ways to assert his Indian identity. First, though he did well in classics, he did not take his degree; second, he qualified ICS examination but failed the riding test; third, he got involved with the nationalists; and fourth, he dropped his English middle name. This was, probably, his resistance to the English ways as the model of success his father had imposed on him.

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### 19.5.3 SYNTHESIS OF THE EAST AND THE WEST

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After fourteen years' stay in England, he reached India and he realized that somehow he felt calm and at peace with himself. A light descended on him and removed the darkness of his Darjeeling days. He started his life in Baroda, got a job, got involved with nationalist politics and was implicated in the Baroda bomb case. He was married by then but soon after his acquittal he renounced the world and went to Pondicherry. His aim was to attain Brahmatej (Brahmanic power) instead of Ksatratej (martial power).

During this time Mira Paul Richard, a French woman, joined Aurobindo and became his spiritual force. He called her his *Shakti*. She was the Ma – The Mother. The Mother organized the Ashram and became an important link between the public and the withdrawn ascetic.

For Aurobindo, the Mother's presence in the Ashram had a spiritual meaning. If he symbolized the East, she symbolized the West. She was non-oppressive West and in her presence he was freed from the oppressive West of his boyhood. Aurobindo had the East and the West in him; she had the West and the East in her. Earlier the West had deprived him of all that he loved; now she came to give that back. She was the divine Mother who helped him to identify himself with his 'self'.

Ashis Nandy interprets Aurobindo's need of the Mother in simple psychological terms. Aurobindo had a painful experience of the West. He was a failure in interpersonal relationships; the imposed values had bred in him darkness and meaningless emptiness and separated him from his inner 'self'. He needed to protect himself from the gnawing sense of failure. Eastern spirituality and the Mother's Western consciousness provided him that much longed for security and belongingness.

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### 19.6 SECTION V: COUNTERING INNER PAIN OF COLONIALISM

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In this section Ashis Nandy explains Indian culture's inner pain through Aurobindo's inner pain. Aurobindo suffered first within the confines of his family and later under the imposed alien education and culture. Under such circumstances rebellion comes silently in the forms of alternatives because open rebellion is impossible. Aurobindo found his alternative in mysticism. His mysticism was kind, humane and away from politics. In that he defeated the West. Later the Mother brought the language of modernity to his language of the spirit. His spirituality was seen in terms of the



technology of salvation and turned Aurobindo into a modern guru. This was his defeat at the hands of the West (The Mother).

The question that confronts us is: was Aurobindo's pain personal or can we call it symbolic of the suffering of India under colonialism? Let us first understand India's pain.

India as a colonized country was a victim. Oppression, exploitation and victimhood entail loss of self-esteem. It creates feeling of defeat and indignation. Under such a historical reality how does the culture preserve its values? Indian society was tossing between traditional values and imposed values and was akin to a psychologically split personality. The need was to defy. Defiance is not a self-conscious decision. It is secret and has the power to reaffirm the 'self'.

Some people like Kipling found defiance weak because it is somewhere between violence and non-violence. It is almost like compromise. But defiance can be a powerful weapon to upset the victor's cherished theories. For example, the oppressor's theory of masculine superiority and feminine inferiority is nullified by an androgynous vision. Or instead of seeing the oppressor and the oppressed as two opposites we can see them as co-victims and defeat the victor by synthesis. Synthesis is a potent weapon because it amalgamates and consequently obliterates the separate identity of the other. Aurobindo recognized this. He did not trivialize the English language, nor did he reject the Western culture. He simply synthesized them into his own culture.

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### 19.6.1 GANDHI'S ANDROGYNOUS VISION

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This is where we find Gandhi's androgynous vision relevant and powerful. We have to admit that Gandhi's Satyagraha, his passive resistance and non-violence were initially criticized as empty and cowardly concepts. When Gandhi acknowledged that he borrowed the idea of non-violence from the 'Sermon on the Mount' he placed his theory in the colonizers' battle ground and deflated their ideals of manliness, honour and courage. They felt morally and ethically weak. Gandhi viewed masculinity and femininity not as two polarities but two sides of the same coin. With this the superiority/inferiority syndrome was also diffused. To support his concept of androgyny he cited *Ardhanarishawar* (Shiva as man and woman) as denoting the male and the female principles and thus got authentication from the Hindu segments.

Gandhi thus fought his battle on moral grounds because he realized that imperialism would lose its power if theories of cultural superiority/inferiority, winners/losers, and masculinity/femininity were removed out of it. He, therefore, involved moral issues based on Christian principles and defeated imperialism on ethical grounds. The simple logic of his theory is: Christianity does not uphold violence, subjugation and oppression and considers them evils; so any administration based on these

principles ought to be evil and cannot be ethical. Those who like Kipling defended imperialism on the basis of the morality of history felt exposed. When colonialism no longer remained a moral issue, it lost its legitimacy in history as an instrument of progress. Gandhi did not censure the West as an antagonist to be shunned; he advocated the synthesis of traditional India with modern West and propounded the idea of a non-modern India.

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### **19.6.2 WHAT IS NON-MODERN INDIA?**

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Non-modern India is a fusion of Western values and Indian values without changing the culture's basic cross-sectional consciousness. This is the way by which the culture protects itself and keeps its flexibility intact. The traditions of Indian culture are liberal, non-aggressive and unassertive. Even if a Hindu does not define himself, he remains a Hindu. That is the reason why any self-definition or aggressive assertion of Hinduism is against the traditional concepts of Hinduism.

Indian culture has had its own tool to deal with political oppression and aggressive cultures and one of the tools is compromise. Compromise looked meek and cowardly but it was a mixture of the folk and classical norms in which maximum and effective protest resulted out of minimum gesture of protest.

Gandhi followed this principle when he propounded the theory of satyagraha. Ashis Nandy quotes from Richard Lennox's account of the Salt March. During the Dandi march the strategy adopted by the satyagrahis looked feeble. Just lifting a pinch of salt without openly challenging the powers appeared ineffective. But it created history when the world recognized its power. The British administration's violence looked brutal in contrast and was condemned.

Many such unique features are Indian culture's strategies to live with contradictions and ambiguities. These features look spineless when pitted against the openly courageous. But these are psychological defenses against cultural invasion.

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### **19.6.3 THE STRENGTH OF INDIAN CULTURE**

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The strength of Indian culture lies in patience. The ordinary Indian has learnt to live with suffering; he protects his values with passivity; he refuses to be overtly aggressive. He survives outer pressures by apparently weak responses. But inside he is the heroic satyagrahi. His theory is: it is better to bend than to break. One advantage of compromise is that as a seemingly weak enemy the aggressor leaves him to himself. Thus undisturbed, he is saved from internalizing the conqueror's values and saves his soul.

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### **19.6.4 CONCLUSION**

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Section VI sums up the discussion. Nandy has examined the march of colonialism to postcolonialism and the psychological impact of the historical reality on the

colonizers as well as the colonized. It gives rise to four sets of polarities:

- (i) the universal versus the parochial;
- (ii) the material vs the spiritual
- (iii) the achieving vs the non-achieving
- (iv) the sane vs the insane

The two ends of the polarities can meet not by scholarly debate but by evolving coping strategies. He argues that when psychological and cultural survival is in question, the polarities vanish. It is possible that under oppression, the values of universalism and spiritualism of the non-achieving may keep the values of the non-oppressive world better than the aggressive and materialistic values. At such times, it is better to remember that knowledge without ethics is as bad as inferior knowledge. The non-achieving and the insane may cope better with the world than the sane and the aggressive.

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## 19.7 GLOSSARY AND ANNOTATIONS

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*antipode* : that which is opposed to another; contradictory;

*Apollonian and Dionysian*: these terms are from Greek mythology. Apollo is the god of the sun and stands for light, music and poetry; Dionysius is the god of wine and ecstasy. Apollonian symbolizes rationality and the principles of wholeness, while Dionysian stands for the irrational nature and frenzied state, the dark side of life;

*bicultural/biculturalism*: relating to two distinct cultures in one nation;

*Cartesian* : relating to the philosophy of Descartes, the French philosopher;

*demystify* : to make less mysterious by removing the mystery from a thing or situation;

*dialectic* : the art of formal reasoning, especially the procedure of seeking truth through discussion; origin from Greek philosophy meaning 'to converse', 'to discuss';

*endogenous* : arising from within; spontaneously generated from an individual's internal state;

*esoterica* : secret. In esoteric practices the secrets are known only to the initiated group;

*ethnic stereotype*: this idea groups all people belonging to a cultural group and looks at them as having typical characteristics. Such a view reduces the importance and uniqueness of the individual;

*ethnocentric* : is the tendency to evaluate other cultures in terms of one's own culture. Generally, an ethnocentric view looks down on other cultures because their world view is different;

- heterogeneity* : made of different elements or forms;
- marginalized* : belonging to or located at the border or margin; not at the centre and hence not important;
- obfuscation* : confusion resulting from failure. It also means obscuring the understanding of other people and leaving them confused;
- proselytism* : the practice of attempting to convert people to another religion. Hinduism is a non-proselyte religion because it does not believe in conversion;
- universalism* : a theory in religion and theosophy that all persons are related to God and will be reconciled to Him. Hindu universalism denotes the ideology that all religions are true and worthy of respect. Also the belief that same norms and practices are applicable to everyone.

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## 19.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. What was Aurobindo's experience in the Darjeeling school ?
2. How did it effect him ?
3. Who is called 'Mother' ?
4. Where was Aurobindo educated ?
5. What does Aurobindo have in common with Kipling ?
6. How is Aurobindo different from Kipling ?
7. What is androgyny ?
8. How did Gandhi treat feminine qualities ?
9. How did Gandhi use feminine virtues to gain a sense of confidence for the nation?
10. What did the Salt March achieve ?

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## 19.9 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit we discussed Ashis Nandy's views about the formation of colonial psyche under colonial pressures. We proceeded on the following lines: through examples of Kipling and Aurobindo we analyzed the impact of colonialism on the two cultures. Indian culture appeared weak and compromising to the aggressive West because the West could not understand the Indian model of autonomy and theory of suffering. Acceptance of suffering was the East's strategy for survival. Gandhi moulded the British opposition to non-violence by synthesizing the East and the West. Synthesis of cultures is a powerful weapon. This is how India resisted colonialism.

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## 19.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Elaborate upon the 'other-worldly' and the 'this-worldly' approach of Indian culture. Why were the British confused by the existence of these approaches side by side and how does Ashis Nandy justify it ?
2. Why is synthesis of cultures considered a powerful weapon to minimize the power of the oppressor?
3. How has the Indian culture preserved itself through centuries?
4. Comment on Indian culture's adaptability, some of the measures of self-protection and how these methods are psychologically important as resistance strategies (You may use the charts I & II to elaborate).
5. Write short notes on:
  - a) Non-modern India
  - b) Non-Eastern Westerner
  - c) India as non-west

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## 19.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## **UNIT 20 : A STUDY OF GIRISH KARNAD'S *TALE-DANDA* - I**

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### **STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT**

- 20.0 Objectives**
- 20.1 Introduction to the Unit**
- 20.2 Introduction to the Author**
- 20.3 Introduction to *Tale-Danda***
- 20.4 A Note on Preface to *Tale-Danda***
- 20.5 A Note on the Use of History**
- 20.6 Scene-wise Summary of *Tale-Danda***
- 20.7 Glossary**
- 20.8 Let Us Sum Up**

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### **20.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The objective of this unit is to help you understand the text *Tale-Danda* in a critical manner. After reading this unit you will be able to :

- (a) know Girish Karnad's achievement as a dramatist;
- (b) comprehend the historical background of the text;
- (c) appreciate the use of language;
- (d) analyze the present relevance of the play.

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### **20.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit we will discuss the multifaceted and versatile personality of the playwright and the plays written by him, the dramatist's use of history and myth and folklore, to tackle the various socio-religious and political problems of the contemporary society. The historical backdrop of the key, 12th century Karnataka has been mentioned briefly. The distinctive quality of the use of proverbial language has been brought out. It has been depicted that the play is characteristic of the dramatist.

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### **20.2 GIRISH KARNAD : THE AUTHOR OF *TALE-DANDA***

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Born in Matheran, Maharashtra on May 19, 1938 Girish Karnad a playwright, poet, actor, director, critic and translator has earned international fame not only in the world of cinema but also for his consistent literary output in his native language, Kannada. For more than four decades now Karnad has continued to write plays often using history, folklore and mythology to tackle contemporary problems.

Karnad has authored about 12 plays : *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Nagamandala*, *Tale-Danda*, *The Fire and the Rain*, *Bali*, *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, *Flowers*, *Broken Images* and *Wedding Album*. Both drama and cinema have won him many accolades. The major literary awards bestowed on him are - The Jnanpith Award in 1999 and the Sahitya Academy Award for *Tale-Danda* in 1994. Out of these twelve, the first seven plays were written originally in Kannada and translated subsequently into English by the author himself. His plays have been translated into several Indian languages and staged by eminent directors.

His first play *Yayati* (1961) conceived during the journey to Oxford when he was proceeding for a Rhodes Scholarship was an instant success and immediately translated into several Indian languages and staged. (Karnad received the Mysore State Award for this play in 1962). The play chronicled the conflicts of the characters from Mahabharata and echoed the problems of generation gap. His second play *Tughlaq* (1964) is a compelling allegory on the Nehruvian era foregrounding the decline of idealism in independent India. *Tale-Danda* (1989) points to the communal and caste-ridden politics of post-Indira Gandhi regime. Ram Gopal Bajaj translated it into Hindi and titled it *Rakt Kalyan*. In *Nagamandala* (1988) and *Hayavadana* (1970) Karnad uses the plot from the popular Indian folklore, in *Fire and the Rain* (*Agni Muttu Male*) (1998) he uses mythology and socio-political themes to comment upon contemporary situations. Karnad was commissioned by BBC Channel 4 to write a radio play to commemorate the Golden Jubilee celebration of India's Independence. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* was written in English and broadcast by BBC radio on 15 August 1997. The later version of this play (2004) has been written entirely for the stage.

*Flowers* (2005) his first play to be written in English, carries forward the legacy of its Kannada predecessors, Karnad drew his inspiration from the folktale from Chitradurga and the relationship between Krishna and Radha. The dramatic conflict is resolved at the end when the physical passion and spiritual devotion merge as in the notions of male and female.

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### 20.3 INTRODUCTION : *TALE-DANDA*

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The literal translation of '*Tale*' is head (Rhyme it with HEY) and '*Danda*' means punishment. When a person needs to be punished or executed, it is "off with his head". Thus '*Tale-Danda*' means 'death by beheading'.

The play *Tale-Danda* keeps in tradition with Karnad's selection of plots from socio-political themes. It is set in 12th century Karnataka where the political situation is in a state of turmoil. The plot relates to the saint-poet-philosopher minister Basavanna, his times and specifically his later life. There are countless books and theses written on Basavanna's life.

At the surface the play depicts the struggles of one man for social reform but at a

deeper level it reveals how the destiny of the society is controlled by the whims of a few. It is a study of the delicate link between religions as the masses understand it and the limits of human tolerance.

Though written in the context of the Mandal Commission and the Babri Masjid riots of the late eighties, the play is very relevant to the contemporary Indian caste and community based politics. The play illustrates that man has not learnt from history. It reveals the repercussions of social reordering on the individual as well as at collective political level.

*Tale-Danda* is structured on three major events:

- (1) The accusations that Basavanna faces and the effect of those accusations
- (2) The repercussions of the inter-caste marriage of a brahmin girl and a cobbler's son.
- (3) Bijjala's captivity, Sovideva's enthronement, and Jagadeva's revenge for his father's death.

Through these events, the making of mass movements, the nature of rebellion and the obstacles to measures of reform are all examined in detail.

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#### **20.4 A NOTE ON THE PREFACE TO THE PLAY**

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The short "Preface" to the play *Tale-Danda* is necessary as Karnad provides a brief historical background to understand the character of Basavanna and the incidents in the play. Deriving his characters and plot from the 12th century Kalyan in South India he provides an engrossing text with one of the earliest historical references to caste politics. Through multiple levels of subversion the play depicts how the protagonist, a Brahmin himself, tries to bring about social change. He denounced the Vedic practices and caste system but he could not succeed in transforming that society.

In the history of Karnataka, some 800 years ago, in the city of Kalyan there was a Virasaiva movement of religious reforms and protests led by Basavanna. He assembled a congregation of philosophers, poets, mystics and social revolutionaries renowned for their social commitment. These people wished to bring about social change through their revolutionary ideas. The masses were under their sway as they opposed idolatry, rejected temple worship, upheld equality of sexes and class and condemned the caste system. But this revolution under the patronage of King Bijjala ended in violence because the opposition to caste system was actually translated into the opposition to the marriage of a brahmin girl and a tanner boy.

Karnad foregrounds the internal strife of Hinduism in the form of caste differences and also between Hinduism and reformist religions like Buddhism and Jainism, and keeps the devotional, mystical and poetic features in the background. *Tale-*



*Danda* deals with the few weeks during which a vibrant and affluent society plunges into anarchy, terror and bloodshed.

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## 20.5 A NOTE ON THE USE OF HISTORY

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The Jnanpith Award winner Girish Karnad has a historic vision but a contemporary voice. He uses history and mythology to depict contemporary situations.

In *Tale-Danda*, as in *Tughlaq*, he has build up various links between history and its relevance to contemporary Indian situation. He neither commends nor denies the facts and wishes the reader to decipher these links on their own. The play offers useful insights into inter-textual connections between history, historiography and the creative mind of the artist. Like *Tughlaq*'s historical narrative helps in understanding the present *Tale-Danda* can be used to unlock the present day situation if we only change the 'Brahmins' and 'untouchables' with 'Hindus' and 'Muslims'.

The history of Basavanna's life and Virasaiva movement provide Karnad with a backdrop against which he portrays the discourse of caste based politics and religious fundamentalism of the Brahmins. Basavanna and Bijjala read against the pages of history clearly reveal 'not only the pastness of the past but also of its presence'.

Basavanna's utopian dream where all human beings will be considered equal without any discrimination based on caste, class or creed is the present concept of *Ram Rajya* given by Gandhiji and the proclamation made in the preamble of the Indian Constitution. This notion of harmony contained the seeds of disharmony too and the seeds of caste and communal disharmony had been sown centuries ago. These have been nurtured and nourished by hatred and violence through centuries and can be seen blooming in present times.

The intermingling of religion with politics to secure power and to awaken the political consciousness of people is a major factor in the game of power politics. Today the destiny of the nation is controlled by politicians who succeed in achieving power through caste and religion votes.

King Bijjala fails to realize the inextricable links between religion and politics in his reign. His own son Sovideva was being used against him by his adversaries the orthodox Brahmins, who not only dislike Basavanna and his *sharana* philosophy but also Bijjala's friendship and trust for Basavanna. With a little more tactfulness Bijjala and Basavanna could have used religion or caste to control the nerve centre of power.

Both Basavanna and Bijjala had fears for the newly wedded couple and they were sent far away but the two fathers were prosecuted by the new king Sovideva. The tragedy thus lies in the failure to reconcile the idealism of a casteless society

with its historical imperatives. It is symptomatic of the complex inherited problems of the Indian society. Many Indian leaders who were models of honesty and integrity have failed to sustain their own vision in politics like Bijjala. By combining the socio-political and historical vision of 12th century Karnataka in the play and by creating characters of Basavanna, Bijjala, Sovideva and Jagadeva, Karnad offers a paradigm for understanding the religious and political institutions, and the role of cult figures in Indian politics.

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## 20.6 SCENE-WISE SUMMARY OF *TALE-DANDA*

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### Characters in the play

Sambashiva Shastri	:	Brahmin, Jagadeva's father
Amba	:	Jagadeva's mother
Bhagirathi	:	Brahmin woman
Savitri	:	Jagadeva's wife
Jagadeva	:	<i>Sharana</i> , Brahmin by birth
Mallibomna	:	<i>Sharana</i> , Tanner by birth
Sovideva	:	Bijjala's son
Rambhavati	:	Bijjala's queen
Damodara Bhatta	:	Queen's priest
Kallappa	:	Bijjala's bodyguard
Bijjala	:	King of Kalyan
Basavanna	:	The great <i>Sharana</i> saint poet
Manchanna Karmita	:	Brahmin, adviser to the king
Gundanna	:	<i>Sharana</i>
Kalayya	:	<i>Sharana</i> , Skinner by birth
Gangambika	:	Basavanna's wife
Haralayya	:	<i>Sharana</i> , Cobbler by birth
Kalyani	:	Haralayya's wife
Sheelavanta	:	Haralayya's son
Madhuvarasa	:	<i>Sharana</i> , Brahmin by birth
Lalitamba	:	Madhuvarasa's wife
Kalavati	:	Madhuvarasa's daughter
Indrani	:	Courtesan
Marayppa	:	Boy Attendant
Bankanna	:	Boy Attendant
Eeravva	:	Queen's maid
Rachappa	:	Palace guard

Brahmins, palace servants, crowds, tribals, *Sharanas*, Indrani's woman, soldiers and messengers

### **Scene-I**

**1168 AD**

#### **Sambashiva Shastri's House**

Sambashiva Shastri is ill; realizing that the end is near he calls his son Jagadeva to be near him. Bhagirathi, a friend and neighbour of Amba, asks her to send a message to Jagadeva about his father's illness. Jagadeva has known of his father's illness for four days now but for him Basavanna's reputation is more important than his father. He is torturing his parents while antagonising the Yuvraj. Bhagirathi and Amba discuss the repercussions of Basavanna's teachings that have caused a rift in every family in Kalyan, father against son, brother against brother.

Jagadeva and Mallibomma return from the treasury and Jagadeva asks Mallibomma to enter his house. Mallibomma (son of a Tanner Kariya) is reluctant to enter a brahmin's quarter. Amba and her friend Bhagirathi too are hesitant but Jagadeva insists and Amba requests Mallibomma in as Jagadeva should attend to his father quickly. Jagadeva finds his father sleeping and he starts narrating the intrigues of Sovideva, his own mettle at mustering the crowd, the events of the four days, and Basavanna's return from Banoor.

Mallibomma feels sorry for Jagadeva's father. Shastri is in a stupor and he asks Jagadeva to pick his body and put it on the floor and directs him to prepare for his funeral, to bring the bier, rope and bamboo, to fold his legs to fit in the bier, and to shave his mother's head. He does not recognize Jagadeva and keeps harking after his son who should be there to cremate his body otherwise the corpse will stink.

### **Scene-II**

#### **The Chamber of Queen Rambhavati**

Sovideva is agitated and infuriated at the behaviour of *sharanas*. He accuses Basavanna of defrauding the treasury and his father of being under his spell. He resents his father for not giving him his separate independent domain. Damodara Bhatta informs the queen of the restraint of the *sharanas* and of their loyalty to Basavanna.

Bijjala is furious because Sovideva has tampered with the treasury locks. He is embittered and tries to beat him but Rambhavati intervenes and tells the king to give him his independent domain. Bijjala retorts that he is not worthy of it as he lacks the courage and skills of a ruler.

Frustrated Bijjala talks of his own caste - a Kalachurya, Katta Churra, a Barber-to his wife. He is aware that the Brahmins despise him and only Basavanna respects

him without any reference to his lowly birth. He is full of praise for Basavanna, as his treasurer and as a person opposed caste to system and Varnashram Dharma. The crowds throng outside to have blessings from Basavanna who is believed to have has performed a miracle.

### **Scene-III** **Palace**

Basavanna has come to return the keys of the Treasury to the King. When Bijjala refuses to take the keys he argues that he was not working for the pleasure of the king but as a caretaker for the wealth belongs to the people. Apart from the king no other member of the royal family has a right to access it. Bijjala apprises him that his son is the *Yuvraj* and they discuss about the kingship, the rights of a son, belief of *sharanas* and then he hands over the keys to the king.

People are let into the Palace Chamber, in groups of four, who believe that miracles are performed by God for Basavanna - Basavanna is flabbergasted. It dawns on him that people believe that he had stolen money to give alms and feed the *sharanas*, and the empty coffers at the treasury were filled up to the brim by Lord Shiva.

Basavanna is not bothered about the stigma of a thief or a miracle-monger but if he is damned as a devotee in presence of great devotees then “*Tale-danda*”

He takes leave of the king as on his way he has to condole for the death of Jagadeva’s father and then reach Maddur where *sharanas* have got into a conflict with the Jains. The crowd follows him.

### **Scene-IV** **Sambashiva Shastri’s House**

The post funeral rituals are going on along with chanting of mantras. Basavanna and Kakkayya enter the street followed by a noisy crowd. Basavanna stops, turns, folds his hands before the crowd, pleads that the miracles did not occur in the treasury but the crowd had unflinching faith and they applaud him with slogans. Basavanna stands nonplussed.

Basavanna enters Jagadeva’s house but no one greets Basavanna and he sits quietly in one corner. Amba belittles him for he is God’s chosen one and God performs miracles for him. As for Amba, she is unworthy of any miracles. She is also apprehensive of Jagadeva’s departure and implores Basavanna to leave him for a day to complete the last rites of the dead man.

The head priest informs that it is a bad omen for outsiders to see the Brahmin who had invoked the departed spirit on himself, leaving the house. Basavanna was not scared of any omens and he kept waiting till Jagadeva came there after completing all the rites.

Jagadeva had reverted to his caste for the last wish of his father and for the peace of mind of his mother. But Basavanna does not comment on this.

Jagadeva inquires about the miracle at the treasury. He wishes to know who had started the rumour. Jagadeva was at the treasury and had guarded it as it was his innate desire to be a leader but all his effort had come to a naught as he had to return for his father's illness. Basavanna then reveals to Jagadeva the vision that Allama had given. By now the impatient crowd has started to throw stones, and Basavanna apologizes to Amba and Jagadeva and leaves.

### **Scene-V** **Basavanna's House**

Two young *sharanas* - Kalayya and Gundanna - inform Basavanna and Kakkayya (the saint of the untouchables) of the atrocities of the officers on the tribals who have come from Andhara and settled on the outskirts of the city with their Gods. Gundanna pleads Basavanna to initiate them into their fold but Basavanna proposes that the physical needs like a roof over their heads and a piece of land to spread their mats is more important than spiritual needs and he asks Gundanna to distribute a few bags of paddy, lentils, salt and spices amongst the tribals.

Meanwhile the two families of Madhuvarasa of Haralayya are waiting to meet Basavanna. When Basavanna and Kakkayya are told of the marriage of Sheelavanta and Kalavati they are dumbfounded. Basavanna's eyes are filled with tears; he is worried about the brahmins who will not take kindly to it. They both suspect that venom will gush out and hatred will erupt once the news of this marriage spreads around. Sheelavanta objects to the marriage because he cannot give up his profession and Kalavati will not be able to stand the smell of leather, the raw hide, which pervades his surroundings.

Haralayya's mother, a devotee of Goddess Dyamavva of Banyan Tree, has prophesized that rivers of blood will flow and human limbs will rot in the streets if the marriage takes place. But Haralayya is adamant and wishes the marriage to take place. He is supported by a group of young *sharanas* who enter Basavanna's house and congratulate them. Basavanna is not ready for this kind of revolution. He exhorts a promise that soon after the marriage the young couple would be sent far away along with Lalita.

While they are still discussing the matter Bijjala the king is announced by Kallappa. Bijjala had come to confirm that Basavanna would not bless the marriage, nevertheless he finds that Basavanna is unwilling to call off the marriage and if Bijjala issues orders prohibiting the marriage then Basavanna along with *sharanas* will sit outside the palace until such orders are withdrawn. Bijjala threatens that if Brahmins and *sharanas* are bent on self-destruction then he with his army will go for war and return only to count the corpses. Basavanna retorts that if Kalyan

cannot offer them security then it is better to leave this kingdom and move on to another one. Bijjala accuses Basavanna of being selfish - neither worthy of loyalty nor of friendship. Fuming Bijjala leaves. Basavanna informs the *sharanas* of Bijjala's consent to the wedding and beseeches them not to begin with any kind of mischief. Jagadeva questions Basavanna about Allama's vision and he replies that one has to unravel the meaning for oneself strand by strand.

### **Scene-VI**

#### **A House in the Courtesan's Quarter**

Damodara Bhatta drags out inebriated Sovideva from Indrani's quarter and asks them to dress him properly. Meanwhile Indrani and Damodara Bhatta discuss the inter-caste marriage of the *sharanas*. Indrani advocates it as a minor affair that does not require so much flexing of muscles. She is full of praise for the *sharanas* who have helped the downtrodden and destitute like her, whereas Damodara Bhatta reveals his concern for the desecration of the scriptures and the Vedic tradition.

The marriage procession passes by peacefully and there is no bloodshed. Sovideva and Damodara Bhatta wonder why Bijjala had guaranteed protection to the *sharanas*. Manchanda Karmita enters accompanied by some courtiers, tradesmen, soldiers and citizens and they proclaim Sovideva as their king.

### **Scene-VII**

#### **Front Yard of the Palace**

Kallappa and Bakkanna are gagged and killed by deceit by Damodara Bhatta and his men. Bijjala inquires about Rudrappa and his crown. Damodara Bhatta informs him that Rudrappa has not reported on duty and the crown is with the rightful owner. Bijjala realizes the treason of his son with the accomplice of Damodara Bhatta. Sovideva enters wearing the crown. His mother Rambhavati implores him to return the crown to his father but her wailing is of no avail. Then Bijjala addresses Sovideva in return Sovideva kicks him and Bijjala is taken unawares and he rolls to the ground.

Damodara Bhatta informs Bijjala that the empire is ringing with proclamations - stone inscriptions - that His Majesty has decided to retire voluntarily and crown his youngest son with his own hands. Damodara Bhatta explains further that this is due to the protection given to the intercaste marriage of the *sharanas*. Bijjala has staunch the wrath of the people, the followers of the Vedic Dharma, and has invited disaster.

### **Scene-VIII**

#### **Basavanna's House**

A conference of *Sharanas* is being held in Basavanna's house and he credits the

king for the peaceful marriage of Sheelavant and Kalavati but others are not willing to grant him that. Basavanna also informs them that the king is being held prisoner and that Bijjala had risked his whole future for their sake and it would be a betrayal not to stand by him now. Some of the *sharanas* are unwilling to accede and they claim this to be a family squabble. They remind Basavanna that the king had asked him not to interfere in his matter. Basavanna declares that tomorrow at dawn he will leave this place to meet the King Bijjala and if anyone wishes to accompany him, they can, but he will not command them. They should follow the dictates of their inner self.

### **Scene-IX**

#### **Night**

Jagadeva, Mallibomma, Kalayya are surrounded by weapons of various sorts and performing a ritual of mixing their blood, wound to wound, to express brotherhood and a vow to exterminate the enemies of Lord Shiva. Jagadeva knows the secret passage to the palace and would lead them. His wife wanted a word with him as his mother has taken to mat and the neighbours treated them like a pariah but he is under a low of celibacy and would not talk to her.

### **Scene-X**

#### **Rambhavati's Palace as in Scene-II**

Rambhavati is bed-ridden. Eeravva is performing a perfunctory puja in the adjacent sanctum. Bijjala paces up and down muttering to himself. Rambhavati requests him to stop pacing, as it would neither bring Sovideva, nor Basavanna there. Bijjala gets agitated at the name of Basavanna and scolds Rambhavati for referring to him as he has asked Basavanna not to meddle in state affairs.

While they are discussing a woman brings the news that Basavanna is on his way to the palace with a hugh crowd of *sharanas*. Bijjala turns Eeravva out of the sanctum and orders Marriappa to enter the sanctum and peep through the skylight to confirm the news. Marriappa, a low-caste, initially refuses to enter the sanctum then Bijjala orders him and still when unable to reach the top Bijjala asks him to stand on his shoulders. Marriappa tells him that they are coming but they are far away. Bijjala is excited as he believes that they are coming to demand the release of the king.

Basavanna is followed by only 770 *sharanas* and when they encounter each other Basavanna only enquires about their health and asks them to have faith in the Lord, he informs Bijjala that he is leaving for Kappadi in search of the Lord. Bijjala's expectations are thinned into the air but he tells Rambhavati that she will be the Queen and every thing will be all right again.

**Scene-XI**  
**The Palace**

Sovideva, Manchanna Kramita and Damodara Bhatta are contriving a course of action to teach *sharanas* a lesson for organising the inter-caste marriage. Damodara Bhatta advises Sovideva to take an aggressive step, to arrest all those responsible for the wedding and to expel their leaders from the city.

Sovideva believes this to be the right time to avenge them for defying him at the treasury. He desires to wreck havoc and strike terror in their hearts. Damodara suggests that Sovideva should visit his father-in-law for his support in this endeavor. It is decided that Damodara Bhatta would accompany Sovideva and Manchanna Kramita would stay back to take care of the day to day affairs of the state.

**Scene-XII**

Gunadanna rushes in agony to inform Jagadeva, Mallibomma and Kalayya about the gory details of the tortures that Haralayya and Madhuvarsa had to undergo. Their eyes were plucked out with iron rods; they were tied to elephant's legs and dragged through the streets; their limbs torn and their flesh and bones littered along the street and they died screaming. Sheelvanta's mother saw her husband's torn body and she ran down the street screaming. The *sharanas* did not intervene. Shut inside their houses, they simply watched. Jagadeva condemns the cowardice of the *sharanas* and their own manhood and suggests that they should attack the palace, trap and kill Sovideva.

**Scene-XIII**  
**The Palace**

Jagadeva, Rachappa, Mallibomma and Kalayya rush in the palace with naked swords but are dismayed to find the palace empty. Sovideva, Damodara Bhatta and others have already left except for the demented old King Bijjala who refuses to step out of the Queen's chamber. The four intruders feel cheated and are worried about the reaction of people outside to whom they had given the slogans of revolution. So they now rush to the Queen's chamber.

**Scene-XIV**  
**Rambhavati's Chamber as in Scene-II**

Jagadeva, Mallibomma, Rachappa and Kalayya rush into the Queen's chamber. Bijjala is sprawling in the sanctum. Jagadeva praises the king and demands a hearing from him. Bijjala replies that he can say whatever he wants to from there itself and leave. On hearing that they have come from Kappadi the reluctant king comes out of the sanctum to send a message to Basavanna. As he steps out he is attacked by these young men and he retreats into the sanctum. Mallibomma senses his pathetic condition and wishes to leave him but Jagadeva thinks if they go out



empty handed people will laugh at them. So they enter without the swords lest they desecrate the sanctum. The four grapple with him but are unable to wrench him free from the *Linga*. Bijjala is surprized at his own faith in God now. He believes that these young men have made him cling to the Lord. Basavanna or his wife could never have him bow before the Lord.

When these young men repeat that they are *sharanas* and have come on their own to kill him, Bijjala replies that he too desires death but his last wish is to sent a message to Basavanna. He tries to remember but forgets it and gets into a delirium. He embraces and addresses Jagadeva as Sovideva. Jagadeva pushes him off and Bijjala rolls on the floor. He is dead.

All leave except Jagadeva who goes into the sanctum stares at the idol of bull, Nandi and says that unlike his father he is not afraid of death, even of sacrilege. He the solitary saint, sits in front of the *Linga* and plunges the dagger into himself.

### Scene-XV

#### Kappadi

Basavanna is told that Bijjala stepped out of the sanctum only because he heard his name and then he was killed. Basavanna holds himself responsible for King's murder and believes that Allama's vision has come true. He desires to merge into the flame of Lord of Meeting Rivers.

### Scene-XVI

#### Palace

A messenger implores Sovideva to protect the masses from the royal guards who are burning trading houses and destroying temples. Another informs him of the rampage, rioting, rape and murders by the royal guards. Sovideva holds Damodara Bhatta responsible for all this and gets him assassinated. The death of Basavanna is announced and also the rebellion of Sovideva's brothers. Sovideva holds his brothers responsible of regicide. Simultaneously he expels *sharanas*, foreigners and free thinkers and orders their books to be burnt; the *sharanas* are to be hounded, looted, killed and their progeny is to be crushed.

While the city burns and the screams fill the skies Sovideva gives orders, the coronation ceremony continues with the chanting of Vedic mantras. The eulogies begin and drown everything else.

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## 20.7 GLOSSARY

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### Scene I

<i>rip off</i>	: something not worth what you pay for it.
<i>destiny</i>	: what's written on our foreheads.
<i>intriguing</i>	: very interesting because of being unusual or having an obvious answer.

<i>sinister</i>	: seeming evil or dangerous, making one think something bad will happen.
<i>incarnation</i>	: embodiment, a person who represents a particular quality.
<i>sharana</i>	: the Sharanas were devotees of Shiva and Brahmins were as welcome to their society as were people from the lower castes.

### Scene-II

<i>vermin</i>	: people who are unpleasant, like rats.
<i>brazen</i>	: open and without shame, usually about something that people find shocking.
<i>impudent</i>	: rude; not showing respect for other people; impertinent; insolent.
<i>tangle with</i>	: to become involved in an argument or a fight with somebody.
<i>somebody</i>	
<i>defraud</i>	: to get money illegally from a person or an organisation by tricking them.
<i>thrall</i>	: in thrall to somebody : controlled or strongly influenced by somebody.
<i>prodigious</i>	: very powerful and causing surprise or admiration, enormous.
<i>treacherous</i>	: that cannot be trusted; deceitful, dangerous when seeming safe.
<i>fluster</i>	: to make somebody nervous and confused by making them hurry up.
<i>sniveling</i>	: tending to cry a lot or complain in a way that annoys people.
<i>perdition</i>	: punishment that lasts for ever after death; hell.
<i>cast somebody out</i>	: to get rid of somebody especially by using force.
<i>to cast an evil eye</i>	: The magic power to harm somebody by looking at them.
<i>temper with</i>	: to make changes to something without permission especially in order to damage it, interfere with.
<i>swaddle</i>	: to wrap something / somebody lightly in a piece of cloth.
<i>cowrie</i>	: a small shiny shell that was used as money in the past in parts of Africa and Asia.
<i>counterfeit</i>	: fake; made to look exactly like something in order to trick people into thinking that they are getting the real thing.

<i>nincompoop</i>	: old fashioned; a stupid person.
<i>sanctimonious</i>	: giving the impression that you feel you are better and more moral than other people; self-righteous.
<i>humbug</i>	: dishonest language or behaviour that is intended to trick people a person who is not sincere or honest.
<i>scion</i>	: a young member of a family, especially a famous or important one.
<i>relentless</i>	: not stopping or refusing to give up or be less strict or severe.
<i>throng</i>	: a crowd of people, to be present in large numbers.

### Scene-III

<i>panegyric</i>	: a speech or piece of writing in praise of somebody.
<i>bland</i>	: not having a strong or interesting taste, not showing no strong emotions or excitement.
<i>rebuke</i>	: to speak severely to somebody because they have done something wrong; reprimand.
<i>indulgence</i>	: the act of having or doing what even you want; something you allow yourself to have even though it is not essential.
<i>imbecile</i>	: a rude way to describe a person that you think is very stupid; idiot, unintelligent.
<i>preposterous</i>	: completely unreasonable, especially in a way that is shocking or annoying; outrageous.
<i>flaunt</i>	: to show something you are proud of to other people, in order to impress them.
<i>anoint</i>	: to put oil or water on somebody's head as a part of religious ceremony.
<i>delude</i>	: to make somebody believe something that is not true; deceive.
<i>malign</i>	: to say bad things about somebody or something publicly; slander.
<i>ecstasy</i>	: a feeling or state of great happiness; bliss.
<i>conjuror</i>	: person who performs magic tricks.
<i>have / want no truck with somebody</i>	: to refuse to deal with somebody.
<i>delirium</i>	: in an excited state and not able to think or speak clearly, usually because of fever.
<i>swat</i>	: to hit something, especially an insect with a flat object. Indian proverb - to swat a fly - an idle person.

#### Scene IV

<i>carnival</i>	: a public festival that involves music and dancing in the streets, for which people wear bright coloured clothes.
<i>nonplussed</i>	: so surprised and confused that you do not know what to do or say; dumbfounded.
<i>masquerade</i>	: a way of behaving that hides the truth or a person's true feelings, or true identities.
<i>bait</i>	: food put on a hook to catch a fish, or animals or birds.
<i>untarnished</i>	: metal/something that does not look bright and shiny.
<i>impale</i>	: to push a sharp pointed object through spear.
<i>loathsome</i>	: extremely unpleasant; disgusting; repulsive.
<i>pantomime</i>	: the use of movement and the expression of face to communicate something or to tell a story.

#### Scene V

<i>hurling a thunderbolt to a sparrow</i>	: incongruence; using something colossal to hit a minor thing.
<i>adjudicate</i>	: to make an official decision about who is right in a disagreement between two groups or organizations.
<i>still wet behind the ears</i>	: young and without much experience; naive.
<i>take umbrage</i>	: to feel offended, insulted or upset by something without any reason.
<i>termagant</i>	: a woman who is very strict or who tries to tell people what to do, in an unpleasant way.
<i>tardy</i>	: slow to act.
<i>turn tail</i>	: to run away from a fight or a dangerous situation.
<i>jibe</i>	: an unkind or an insulting remark.
<i>snarl up</i>	: to involve somebody in a situation that stops their movement or progress.
<i>impunity</i>	: if a person does something bad with impunity, they do not get punished for what they have done.
<i>dunderhead</i>	: a silly or a stupid person.
<i>flaccid</i>	: soft and weak.
<i>stay put</i>	: continue to be in the place where they are.

#### Scene-VI

<i>inebriated</i>	: drunk.
<i>flex your muscles</i>	: to show how powerful you are; threat.

<i>desecrate</i>	: to damage a holy thing or treat it with disrespect.
<i>perverse</i>	: showing deliberate determination to behave in a way that is unacceptable or unreasonable.
<i>sacrilege</i>	: treating a holy thing or place with disrespect.
<i>iniquitous</i>	: very unfair.

### **Scene-VII**

<i>cadaver</i>	: a dead human body.
<i>virulent</i>	: extremely dangerous or harmful; showing strong negative and bitter feeling.

### **Scene-VIII**

<i>indomitable</i>	: not willing to accept defeat; brave and determined.
<i>cacophony</i>	: mixture of loud unpleasant sounds.
<i>itinerant</i>	: travelling from place to place, especially to find work.

### **Scene-IX**

<i>get away</i>	: to escape from somebody or a place.
<i>pariah</i>	: a person who is not acceptable to society; outcaste.
<i>celibacy</i>	: a person who has chosen not to marry; not to have sex, brahmacharya.

### **Scene-X**

<i>gone off</i>	: to suddenly become angry and leave.
<i>obstinate</i>	: refuse to change opinion; stubborn.

### **Scene-XI**

<i>adrift</i>	: feeling alone and without direction or an aim in life.
<i>decimate</i>	: to severely damage something or make something weaker.
<i>unctuous</i>	: insincere praise.

### **Scene-XII**

<i>take hold of yourself</i>	: to become strong; to begin to have complete control over something/somebody.
<i>cemetery</i>	: land used for burying dead people especially one that is not beside a church.

### **Scene-XIII**

<i>sprawled</i>	: lying with arms and legs spread out in a lazy or awkward way.
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<i>fend somebody</i>	: fight off; ward off; to protect or defend yourself from attack.
<i>adamant</i>	: determined not to change your mind.
<i>grapple</i>	: to take a firm hold of something.
<i>wrench</i>	: to pull or twist yourself suddenly and violently; jerk.
<i>whack</i>	: to hit something/somebody very hard.
<i>retch</i>	: to make rounds and movements as if vomiting although you do not actually do so.
<i>markandaya</i>	: he was a Vedic scholar with a proviso life span of sixteen years. Nearing his death he started praying to Lord Shiva, clinging to the <i>Linga</i> . He was rescued from Yama by Lord Shiva and granted immortality.
<i>cupola</i>	: round part on top of a building like a dome.

#### **Scene-XV**

<i>tableau</i>	: a scene showing events and people from history, that is presented by a group of actors who do not move or speak.
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#### **Scene-XVI**

<i>rampage</i>	: wild and violent behaviour often causing damage and destruction
<i>gruesome</i>	: unpleasant and filled with horror because it is connected with death or injury.
<i>annihilate</i>	: to destroy completely.
<i>eulogy</i>	: speech or piece of writing praising somebody very much.
<i>gesticulate</i>	: to move hands and arms about to make understand what you are saying.

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## **20.8 LET US SUM UP**

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The unit prepares you for a critical study of the text *Tale-Danda*. We have the scene-wise summary of the text as well as glossary. You will notice that your first reading of the text is supported with the critical guidance provided in this unit.

An introduction to Girish Karnad and his works is provided along with the Introduction to *Tale-Danda* and the use of history to correlate it to contemporary situation for a better appreciation of the text *Tale-Danda*.

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## UNIT 21 :A STUDY OF GIRISH KARNAD'S *TALE-DANDA-II*

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### STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

#### 21.0 Objectives

#### 21.1 Introduction to the Unit

#### 21.2 A Note on the Bhakti Movement

#### 21.3 A Note on the Dramatic Art.

#### 21.4 Dramatic Structure of *Tale-Danda*.

#### 21.5 Main Characters in the Play

(i) King Bijjala

(ii) Basavanna

(iii) Jagadeva

(iv) Sovideva

#### 21.6 Sub-themes

(i) Socio-religious Issues

(ii) Intercaste Marriage and Community Barriers

(iii) Power, Resistance and Violence

(iv) Postcolonial Text

#### 21.7 Let Us Sum Up

#### 21.8 Unit End Questions

#### 21.9 Suggested Readings

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### 21.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objective of this unit is to help you study the text in a critical manner. It will enable you to :

- (a) appreciate the formal design of the play and the dramatic art;
- (b) analyze the characters of the play;
- (c) relate the play to the present times;
- (d) comprehend the sub-themes in the play.

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### 21.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we will discuss the various aspects of the play. *Tale-Danda* is a historical play and we have shown how it is related to the context and to the present times while bringing out the various subthemes in the play.

The complex formal design of the play, we suggest should be analyzed into the following:

- (i) Plot
- (ii) Character
- (iii) Theme
- (iv) Action

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## 21.2 BHAKTI MOVEMENT

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Based on the principle of monotheism the Bhakti movement inculcated in its *Bhaktas* loving devotion and belief in God. It was initially considered unorthodox as it rebelled against caste distinctions and brahminical rituals which the saints and mystics felt unnecessary and redundant for salvation. The devotional songs and teachings of the saints this movement led to the enrichment of regional prose and poetic literatures in their respective languages.

**In South India :** Thirty six Nayanars (Shaivites) and twelve Alvars (Vaishnavites) began the Bhakti movement under the Pallavas and Pandaya dynasties in the fifth and seventh century A.D. The path of love and devotion expounded by these mystics was later incorporated into Ramanuja and Madhava philosophical systems. During the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. in the Vijaynagar Empire the Virasaiva movement and Haridasa movement gained impetus. The Haridasa movement propagated the philosophy of Madhavacharya and the Virasaiva movement spread the philosophy of Basavanna and propagated Carnatic music. Basavanna rejected the caste system, denied the supremacy of Brahmins, condemned ritual sacrifices and insisted on Bhakti and worship of Lord Shiva (Virasaiva means) ‘Stalwart Shiva Worshipers). The *Vacanas* of Basavanna were translated into English by A K Ramanujan as *Speaking of Siva* (1973) and Girish Karnad has incorporated these translations into his text, which he acknowledges in his preface to the play.

**In North India :** The Bhakti Movement gained momentum between fourteenth and seventeenth century under the domination of muslims and coexisted peacefully with Sufism and other movements of Hinduism. Unlike south, the bhakti movement in North centered around Rama and Krishna, the incarnations of Vishnu. This movement spread itself uniformly throughout the whole of north and central India with saints and mystics preaching and singing hymns in their regional languages. The main propounders in North were – Chaitanya, Vallabha, Meerabai, Ratnabai, Raidas, Kabir, Nanak Dev, Tulsidas, Dnyaneshwar, Namdeo and Tukaram.

The basic tenets of this movement are:

- (1) It liberated God from the temples and people from the dominance of priests, Brahmins and rituals, i.e. it disrupted the power structures like class, caste, ritual, temple fiefdom etc. by challenging the strongholds of caste hierarchy.
- (2) It located both virtue and worship in human relationships and action thus human being was in direct contact with God without any intermediary priest/Brahmins.



- (3) It marked a turning point in the relationship between God and women.
- (4) The reformers preached and composed hymns and songs in the local and regional languages thereby challenging the use of Sanskrit – the language of elites, of Brahmins. Jayasi and Tulsi wrote in Avadhi, Surdas in Brijbhasa, Tukaram & Namdev in Marathi, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengali. Urdu (Persian and Hindi) was developed during this period.
- (5) It checked the excesses of polytheism and encouraged the spirit of tolerance. The animosity between Hindus and Muslims was reduced and they began to live amicably together.
- (6) It emphasized the pure life of charity and devotion.

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### 21.3 A NOTE ON THE DRAMATIC ART

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The Indian art of dramaturgy is as old as the Western art. The only difference between the two is the growth of form. The Western art has both a recorded history and the text of the play. The Indian tradition of dramaturgy is traced from *Natyashastra* of Bharatmuni, also referred to as the Fifth Veda dictated by Brahma himself. There is a strong possibility that the Brahmin theoreticians had overlooked the folk or the popular arts.

The texts of the Sanskrit classical theatre which flourished from 200 BC to 100 AD are available but after that there are no texts as theatre then was dependent on patronage of Kings and India since then had been politically unstable. After 1<sup>st</sup> century AD India did not have a record/ tradition of play writing although there have been strong evidences of performances. The west had its tradition of playwriting and performances but there have been frequent ruptures. In India the regional theatre forms still exist with history stretching over centuries. Karnad envisages the folk or regional theatre as a continuity of the mainstream. In his "Interview" with Chaman Ahuja published in *Contemporary Indian Drama* he says:

There is no difference between the folk and classical drama: the aesthetic principles are the same. The basic thing I discovered is that the subject of any play is human spirit. Using folk as a mere aesthetic device – with no further exploration of what it is to be human – does not attract me. (p 180)

When Karnad started writing plays in the post independence era there was no dramatic structure in the Indian tradition to which he could relate to. The Sanskrit classical theatre could not be used; the folk theatre, the *Yakshagana* performances seemed quaint and silly; the Parsi theatre an imitation of the British / Western theatre was nearly moribund after the advent of Indian talkies. Karnad was also aware of the challenges that the playwrights of his generation had to face. He writes in the "Introduction" to *The Three Plays* :

..... Tension between the cultural past of the country and its colonial past, between the attractions of Western modes of thought and our own traditions, and finally between the various visions of future that opened up once the common cause of political freedom was achieved. (p 1)

To cope up with these problems the playwright turned towards the Western modes of expression and their theatrical practices for it was a powerful means of exploring reality and the meaning of human existence. The Realistic Theatre, from Edward Albee to Ibsen was essentially individualistic where individual identity was in crisis, could not be helpful as in India there “has never been a bourgeoisie with its faith in individual, as ultimate value” (9). The Indian realism however only took up social problems as Indian society is not individualistic, the individual is in fact defined in ‘relational’ terms.

Keeping in view the requirement of the times Karnad used the traditional popular form of regional theatre which used the natural language of the people and had its own aesthetics. He combined the indigenous dramatic art and resources – history, myth and folklore and the various western influences of Greek drama and the dramatists like Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, O’Neill, Bertold Brecht – in his plays. Karnad was especially influenced by the Brechtian theory that drama is a means of intellectual stimulation and social transformation. Describing Brecht’s influence he writes, “What he did was to sensitize us to the potentialities of non-naturalistic techniques available in our own theatre” (15). The various conventions – the chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and non-human worlds – were used to present alternative points of view of the central problem. Karnad creates proper atmosphere for intellectual stimulations which is non-cathartic in approach.

Karnad and his contemporaries – Dharamvir Bharti, Chandrasekhar Kambar, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, and others – have used myth, history and folklore to depict the contemporary reality and integrated it with the Indian modes of dramaturgy to establish a tradition of their own.

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#### **21.4 DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF *TALE-DANDA***

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Drama is a performative art and it is a representation of an action through actors on a stage before an audience. Dramatic structure involves the overall framework or method by which the playwright organizes the dramatic material and action. It is easy for playwrights to establish themes but the challenge comes in applying structure to the ideas and inspirations. Most modern plays are structured into acts that are further divided into scenes. Generally the wants and desires of one character are in conflict with those of another character and with this method the playwright establishes a pattern of complication, rising action, climax, and resolution. This is commonly known as ‘cause to effect’ arrangement of incidents.

Drama is normally analyzed on the principles given by the Greek philosopher Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Aristotle describes drama as the representation (or imitation) of a complete and whole action, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The current use of Aristotle's ideas is called neo-Aristotelian because they have been clarified by new ("neo") critics. Many writers and critics have discussed and described the principles and they generally agree that there are six major elements in drama:

1. Plot, 2. Character, 3. Thought (theme, idea), 4. Diction (Language), 5. Music (sound), 6. Spectacle.

**Plot of *Tale-Danda*** : The plot is the arrangement of events or the selection and order of scenes in the play. It is different from the story - the story is 'WHAT' happens and the plot is 'HOW' it happens.

The antecedent actions that expound the situation are described in the first act which is also called '**The Exposition**'. It introduces the world of drama – the characters/persons, their relative position in life, their circumstances, and their relation to one another and finally they leave the audience keenly interested in the questions that will emerge out of the given circumstances. It is not a situation of conflict that interests audience/reader but the situation that threatens conflict. Most dramatists use a prologue to inform their audience, others use action and events along with speeches to inform their audience and make it more interesting through the conversation of the minor characters of the play.

In *Tale- Danda* the 'point of attack' is revealed in the first scene. Through the conversation of the minor characters the audience/reader is informed about Sovideva's sinister plans to tarnish the image of Basavanna the minister of Treasury, and the unity and discipline of his followers/disciples to fend for his honour. The sub-theme of caste discrimination, the idea of pollution and purity, the hegemony of the brahmins, the rituals and funeral rites, all are introduced by the minor characters. By the time Basavanna is introduced on stage the audience is well aware of the *sharana* philosophy and familiar with his character and personality. Similarly, Sovideva, the prince is already introduced.

The main body of the play is occupied with the growth and vicissitudes of *the conflict*. In fact the essence of the drama is its **action** or the conflict and its outcome. The conflict is introduced in the exposition and it disrupts the status quo, sets the action into motion and leads to a *crisis*. A crisis is a point at which the action may lead in two or more directions and a decision must be made, which leads to such circumstances that force an action. Action is like the revealing flashes that the audience/reader discovers about the character/incidents. Hence the 'Dramatic effect' depends on what meaning the various minor scenes and the final situation brings to the minds of the audience/reader. The opposing forces are brought together to reveal the conflict which rises to a climax. Basavanna's

philosophy of a classless, casteless, egalitarian society is translated into a reality through the marriage of a brahmin girl and a low-caste boy and Bijjala reluctantly accepts the intercaste marriage and gives it a royal protection while displeasing the orthodox brahmin courtiers. This is the “**inciting incident**” that leads to *the climax* when the orthodox brahmins connive with Sovideva to dethrone Bijjala and he is made a captive in the palace. Basavanna does not believe in coercing his followers to do anything, hence he has no following, when he wants to rescue the king from the captivity of his son. The revolution thus fails at a moment of crisis. Both these conflicts have fatal results. Both power structures political and socio-religious crumble and their reversal becomes the *anti-climax* of the play.

The tragic play ends into a catastrophe, the final resolution of the conflict. Sovideva and the orthodox brahmins avenge the *sharanas* by violent torture of Haralayya and Madhuvarasa, Basavanna’s disciple Jagadeva murders Bijjala and commits suicide. The power is restored in the hands of orthodox brahmins and Sovideva, both with fascist ideology.

### **The plot of the play**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Act - I Exposition Scene i - iv                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Sovideva’s accusation’s against Basavanna.</li> <li>(ii) Sharanas loyalty towards Basavanna.</li> <li>(iii) Friendship between Jagadeva and Mallibomma.</li> </ul>  |
| Act - II Climax Scene v - vi                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Intercaste marriage supported by Bijjala.</li> <li>(ii) Dethronement &amp; captivation of Bijjala.</li> </ul>   |
| Act - II Catastrophe/ Denouement Scene xii - xvi | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Sharanas do not follow Basavanna for the release of Bijjala.</li> <li>(ii) Haralayya and Madhuvarasa are tortured and killed by Brahmins.</li> <li>(iii) Bijjala is assassinated and Jagadeva commits suicide.</li> <li>(iv) Coronation of Sovideva.</li> </ul> |

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## **21.5 CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY**

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*Tale-Danda* is a play with a large cast. The major characters are Basavanna, Bijjala, Sovideva and Jagadeva, other characters that help to carry forward the action of the play are Damodara Bhatta, Manchanna, Kramita, Haralayya, Madhuvarasa etc. (See unit 20)

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### 21.5.1 CHARACTER OF BIJJALA

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Bijjala is the king of Kalachurya empire in about 1154 A.D. His capital city Kalyan (a Welfare State) is in grip of a revolutionary movement for a casteless egalitarian society. This revolution, brought about by Basavanna and his Virasaiva philosophy, is opposed by the orthodox brahmins who want the king to protect the *Sanatan Dharma*. Bijjala was neither interested in *sharana* movement nor in the Brahmins, he only wanted to rule his empire without any trouble. But he has complete faith in Basavanna, though he dislikes the latter's morals and Bhakti yet he appreciates the significance of this spiritual and social movement. He acknowledges the role of *sharanas* in bringing economic prosperity to the country. He also comes from a lower caste.

#### **Bijjala's relationship with Basavanna :**

Bijjala had complete faith in Basavanna's capabilities, when Sovideva checks the accounts at the treasury; he is scolded and humiliated by Bijjala for this insensitive action. In fact Bijjala is quite upset at this. When Basavanna comes to return the keys of the treasury it seems as if the relationship between the king and Basavanna had deteriorated. Bijjala's decision to seat Basavanna in the inner chamber was a strategic decision used by Karnad to bring in the question of pollution and purity. Queen Rambhavati resents this decision as many 'low-castes' enter the inner chamber with Basavanna. When the matter of intercaste marriage came up, forced by the orthodox brahmins, Bijjala goes to Basavanna to stop it but Basavanna is another force to reckon with. Basavanna threatens the king with a non-violent rebellion and Bijjala criticizes him for being selfish and disloyal however Bijjala is forced to accept the marriage and even assures them of protection during the wedding ceremony.

In fact Bijjala had to pay a heavy price for protecting the *sharanas* and for his friendship and trust for Basavanna but he never accuses him of this betrayal. He blames his son and the Brahmins who are true culprits. He expects to be released by the *sharanas*. Learning of Bijjala's captivity Basavanna attempts to liberate him but fails as *sharanas* decide not to interfere in the family squabbles of the king. However, Basavanna meets Bijjala on his own advising him to have faith in the Lord Shiva. Bijjala is disillusioned and frustrated.

**From an agnostic to a theist :** Initially Bijjala is an agnostic but he is much impressed by the Virasaiva philosophy and respects Basavanna as one who treats him as an equal, without referring to his caste. He tells his wife Rambhavati who comes from Hoysalas, that she may be a Kshatriya :

But I am a Kalachurya. Katta Churra. A barber. His Majesty King Bijjala is a barber by caste.... The only people who have looked me in the eye without a reference to my lowly birth lurking

deep in their eyes are the *sharanas* : Basavanna and his men.

They treat me ... as a human being. (sc ii)

Bijjala respects Basavanna and his men for their prodigious courage to annihilate the varna system. He remembers the *vacanas* sung by Basavanna but he thinks that their ethics are not designed for rulers and criticizes him for their bhakti or devotion. Bijjala say, "But the one truth I know is that I exist and God doesn't". (sc ii)

Towards the end of the play when Jagadeva and Mallibomma come to kill him, Bijjala clings to the *Linga* and says :

Basavanna couldn't make me bend before the Lord. My wife couldn't. But you young whelps have made me cling to Him.[]I'll be Markandaya and you play the messengers of Death. (sc xiv)

No one could arouse his faith in the Lord but the fear of death does it. In a delirium he addresses Jagadeva as Sovideva and desires to be released from this captivity. Jagadeva thus becomes a messenger of God to liberate him from the captivity of his son.

**Bijjala and Sovideva** : Bijjala and Sovideva share a splitting of the self. Bijjala is a ruler without evil whereas Sovideva is the very opposite. Bijjala could not be manipulated by the orthodox Brahmins to serve their cause whereas Sovideva was manipulated by Damodara Bhatta. Bijjala is a respectable king who disposes his duties towards his subjects but he did not consider Sovideva as an apt ruler.

Girish Karnad has very overtly laid stress on the "low-caste" origin of the King Bijjala as it reflects the contemporary India where such people are in responsible position today. The implied suggestion is that it requires self-sacrifice to create a more equitable society and people like Damodara Bhatta and Sovideva are a bitter truth that cannot be wished away. Bijjala's character is raised to a tragic hero without a flaw and his stature is elevated to a great martyr for an egalitarian society when Jagadeva kills him wantonly.

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### 21.5.2 CHARACTER OF BASAVANNA

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Girish Karnad has portrayed the character of Basavanna, a saint, perhaps much more successfully than G.B. Shaw in *St. Joan* and T.S. Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Basavanna (1106-1167) a *bhakti* saint is believed to be an incarnation of Nandi (Vrishabha) and Basava is the Kannada word for the sanskrit word Vrishabha. Later out of respect he was called Basavanna meaning Basava the elder brother or Basaveshwara, Basava the God. Basavanna preached that work is worship and that everyone should continue in his professional work and at the same time lead a virtuous life. He taught the ideals of simple living and the equality of all men.

During his times it was customary to write religious and ethical texts in Sanskrit but Basavanna began to write in Kannada, the language of the people and his *vacanas* were written in prose instead of poetry. Basavanna had stressed the use of local language and Karnad in the play depicts that the Brahmins issue Sanskrit titles for the King and Basavanna condemns them saying that it would be better if these could be comprehended by the common man.

Karnad has used two reference works (i) M. Chidananda Murthy's *Basavanna* in the National Biography series published by National Book Trust and (ii) H. Thipurudraswamy's *Basaveshwara* in the Makers of Indian Literature Series published by Sahitya Akademi. Both biographies acknowledge that the source materials were not very authentic and their versions of his life are slightly different. However, Karnad exploits these materials to achieve his own ends. His portrayal deviates from both these sources and Basavanna comes alive in many roles that of a treasurer, saint-poet-philosopher and social reformer.

**Treasurer :** Bijjala tells Manchanna Kramita, "I came to this city ten years ago and I brought Basavanna with me as my Treasurer". Bijjala thus has immense faith and trust in the capabilities and integrity of Basavanna. But Sovideva, Bijjala's son, opens the treasury locks in absence of both the King and the Chief Treasury Officer to prove that Basavanna is guilty of diverting the state funds for the propagation of his new religion. Jagadeva, a disciple of Basavanna ensures that Sovideva does not tamper with the accounts to bring dishonour to his master. There were about 5000 *sharanas* that encircled the treasury, they were quite disciplined, and 'ungrudgingly and even cheerfully' they demonstrated their loyalty for the charismatic personality of Basavanna and to the peaceful non-violent protest of which he is the stalwart.

When the king returns he is furious at his son and questions him :

Did you find a broken cowrie missing from coffers? A counterfeit coin unaccounted for in the books? When Basavanna puts something down on paper, it is then for good. As if planted by Brahma himself. And that's why he continues to be the King's Treasurer. (sc ii)

In private Bijjala takes his son to task for the rift he has created but in public he defends him and is unwilling to accept his folly. Humiliated by Sovideva's action, Basavanna hands over the keys to the king. Quite reluctantly Bijjala accepts his resignation.

**Saint, philosopher and poet :** Basavanna was quite popular among the people as evident from the crowds that throng the palace in scene two and later at Jagadeva's house for *darshan*. Bijjala too is enthralled by the charismatic personality of the saint poet and recites his *vacanas*. Damodara Bhatta too quotes from the *vacanas* and Indrani, the prostitute, mocks at him saying that though he

condemns and despises the *sharanas* yet their poetry seems to dance on his tongue (sc iv). Basavanna's philosophy of life, and his *vacanas* are interspersed throughout the play.

**Basavanna represents Gandhi** : With his utopian ideals of a classless society and love of truth and non-violence Karnad seems to be influenced by Gandhian ideals while portraying the character of Basavanna. He has used non-violence and threats of non-cooperation in the play as a moral force. Basavanna condemns violence, whatever the provocation. He rebukes his own people for forcefully occupying a Jain temple at Maddur.

When King Bijjala fears that the wedding pandal will turn into a slaughterhouse so this cursed marriage will not take place, Basavanna threatens that he will go the palace and sit in the ground until such time as prohibition is withdrawn. He will not ask anyone to come but the *sharanas* may decide to do it on their own. Bijjala can see the threat :

A hundred and ninety-six thousand *sharanas*! They only have to lay down their implements. And market after market in the city will close down. Streets will fall empty. Trade will collapse, the economy will suffer a set-back. (sc v)

Thus *sharanayat* that began as a spiritual mission gradually turned into a popular social movement that could even disrupt the economy of a nation.

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### 21.5.3 CHARACTER OF JAGADEVA

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Son of Sambashiva Shastri, Jagadeva is a staunch follower of Basavanna. When Sovideva, the Prince, wanted to inspect the accounts in absence of the King and Basavanna, Jagadeva smelt a conspiracy against Basavanna and rallied the *sharanas* to the palace. Jagadeva ensures that Sovideva does not tamper with the accounts to bring dishonour to his master. Later Jagadeva tells Basavanna that he did all this :

To make sure that Basavanna's honour remained untarnished. To establish his glory in perpetuity. That's why! Tomorrow I shall be the talk of the town, ... I shall be the hero of the *sharanas*. I could see myself taken out in procession, hoisted on the shoulders of my friends and companions! (sc iv)

But all his dreams are shattered by 'the miracle' that is believed to have occurred at the treasury. He had rallied the people to the treasury despite the illness of his father. When Jagadeva returned home after four days, his father is critical and in a state of delirium. His father does not recognize him. Later Jagadeva performs the funeral ceremonies as per Brahminical tradition. He reverts to the caste system by wearing the sacred thread in order to do so.



Basavanna visits Jagadeva when almost all the funeral ceremonies are over and Jagadeva is at a loss to understand 'the miracle'. Basavanna tries to convince him that there were no miracles at the treasury as he did not steal money from the treasury and needed no miracles. Basavanna shares the vision given by Allama with him. (Allama was a great saint, a mystic and one who had attained a state of grace) Basavanna cannot explain why Allama shared the vision with him and now why he is sharing it with Jagadeva. The vision emphasized that nothing is pure in the human world. Basavanna says :

...I even saw myself and my associates. Everything. Not just the ordinary or the simple or the holy or the beautiful. Along with that the grotesque and the evil. Filth beyond belief. As though a river full of spring blossoms also carried decaying flesh, rotten limbs, uprooted hair, a flood of pus – the stench interwoven with fragrance... (sc iv)

The good and the evil flow together in this life and it is same with Basavanna and Jagadeva. They have become quite close associates.

When the marriage between Sheelvanta and Kalavati is decided Jagadeva again anticipates trouble and works out a strategy to face the consequences. The marriage takes place peacefully but the king is made captive and Sovideva is crowned the King of Kalyan. Now Sovideva and the orthodox Brahmins at the court terrorize and prosecute the *sharanas*. Sovideva under the influence of Damodara and Manchanna arrests Haralayya the father of Sheelvanta and Madhuvarasa the father of Kalavati. Both Haralayya and Madhuvarasa are brought to the city square where their eyes are plucked with the iron rods, they are tied to the elephant legs and dragged into the streets. (sc xii)

When Jagadeva comes to know about the horrible death of Haralayya and Madhuvarasa he plans to take revenge on Sovideva. Along with a few *sharanas* he goes to the palace but to his dismay Sovideva had already left, he finds Bijjala in the Queen's chamber. With deceit they bring him out of the sanctum and Jagadeva stabs him and asks others to leave him alone. Jagadeva goes into the sanctum and addresses Basavanna :

You are watching Basavanna?... I am not afraid. Even of sacrilege.  
Watch. If you are Basavanna, I am Jagganna - the Solitary Saint.  
(sc xiv)

And he plunges the dagger into himself. The Solitary Saint revenges the death of his father, of Haralayya and Madhuvarasa.

In Jagadeva, Karnad has portrayed a politically ambitious character who is a devout follower, one who actually takes up arms and sacrifices his life for the cause. He too is a saint, made in a different mould than Basavanna.

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#### 21.5.4 CHARACTER OF SOVIDEVA

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Sovideva, the son of king Bijjala by Queen Rambhavati of the Hoysala dynasty is a frustrated man as he is not given an independent domain though he has attained the age of twenty. At the instigation of orthodox Brahmins he opens the treasury locks to check accounts in absence of both the King Bijjala and the Chief Treasury Officer but his plans are toppled by the non-Brahminical forces of *sharanas* and his desire to prove Basavanna guilty of diverting funds for propagation of his new religion comes to a naught. In fact Sovideva becomes the laughing stock.

King Bijjala thinks him to be a coward who will not efficiently manage the affairs of the state. But Bijjala is captivated in his palace and Sovideva with the aid of orthodox Brahmins usurps power. He subverts all the progressive change in the social, economic and political fields. He is physically weak but conniving and manipulating.

He is one character that foils the actions of both Bijjala and Basavanna, of politics, of social and economic revolution. The Brahminical forces subvert the ideals of casteless, classless society and economic prosperity by terrorizing the *sharanas*. Kalyan which literally means a welfare state ironically is being ruled by fascist forces headed by Sovideva.

The last scene of *Tale-Danda* reminds one of the last scene of *Tughlaq*, when Tughlaq almost turns mad. Sovideva too is seen gesticulating.

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### 21.6 SUB THEME

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#### 21.6.1 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ISSUES

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*Tale-Danda* enacts a hindu way of life, the caste hierarchy, the hegemony of the Brahmins, a dream of a casteless, classless, egalitarian society that has respect for all artisans. Karnad has used metaphorically the historical facts based on the life of Basavanna who is trying and impose humanistic secular mindset on his people but fails miserably.

The secular mindset is quite difficult to achieve as the caste system has socio-religious sanction and is believed to be ordained by Gods and institutionalized through religious scriptures: the Vedas, the Smrities and the Manushastra. It consists of hierarchically arranged hereditary groups separated from each other in respects of endogamy, restrictions on eating together and in physical contact but inter-dependent in matters of traditional division of labour.

Karnad here uses the two extreme sections of the society: the brahmins and the untouchables. The untouchables or 'Harijans' were required to live at a distance from the main village, they were responsible for scavenging, night soil transport, burial and making leather goods. They were denied entry into temples and prohibited access to common water resources. Doctrinally they are not a part of

Hindu society yet existentially they are an integral part of local communities. The Brahmins wielded socio-religious power and controlled all knowledge and opinions.

In the play the important issue of casteless society is raised by Basavanna's *sharana* philosophy of integrating society into a single unit. His Anubhav Mantapa was not just a platform for spiritual discourses but it also represented the confluence of the rivers of the artisan's minds.

Karnad creates powerful characters through which the fundamental issue of a casteless society is reinforced. The issue has been historically relevant as it is today and was also in 1989 when the play was written as a reproach to the then prevalent Mandal and Mandir politics in the country.

The very first scene sets the tone for the theme of caste identity and the ensuing problems to be faced by the abolition of caste identity. Bijjala himself is from a lower caste – a Barber – tacitly approves of Basavanna and his *sharana* followers as they treat him as a human being. He is aware of the dislike the orthodox Brahmins have for him. Karnad has overtly used many incidents that reveal the breaking of caste barriers.

- (a) Mallibomma, a tanner by caste, enters into the house of Sambashiva Shastri, a Brahmin, as Jagadeva, his son, is a fellow *sharana*.
- (b) Bijjala asks Basavanna to sit in the inner chamber of the palace where his followers belonging to all castes are admitted for his blessings.
- (c) The exogamous marriage between Kalavati, a Brahmin girl, and Sheelavanta, a cobbler boy, is forbidden in the religious books but both Basavanna and Bijjala approve of it although for different reasons.
- (d) Marriappa a low caste boy is asked by Bijjala to enter the sanctum and peep through the skylight.
- (e) Malibomma, a tanner, exchange blood through wounds to pledge brotherhood with Jagadeva and others.
- (f) Mallibomma enters the sanctum with Jagadeva and others to wrench Bijjala free of the *Linga* and bring him out of the sanctum.

The play in fact begins with the conflict in the mind of Sambashiva Shastri and his wife whether their son Jagadeva will perform the funeral rites according to Brahminical principles or not as he has embraced the *sharana* Philosophy that repudiates Vedic rituals. The climax of tension culminates in the scene five when Bijjala asks Basavanna not to bless the inter-caste marriage as the orthodox Brahmins have registered their vehement dislike for this marriage. This scene is remarkable for the development of the main themes of caste and religion.

The final blow is organised by the orthodox Brahmins, who have disliked the friendship between Bijjala and Basavanna, and now they crown Sovideva as the king and Bijjala is captivated in the palace. Thus the dream of a casteless society is shattered with the harsh treatment given to the *sharanas* and coronation of Sovideva.

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### 21.6.2 INTERCASTE MARRIAGE AND COMMUNITY BARRIERS

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Apart from the caste identity and issues related to individual identity Karnad introduces a sub-theme of inter caste marriage in the play and makes the situation quite volatile. Basavanna's utopian dream of a casteless society is translated into a reality by Haralayya, a cobbler and Madhuvarasa, a brahmin as they decide to unite their children into a bond of marriage. The disciples of Basavanna are elated at this proposal but he warns them that marriage is a private affair in which people who are directly involved must arrive at a decision, without being forced upon by the society. They should be prepared to face the consequences.

Basavanna exhibits his astuteness and respect for the individual by sympathizing with the mother of Kalavati who feels that it would be difficult for her daughter to adjust to the day to day life of a cobbler's family who cannot stand the smell of leather due to her upbringing in a Brahmin family. He also sympathizes with Sheelavant who is scared of the society that will tease them day and night with sarcastic remarks and call Kalavati "a cobbler's priestess" (sc v).

The question of change of vocation is also raised here by Karnad. Sheelavanta's father says, "If my son decides to change his vocation, will the weavers accept him? Will the potters open their ranks?" (sc v). In Varanashram system the caste and vocation of a person are very well defined. Earlier in the play the same question is raised by Bijjala, the King when his wife says we are Kshatriyas, Bijjala replies that Hoysalas were Kshatriyas but ask any innocent child of the Empire about the caste of Bijjala, "And the instant reply will be: a barber! One's caste is like the skin on one's body. You can peel it from top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again: a barber – a shepherd- a scavenger!" (sc ii)

As the society denies change of caste and vocation of a person similarly the marriage outside one's caste is considered bigotry. Marriage especially between an upper caste girl and lower caste boy is prohibited in the Indian scriptures. Basavanna is apprehensive of the carnage that will take place, of the "venom that will gush out" and "hatred that will erupt" in the society. Bijjala too persuades Basavanna to call off the marriage as the people of "higher caste will not take it lying down and the streets of Kalyan will reek of human entails" (sc v). Bijjala threatens to stamp out *sharanas* "like a cushionful of bedbugs!" (sc v). But all his persuasion and threats come to a naught when Basavanna threatens him with non-violent resistance and finally Bijjala too relents to marriage. Both Bijjala and Basavanna know that the

society will not accept this inter caste marriage. Sheelavanta's grandmother prophesized, "Rivers of blood will flow if marriage takes place, she said, human limbs will rot in the streets" (sc v).

And the prophecy comes true. The orthodox brahmins are not tolerant. Bijjala is held captive; Madhuvarasa and Haralayya were tortured and brutally killed; Basavanna leaves for Kappadi; *sharanas* flee for their life; Jagadeva kills Bijjala and commits suicide; Basavanna holds himself responsible for Jagadeva's crime and "he merged with the elements. Nothing else is known" (sc xvi). Damodara Bhatta blames the intercaste marriage for the events to follow:

And if your Majesty had not intervened, the *sharanas* would have met their fate on the day of that infamous wedding. But your Majesty staunched the wrath of the people and invited disaster on your head. Why? (sc vii).

The orthodox Brahmins feel that this marriage is "the desecration of the body of that Purusha", the Primordial Man from whom flow the four Varnas, "The Brahmins from the head, the Shudra from the feet". This marriage according to them is a sacrilege, a profanity (sc vi) and hence stands condemned.

This sub-theme of inter caste marriage adds fuel to Sovideva's plotting the political theme. The orthodox forces join hands with Sovideva and together they lead to the damnation of the *sharana* movement. All dissent is crushed out and the society reverts to orthodoxy.

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### 21.6.3 POWER, RESISTANCE AND VIOLENCE

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The quest for power and success blinds individuals to the injustices around them. To protect threatened and vulnerable truths, to denounce abuse of power and oppression is a courageous and dangerous act of resistance. Resistance is a tool to overthrow oppression and exploitation by the colonizer or the oppressor. The human suffering is the same whether resistance is used to fight oppression and exploitation by foreign imperialist or from an exploiter within the society.

*Tale-Danda* is a play about the power structures and their reversals in socio-religious and political terms. It presents resistance against the essentialist position and fundamentalist ideals within the Hindu society of 12<sup>th</sup> century Karnataka and subverts and challenges the barriers of casteism. Karnad uses resistance at every step to fight against internalized oppression referred to as "the colonizer within."

The *Varnashrama dharma* system stratifies the Hindu society into hierarchical divisions of the hegemony of the Brahmins and the oppression of the lower castes. The dream of a casteless society of the Bhakti saint Basavanna and of Mahatma Gandhi did not see the light of the day. Karnad used history as a resistance strategy to generate the counter discourse to hegemonic structures in-built in the Indian society.

Basavanna's '*Sharanayat*' is a resistance movement that resisted the casteist practices in Hindu society. Jasbir Jain in her article "A Phoenix Called Resistance", analysing Karnad's *Tale-Danda*, writes:

Karnad's play, *Tale-Danda*, in its treatment of Indian social constructs and Indian past, supersedes both historical text and the present moment. The debate that marked India's freedom struggle was between violence and non-violence; these two parallel discourses that interact intermittently are an undercurrent in the play. (*Journal of Post Colonial Writing*. p 175)

The *sharanas* take to non-violent resistance whereas the orthodox Brahminical power that rises with Sovideva resorts to violence. When the honour of Basavanna is at stake and Sovideva checks the accounts, thousands of *sharanas*- disciplined, ungrudging, even cheerful- surrounded the treasury. Later Basavanna threatens Bijjala with non-violent resistance if he withholds the permission to inter caste marriage.

At the beginning of the play there is a decline in the Brahminical power represented by the crumbling figure of Sambashiva Shastri, a brahmin courtier. Jagadeva loaths his father's condition:

Do you know how a man crumbles when he loses power? In the service of the court, father was tall and imposing and walked with long confident strides. Weighed each word before parting with it. But the moment Bijjala threw him out, he shrank, like a piece of soaked cloth. Even his voice went shrill. (sc. i)

Similar is the condition of Bijjala when political power is usurped by Sovideva and orthodox Brahmins. Later Basavanna's power too is on the decline when he tries to convince *sharanas* that Bijjala is dethroned and held captive due to protection given for inter caste marriage, a meager number of 770 *sharanas* follow him.

The orthodox brahminical forces that – rise with Sovideva resort to violence. Sovideva, on the advice of Manchanna and Damodara, decides to take revenge on *sharanas* for defying him at the treasury and punish those involved with intercast marriage. For Basavanna and *sharanas* "violence is wrong whatever the provocation." Jagadeva betrays his mentor and pledges to kill Sovideva. Unable to find him, he avenges his father's death by brutally stabbing Bijjala and then commits suicide. The play ends on a tragic note. The last scene of Sovideva's coronation reminds of the last scene of *Tughlaq* as a sense of incomprehension and tinge of madness can be seen in Sovideva.

*Tale-Danda* concentrates on the tale of injustice and oppression and ends with images of defeat, loss and ultimate despair. By breathing life into fictional characters Karnad records oppression, abuse of power and acts of resistance. The individuals

Bijjala, Basavanna, Jagadeva, Haralayya, Madhuvarasa are crushed within larger and public conflicts involving politics and religion. None of these characters are punished or killed for their personal crimes, they die for a public cause. The incident of marriage reveal the crushing weight of tradition which denies the lower castes most of the privileges of the upper castes.

*Tale-Danda* thus explores different forms of injustice, of inequality, of oppression by hegemonic power structures and the violent and non-violent resistance offered. Karnad deviates from the accepted dramaturgical practices of the day by depicting murder on the stage. Technically he has retained the scenic divisions and the 16 scenes flow continuously but for our analysis we can divide the play into three acts based on the thematic changes that take place as follows:

Act-I	Sc. i-iv	Loyalty, non-violent resistance, non-Brahminical hegemony, Bijjala and Basavanna.
Act-II	Sc. v – vi	Reversal of Power, betrayal.
Act-III	Sc. vii-xvi	Revenge, violence, orthodox Brahminical hegemony, Sovideva and Jagadeva.

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#### 21.6.4 POSTCOLONIAL TEXT

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It is a resistance text that the play functions as a postcolonial text. The internal colonization of the Indian society is rooted in their past, heritage values and culture. The brahminic hegemony in the society and their dominance over the other castes is quite evident in the play. The *sharana* religion and the inter caste marriage are acts of resistance. These are both brutally suppressed by the orthodox Brahmins who felt this was a rebellion against their traditional caste hegemony, but this does not subtract from the questioning of society. As George Orwell observed that all revolutions are failures, but they are not the same failures.

The resistance discourse is related to postcolonial discourse where colonized offers resistance to the colonizing forces as discussed in section 21.6.3 of this unit where we have internal colonizer the Brahmin caste. Its reflection on the political scenario of the eighties and the nineties, the Mandal Commission and its aftermath and Mandir-Masjid issues, locates it in the discourse of dissent.

In his “Preface” to his plays and in his interviews Karnad clearly articulates the historical and cultural contexts which his plays attempt to confront and tackle. His plays are directed to the ‘postcolonial search for Indian roots’. Most of his themes are borrowed from myth or history or folklore and he adequately represents indigenous people and their culture. He also reveals that ancient myths can be harnessed “to address the modern sensibility of loss and individual identity.” He has mastered the art of subversion of the well established hierarchies with remarkable irreverence by complex manipulations. He both controls and

manipulates the meaning in order to reinterpret history or myth. In *Tale-Danda* Karnad uses history of 12<sup>th</sup> century Karnataka, the social change initiated by Basavanna and reinterprets it in terms of caste politics and Mandal, Masjid issues.

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## 21.7 LET US SUM UP

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Girish Karnad set the play *Tale-Danda* in 1168 AD on the later life of Basavanna, a brahmin. Through multiple levels of subversion Karnad tries to depict the fate of social change. Basavanna revolts against the Vedic practices and caste system but does not succeed in transforming that society as the King Bijjala who was sympathetic to change was captivated and killed. His son Sovideva is manipulated to the throne by the orthodox Brahmins of the court. However, the play succeeds in presenting the social and ideological conflicts in medieval age, which could serve as a mirror for the realpolitik of the society today.

The play illustrates how man has not learnt from history. It depicts the tragic failure of social reordering on individual as well as collective/political level.

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## 21.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss the contemporaneity of the play *Tale-Danda*.
2. Which tenets of the Bhakti movement do you find in the play?
3. Compare and contrast the character of Bijjala and Sovideva.
4. How is the subplot of inter-caste marriage related to the main plot of the play?
5. “*Tale-Danda* is about subversion of power structures in the society”. Elucidate.
6. “The play presents the philosophical dialectic of caste as well as the practical consequences of the opposing positions.” Discuss.
7. Do you agree that the play is a commentary on the relation of the religion to politics? Why?

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## 21.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## UNIT 22 : “THE DIASPORA IN INDIAN CULTURE” BY AMITAV GHOSH

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### STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 About the Author
- 22.3 About the Age
- 22.4 Introduction to the Text
- 22.5 Detailed Explanation of the Text
- 22.6 Analysis of the Text
- 22.7 Glossary, Annotations and References
- 22.8 Self Assessment Questions
- 22.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.10 Unit End Questions
- 22.11 Suggested Readings

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### 22.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objectives of this lesson are:

- (i) to introduce the student to a very renowned contemporary writer, Amitav Ghosh, through an analysis of his short essay "The Diaspora in Indian Culture";
- (ii) explain some of the key terms and concepts in the area of study called ‘diaspora criticism’, which has taken an important position in the contemporary literary and culture studies;
- (iii) to analyse the relationship between diaspora writing and travel;
- (iv) look into the close links between postcolonial theory and diaspora criticism.

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### 22.1 INTRODUCTION

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This essay was originally meant as a lecture. It was first published in *Granta*, 20 (Cambridge) 1986. It is now included in Amitav Ghosh’s collection of essays, titled *The Imam and the Indian*, published by Permanent Black, Delhi, 2002.

Amitav Ghosh is, in the main, a novelist who has written about diverse aspects of Indian life. He also writes on contemporary events of great significance, such as the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the riots of 1984 that he witnessed in New Delhi, and the nuclear policy of India and its impact on the policies of other South Asian countries. He has also written about and commented on especially other artists and authors, those he admires and likes such as Satyajit Ray, Rabindranath Tagore and the Kashmiri poet, Agha Shahid Ali. He writes about

such incidents as the tsunami that killed thousands of Indians on the southern coasts in December 2005, and the attack on the World Trade Centre in the USA in September, 2001. As a journalist, novelist and essay-writer Ghosh presents his ideas and perceptions in a mild, gentle and sympathetic tone.

In this essay he has written on a subject that reflects the lives of millions of Indians who are living outside the main homeland and form India's diaspora. Ghosh looks upon the sensitive issue of the emotional bonds between those who live away from the country of their origin and its culture and their lives. Ghosh interconnects the culture of the homeland and the changed, new culture that the diaspora form when separated from their homeland.

Reference : *The Imam and the Indian*. Ravi Dayal, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2002.

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## 22.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Amitav Ghosh was born on July 11, 1956. He spent his childhood in Calcutta, New Delhi, and studied in the Doon School at Dehradun. His father was an army officer who later became a diplomat. Amitav travelled with him to Sri Lanka, Burma and other places. Graduating from St. Stephen's College in Delhi, he went on to do his M.A. in Sociology from the Delhi University in 1978, a Diploma in Arabic from Tunis, in Tunisia in 1979, and a D.Phil (Ph.D.) in Social Anthropology from Oxford University in 1982. For his research work he travelled to parts of Egypt in 1980, and spent some time in a village, called Lataifa.

Returning to Delhi, Amitav Ghosh worked for some time as a journalist. Since then he has visited many universities around the world as Visiting Professor. Some of the places he has worked at are : Visiting Professor of Anthropology at the University of Virginia, USA in 1988, University of Pennsylvania in 1989, The American University at Cairo, in Egypt, in 1994, and Columbia University, New York, in 1994-97. From 1994-2003 he held the Chair of Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature at Queens College in New York, USA. He lives mostly in New York with his wife and children.

Amitav Ghosh published his first novel, *The Circle of Reason* in 1986 and the second *The Shadow Lines* in 1988. These two novels established him as one of the most talented and mature novelists in English in post independence India. His novels are acclaimed all over the world. By now he has published six novels and a number of non-fictional texts. He constantly experiments with the form and narrative style. In his book *In An Antique Land* he brings together anthropology, travel account and personal narrative to reflect upon the changes in religious attitudes and cultures in the world.

In novels like *The Glass Palace* (2000) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008) Ghosh creates tremendously interesting account of the colonial period in South Asian

countries. The novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) takes up one of the neglected areas of the country, the Sunderbans, where human beings still fight the tiger for survival, and to hold on the land against the eroding waves of the sea.

Ghosh's novels, non-fiction and journalistic writing reflect a deep engagement with contemporary issues and suggests a reconsideration of one's views about history, different people and other countries.

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### **22.3 ABOUT THE AGE**

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Amitav Ghosh belongs to the generation of writers born after India became an independent country. He belongs both to the twentieth and the twenty first centuries. He is deeply conscious of the immense struggle that took place for more than fifty years for India's freedom. He feels that history should be understood with full seriousness and care. The country began to change rapidly after it gained independence and with a new sense of confidence and hope India started to move towards industrialisation, social and cultural reform and making education accessible to as many people as possible.

During 1970s and 80s there was an increase in the trend to travel to different western countries for higher education and professional opportunities and large scale migration, especially from the educated middle class professionals, took place to U.K., USA and other European countries leading to the formation of a sizeable Indian diaspora in different parts of the world.

The last two decades of the twentieth century have stressed the increased popularity of Indian writers in the west. Writers like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh are widely recognised, frequently awarded and honoured by critics and societies in the western world. In India also there is now a greater respect for these diasporic writers. The writers living abroad have written about the political and social conditions within modern India, and about the lack of certain values. These writes have often been criticised within India for their critiquing of India.

During the last part of the twentieth century writers inside the country as well as the diaspora have also shown greater concern with the minority groups living within India, that is the suppressed classes, castes, and women. The "marginalised" sections of the society are discussed, portrayed and brought into centre of interest.

Amitav Ghosh is also concerned with social and political issues that face many of the suppressed and silenced people.

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### **22.4 INTRODUCTION OF THE TEXT**

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The main theme of the essay "The Diaspora in Indian Culture" is the impact of travel, and of the migrating communities on the culture of the mainland. The word 'diaspora' is derived from the Greek words *dia* - meaning - completely, and

*speirein* - meaning - sowing. A botanical phenomena of sowing seeds by dispersing them around is indicated.

This meaning is no more suggested in the modern uses of the word as it has become associated with the widespread movements of human beings from different parts of the world. As increasing number of travellers have been making countries other than those of their ancestors, their new home. The diaspora of the last three hundred years have experienced a variety of emotions. Those who were taken by force and forced to work as slaves or indentured labour were filled with a great sense of nostalgia and a helpless longing to return to the place of origin. Many people have chosen to leave the home country and to settle in other countries of their choice. Many writers, artists and thinkers have been among such migrants. Gabriel Sheffers in writing about diaspora defines it in these words : "Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with its country of origin - their homelands" (3).

These diasporas are created by either voluntary or forced migrations. The large number of writers and artists who have chosen to leave their home country have been looking for greater intellectual or creative freedom. Such writers include James Joyce (born in Ireland, moved to Paris, and Switzerland), Joseph Conrad (born in Poland, lived in England), Salman Rushdie (born in Bombay, lives in England and USA), Bharati Mukherji (India born writer who moved away to Canada and then to States). Amitav Ghosh is also in the USA.

Diaspora writers have made a special place for themselves in the world today. V.S. Naipaul whose ancestors left India about one hundred and fifty years ago and were taken to the West Indies, moved to England during the 1950s for higher education and a career in writing. He is recognised as one of the most important writers today, and has been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Ghosh's essay explores the strange phenomena of the extra sensitivity the Indian people and government show towards the diasporic writers. The views of the diasporic writers have led the Indian government to take up hasty decisions, whereas there is usually no response to many very serious problems. Ghosh begins the essay by making this query - why is it that the opinion of the diaspora gets a hearing.

He then goes on to analyse some of the characteristic features of the diaspora itself - how the exiled communities have maintained strong links with the home country, its culture, rituals and religion, despite the distance of space. He also goes on to explore the curious mixing up of the culture of the host country - the country to which they have travelled, and where they are living - and the culture of their parent country, which the migrated people have carried with them, leading to the formation of new "hybrid", mixed culture, language and identity. Homi

Bhabha, an important diasporic critic has discussed these features of the mixing up of different influences in his book called. *The Location of Culture* (Routledge,1994). He uses terms like “hybridity”and “mimicry” to discuss these transformations and translations.

Ghosh then examines how the diasporic communities actively cultivate and build up relationship with their homelands. Sheffers has also discussed how the two-way relationships of the diasporic community : between the land of adoption and the land of origin, forms a triangular situation, putting the diaspora in-between. They experience a space in between the two locations, and between the two cultures. Does this ‘margin’ - that is the in between space, the interstices have any value ?

Reference : Sheffer, Gabriel (ed.). *Modern Diaspora in International Politics*. London and Sydney. Crown Helm 1986.

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## 22.5 DETAILED EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT

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The first sentence of the essay democratizes the historical age of the diaspora that the essay is referring to. The diaspora of India in the modern age has been formed under certain specific historical and political conditions, creating some very characteristic responses. Although Indians are known to have travelled widely, and sometimes settled down in other countries even in periods like the age of Buddha, those diasporas had different cultural qualities. In this essay Ghosh discusses the modern Indian diaspora.

‘Demographic’ refers to issues pertaining to population; large number of groups of men and women who have been dislocated by colonial powers. There have also been some shifts of social groups due to a search for better opportunities for business or education. So diasporas have been made by voluntary or involuntary movements from one’s own territory. Deterritorialization creates tensions of emotional and intellectual nature, bringing about efforts to cling to the memories of the homeland, ancestral traditions and an attempt to hold on to them.

The first important point the writer makes is that the diasporic Indians have become widely known. They are being recognized as outstanding writers and professionals in those countries where they have settled down. Ghosh refers to the extra sensitivity of the government and people of India to the opinions expressed by the diasporic writers of Indian origin. He refers particularly to the controversies raised by V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie’s works. Naipaul’s book on India *An Area of Darkness* and Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* were banned in India when many groups of people expressed their dislike for the views expressed in these books. Ghosh finds this hastiness on the part of the Indian Government to ban the books comic, for the government is usually too slow in taking any stand on more important matters. Ghosh wants to know the reason for the attention that is given to the views or works of such writers.

He holds the view that such attention does not reflect a “colonial mentality” - which means an undue respect for views or ideas, actions belonging to the western/ white people. In order to emphasize that the sensitive reaction to the criticism by the diaspora is not due to a colonial mentality, he refers to the response of Indians to a book called *Mother India*, written by an American lady, Katherine Mayo in 1927. It was highly critical of Indians, saying that they were not ready for independence as they did not treat their women in a humane, civilized manner. There was a widespread strong reaction to this book. Most Indian leaders criticised it. Criticism of Indian government and people is still being made, e.g. by Gunnar Myrdal, a leading economist, but usually, the Indian government does not pay much attention to them.

Ghosh asks the question what makes the criticism of V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie more hurt ? Here Ghosh comes to his next important point - what is the peculiar nature of the relation between mainland India and its diasporic communities ?

He begins by comparing the practices of some other diasporas, who have taken their political and social institutions with them to the new lands to which they have gone. The ancient Greeks took their rituals and political system to their newly adopted lands. In contrast to this, the diasporic Indians could not do this, mostly because they travelled to countries which were governed by the British rulers. He talks about Cheddi Jagan - who first participated in the freedom struggle for Guyana, a colony of the British; then he became President of the independent state. The relation of the diasporic community remained more or less the same.

Ghosh goes over different forms of mediation between mainland community and diasporas. It is not through the hold over mother tongue or their caste practices or religious rituals that the bonds have been very strong. In fact in all these forms of action and behaviour show a remarkable flexibility, and a degree of assimilation. Adaptation of new influences in seen is the Indian diasporic communities in the different parts of the world. Linguistic adaptation has led to the formation of mixed languages known as ‘Creole’. It is this kind of flexibility that has moulded Indians abroad.

Ghosh then discusses the most significant aspect of Indian diaspora, and how it has been able to maintain very strong relation with India, the country of origin but now a distant space. Ghosh considers this relationship to be lived in the imagination, not so much in any concrete action or ritual. It is a “historical anomaly” in the sense that the direct and unending attachment that exists between the diasporic communities and India has not been influenced.

It is “an epic relation” : an indication of the continued, unending saga of relationship with the homeland. The word “epic” is used here to suggest the undisturbed story of this relationship. When Indians go and settle in other countries they often continue

to remember the locations and spaces of India. As an example of this practice Ghosh tells the reader that in Thailand the Indians have built an area called 'Ayodhya' one of the holy cities of the Hindus. The diasporic writers reestablish their emotional association with the places in the country in their writings by referring to them.

In this context Ghosh emphasizes the role played by (1) Memory and (2) Imagination. Removed from their place of origin and homes, their dislocation creates a sense of longing a nostalgia, a sense of loss. It is difficult for many of the persons who have migrated and are 'immigrants' in their land of adoption, to completely get over this sense of loss. When the colonizers came to occupy and conquer different countries they renamed some of these places, using names of towns or villages in their mother countries. Such as New 'Park' or New Wales. But in this respect the slaves, indentured labour force lacked the freedom and power to do so. To make up for this inability, these migrated communities continued to recall the sites, villages, rivers or other geographical features of their native land. Gradually only the name remains, the spaces in the country becomes distantly remembered.

The Indian diasporic writers write more about their own home country or about Indian communities living abroad or in the mother country. India clings to those placed outside its boundaries and it is easy for the travellers going out of India to continue to feel they are part of India. The flexibility and adaptability that is found in Indian diaspora encourages differences, deviations and "mutations". To change and differ can become a positive aspect of life. Ghosh highlights these aspects of Indian culture within and outside the country.

Ghosh comes to the two very important qualities which define Indian culture. He considered its tolerance for diversity as its core value, one of the most basic principles. He finds that the Indian culture has treated its margins with care. He refers to the four sacred places of pilgrimage - '*Char dham*', which are located in its four corners. This religious philosophy of treating the margins to be important as the centre - Ayodhya - opens out the spatial imagination. He then calls India's diasporic communities the margins of the mainland. These communities stretch the limits of India to wherever they are, making the boundary divisions insignificant.

Because of this close emotional relation between the native country and its migrated communities or individuals, the country feels equally sensitive to the opinions of the diaspora. The diaspora becomes a representation, a mirror in which the homeland, its inhabitants see themselves reflected. The diaspora and those inside the country are not separated by the distance, in fact, the relationship becomes more binding.



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## 22.6 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

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In this essay Amitav Ghosh, who is a well-known diasporic writer, has discussed some of the prominent issues about Indian diaspora. He clearly demarcates the age of the diaspora that he is dealing with : the diaspora that has been formed in the last one hundred and fifty years. Indians have travelled to countries close and far, in all directions, in almost every historical period. The social, political and economic conditions in which Indians have migrated from their homeland during the colonial period has created its own distinct sense of belonging, longing, love and nostalgia, sense of loss, mourning and remembering. Ghosh reflects upon the modern diaspora, and their impact on the culture within the country.

The essay tries to analyse the cultural features of the modern diaspora of India. Its manifestation in the language spoken by the diasporic communities, their observation of rituals and caste practices are considered. In this essay Ghosh has referred to different Indian and non-Indian writers. These writers form important points of reference for they reflect variety of attitudes towards India. Literature has a special place in the cultural activities, for it not only entertains, it also forms opinions and intellectual discussions.

By talking about some of the very basic values of the Indian, and within it of Hindu culture, this essay takes the reader towards a deeper understanding of the changing concepts of diversity, differences, and margin-centre relationship. In the critical theories of deconstruction and postcolonialism these concepts are being reexamined, and redefined. Another concept that is under constant scrutiny is the idea of “nation”. When the nation is taken abroad by its migrating groups, the boundaries which maps show are opened up.

This essay makes an important contribution to diaspora criticism. There is a discussion of the impact of the part of the country is population that has been made to leave it by force, or willingly. Now that the numbers have increased, they are being recognized all over the world as being highly accomplished and successful, it is important to talk about them in a serious manner. Ghosh does not express sorrow or mourn for what is lost, he rather celebrates the links between the country and its diaspora.

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## 22.7 GLOSSARY

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<i>diaspora</i> :	The dispersal of seed; originally used for the dispersal of Jews beyond Israel; new extended meaning refers to people living outside original place of birth.
<i>demographic</i> :	related to population : problems, numbers, studies.
<i>dislocation</i> :	disturb the normal position, location of person or thing.
<i>reprehensible</i> :	deserving to be condemned.

<i>apparatus</i> :	the equipment needed for a particular activity or purpose.
<i>decrying</i> :	publicly denounce, criticize
<i>babble</i> :	talk rapidly and continuously in a foolish, excited or incomprehensible way.
<i>vitriolic</i> :	extreme bitterness or malice
<i>hypothesis</i> :	a supposition or proposed explanation made on the basis of limited evidence as a starting point for further investigation.
<i>endemic</i> :	prevalent amongst a certain people, nature or peculiar to a people.
<i>creole (language)</i> :	a used for peoples, languages, cooking etc. But here it is with reference to language - a mixture of European and native languages, language that originates seemingly as a “pidgin” a mixture of two or more languages, shares grammatical similarity with each other (the two or three languages that get mixed together).
<i>preponderance</i> :	superiority in some way - weight, numbers or power.
<i>anomaly</i> :	something that deviates from what is standard, normal.
<i>strategy</i> :	forming part of a long term plan for a specific purpose; also, a military plan to gain advantage over enemy in a war, method for achieving a defenced objective.
<i>political brinkmanship</i> :	pursuit of a dangerous policy beyond the limits of safety.
<i>bedraggled</i> :	dishevelled, clumsily presented.
<i>encapsulated</i> :	enclose in or as if in a capsule, express concisely or briefly.

### **Annotations and References**

V.S. Naipaul :	born in Trinidad in 1932. He came to England in 1950. Author of several novels and travel accounts: <i>An Area of Darkness</i> (1964) is a reflective and semi-autobiographical account of a year he spent in India. His book <i>India. A Wounded Civilization</i> (1977) is an analytical study of Indian political situation.
Salman Rushdie :	born in 1947 in Bombay, India. Moved to Pakistan, and U.K. where he has lived for most part of his adult life. Author of several novels and essays, he became famous with his novel <i>Midnight's Children</i> (1981) for which he won the Booker Prize. The novel <i>Satanic Verses</i> in 1989 became centre of a controversy in India and some other countries. Currently in the U.S.

Katherine Mayo :	(1867-1940) American journalist, historian and novelist; she wrote <i>Mother India</i> (1927) criticising Indian men for their treatment of women. She held the view that Indians/India was not ready for independence. The book was criticised all over India; in some places copies of the book were burnt. Several American and English readers also disagreed with Mayo's ideas.
Gunnar Myrdal :	Karl Gunnar Myrdal (1898-1987) a Swedish economist and politician; wrote the book <i>An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy</i> (1944) which influenced the U.S. Government's policy towards the negroes. Myrdal was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1974.
Cheddi Berret Jagan :	(1918-1997) was a Guyanese politician, born of migrant Indians; he was the Chief Minister of British Guyana from 1961-1964; later, as Guyana achieved independence he was elected President, the post he held from 1992 to 1997.
Fiji islands :	a group of islands near Australia.
West Indies :	a group of islands in the South of USA
Guyana :	a state in South America.

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## 22.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. What are the different meanings of the word 'diaspora' ?
2. Which period in history is being discussed in the essay ?
3. How are feelings for one's homeland affected by moving away from it ?
4. Does the Indian diaspora hold on to its original language or accepts modifications in it ?
5. Give the main features of the relationship between the Indian diaspora and the homeland in your own words.
6. Does memory play an important role in creating imaginary links with the homeland?
7. What does the author mean when he talks about the recreation of spaces from homeland in the adopted country ?

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## 22.9 LET US SUM UP

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We have seen that this essay belongs to the form of study called "diaspora criticism". This form of writing deals with the issues and problems relating to movement of large number of people from one country to another and forming migrated communities.

Amitav Ghosh has dealt mainly with modern Indian diaspora - the writers and others belonging to these groups. He analyses the close links that are found between the community of Indians living out of the country, and their homeland. He also defines some of the outstanding qualities of Indian diaspora. He emphasizes the diversity that is basic to Indian culture : the culture's acceptance of difference, deviation and variety. There is an openness to change and assimilation that does not allow for rigid adherence to anyone practice as the only correct one. The immigrants from lesser developed countries are different from the white, settler communities as they had no proprietorial authority and hence live more deeply in their memories.

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#### 22.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Explain how Ghosh distinguishes between Indian diaspora and diaspora of other countries
2. What significance does Ghosh find in the spatial location of the 'Char dhams' ?
3. How did the migrated population of India retain memories of the places they had left behind ? Does the process of remembering really recreate the past ?
4. What are the reasons that make the diaspora important to the people and government of India?

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#### 22.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## UNIT 23 : NAIPAUL'S *INDIA* : A *WOUNDED CIVILIZATION* - I

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### STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 A Biographical Sketch of VS Naipaul
- 23.2 An Overview of His Works
- 23.3 Summary of the Prescribed Work *India: A Wounded Civilization*
- 23.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.5 Unit End Questions

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### 23.0 OBJECTIVES

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The main objectives of this unit are to provide a brief biographical sketch of Sir VS Naipaul, an overview of his works, especially his two other books on India, *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. A summary of the prescribed text *India: A Wounded Civilization* is also provided in this Unit.

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### 23.1 A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF VS NAIPAUL

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Sir Vidiadhar Surajpershad Naipaul was born to Seepershad and Drobotie Naipaul (nee Capildeo) in 1932 in Chaguanas, the second of seven children. At the time of his birth, the population of Trinidad was a little over 40,000. Of these, about one third were Indians, employed as agricultural labourers, merchants, spirit vendors, clerks, shopkeepers, lawyers, teachers and government servants. When Naipaul was born, his father was the staff correspondent for *Trinidad Guardian*, a job he quit two years or so later. After that he picked up odd jobs here and there, nothing that enabled him and his family to live independently of the rich and influential Capildeos, his in-laws. As a result he dangled all his life “in a half-dependence and half-esteem between these two powerful families.” (*Finding the Centre*, 34), something that has been fictionally represented in his magnum opus *A House for Mr Biswas*.

In 1950 Naipaul won a Trinidad Government scholarship to study English at Oxford. He accepted the offer gladly not because he wanted to be an academic, but because he thought it gave him an opportunity to get away from Trinidad and establish himself as a fiction writer in England where he would find an appreciative readership, something that would have never been possible in Trinidad. However, in England, Naipaul realised that he had no understanding of life other than his own in Trinidad, and his life and reading in England did not provide him with material for a book. So, while working for the BBC as a freelance, he sat at the typewriter in his room, sifting his Port of Spain memories as well as borrowing from his grandfather’s accounts of his experiences on the ship from India to West

Indies.

Finally he decided to write on Bogart whose father had traveled together with Naipaul's maternal grandfather as an indentured labourer on the same ship. The story, later included in *Miguel Street*, Naipaul's first work of fiction (though not the first to be published). Other books followed, the first few based on the Port of Spain experiences, his own and that of his family. He continued to write and got married around this time to Patricia who took up a job so that he had the freedom to be a full time writer. Success was slow to come but when it did, he received one award after another, till finally in 2001 he was awarded the Nobel Prize. Curiously, in his Acceptance Speech he acknowledged the influence of India on his work, but not that of Trinidad, something that annoyed most Caribbean writers. An overview of his works that follows, shows how Naipaul loves controversy and takes special delight in saying things that are sure to stir up a storm.

After his wife Patricia died of cancer, he did not marry for a long time. When he did, it was to a much younger Pakistani journalist called Nadira who was a divorcee with grown up children. He travels a lot and many of his travel impressions and reportage have taken the shape of books. *A House for Mr Biswas* which was one of his earliest novels, still remains his magnum opus. *India: A Wounded Civilization*, the second in a trilogy on India, which you will read is also very interesting and significant. In the next section you will get an overview of his books which will help you to get a perspective on *India: A Wounded Civilization*.

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## 23.2 AN OVERVIEW OF NAIPAUL'S WORKS

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In a literary career spanning six decades, Naipaul has written twenty eight books. In a chronological order they are: *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *Miguel Street* (1959), *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), *The Middle Passage* (1962), *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* (1963), *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *A Flag on the Island* (1967), *The Mimic Men* (1967), *The Loss of El Dorado* (1969), *In a Free State* (1971), *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (1972), *Guerillas* (1975), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), *A Bend in the River* (1979), *The Return of Eva Peron and the Killings in Trinidad* (1980), *Among the Believers* (1981), *Finding the Centre* (1984), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), *A Turn in the South* (1989), *India: a Million Mutinies Now* (1990), *A Way in the World* (1994), *Beyond Belief* (1998), *Half a Life* (2001), *The Writer and the World Essays* (2002), *Literary Occasions Essays* (2003), *Magic Seeds* (2004) and *A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling* (2006).

Naipaul's first four novels should be considered against the backdrop of colonialism, something that will be studied in detail in the second Unit. The choice of the East Indian Trinidadian community into which he was born and was familiar with, is natural. *Miguel Street* with its seventeen episodic sketches of characters

and events loosely held together by a young boy narrator who leaves home for study abroad, was the first to be written, though *The Mystic Masseur* (which has recently been made into a film) was the first to be published. In *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Suffrage of Elvira* Naipaul represents his version of the political reality of Trinidad before and after the country became independent. Naipaul's colonial perspective gave his writing a pro-white bias.

Naipaul's three books on India trace the growth of his attitude towards India and Indians from sharp impressions and disappointments of the first visit as recorded in *An Area of Darkness*. The perception of India as a decadent civilization which needs to make a clean break with the past in order to progress, as considered in *India: A Wounded Civilization* will be critiqued in Unit 24. In *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, Naipaul's third book on India, the tone is mellow, there is a gradual resignation to all that he sees in India and he attempts to interpret current situations and issues to his largely western readership. The deliberate colonial slant of the title can be simplistically interpreted as an indication of the colonial bias in Naipaul's works. A contemporary reading would hint at the author's perception of the imperialistic attitude of a central government which is viewed as a neocolonial power, suppressing assertions of identity by numerous socioethnic/religious/political groups in this country which had been marginalized till recently. However, Naipaul's approach remains journalistic and reportage/interviews are used as methodology by him. As a result, his attempts to study the problems of separatism in India are remembered as vignettes that stand out for their good prose style and evocative passages rather than insightful observations or analyses.

"Prologue to an Autobiography" one of the two narratives in *Finding the Centre* and *The Enigma of Arrival* are possibly the most autobiographical of Naipaul's writings. The former substantiates facts from Naipaul's life (for the first time he talks about it openly) and his development as a writer. The latter, also autobiographical in nature, is based in rural England, in Wiltshire where Naipaul has a cottage to which he often retreats, especially when he is writing. The metaphor of the journey which one finds in many of Naipaul's works, is present here too.

In *Half A Life* for which Naipaul was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2001, he seems to have come to terms with his problematic Indian origin and is able to provide an Indian locale to a section of the novel. Another topic on which he opened up after four decades of creativity is sex. It can be said that *Half A Life* is a return to the story that began with *A House for Mr Biswas* and carried on with *Finding the Centre*, *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*. Willie Chandran, the protagonist of the novel, makes a comeback in *Magic Seeds* but not an impressive one.

This is just an overview of Naipaul's works and not relevant to the prescribed text, *India: A Wounded Civilization*.

### Part I

*India: A Wounded Civilization* is VS Naipaul's second non-fiction on India. Published in 1977, the book records the impressions of his second and third visits to this country. Even before one starts reading the book, one should keep in mind the fact that Naipaul's relationship with India is not an easy one. To quote from his Foreword to the book, "India is for me a difficult country. It isn't my home and cannot be my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it. I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far." (p. 8)

The book starts with a reference to a thousand-year-old Hindu temple in South India which had a pet crocodile. The British soldiers stationed there killed the crocodile and defiled the image. After thirty years of independence the temple was renovated and a new image of the deity was installed, something that Naipaul attempts with the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975, a far fetched analogy. He then describes the ruins of Vijayanagar, about two hundred miles from the temple, on the banks of the Tungabhadra river. According to him, Vijayanagar "sustained all the talent of the land" at the zenith of its grandeur but reached a dead end later. In the decadence of Vijayanagar, Naipaul sees a decadence of India in general, which is not just political or economic. In his words, "The larger crisis is or a wounded old civilization that has at last become aware of its inadequacies and is without the intellectual means to move ahead." (p.18) It is this crisis of India as "wounded old civilization" that Naipaul attempts to analyse in the book under study.

From history, Naipaul goes on to literature and talks about R.K.Narayan and his works. He can relate well to Narayan's works as he feels that they share a similar background. In his words, "Narayan's India with its colonial apparatus, was oddly like the Trinidad of my childhood. His oblique perception of that apparatus, an the rulers, matched my own; and in the Indian life of his novels I found echoes of the life of my own Indian community on the other side of the world." The novel of Narayan that he makes a detailed study of is *Mr Sampath*, first published in 1949. The analysis concludes with the observation: "The novel I had read... was also a fable, a classic exposition of the Hindu equilibrium, surviving the shock of an alien culture, an literary form, an alien language, and making harmless even those new concepts it appeared to welcome." ( p. 27 )

Naipaul travelled to some parts of Bihar, Kota and Bundi, researching for this book. He was appalled by the poverty that he saw in these places, more by the lack of vitality that incapacitated people so that they were completely bereft of any desire to improve conditions of their living. To quote, "Men had retreated to their last, impregnable defences: their knowledge of who they were, their caste,



their *karma*, their unshakeable place in the scheme of things; and this knowledge was like their knowledge of the seasons.” ( p.32 )

Monuments did not interest him though he was familiar with Indian history. They were everywhere, emblems of ambition and restlessness, “so many of them abandoned or destroyed, so many unfinished, the work of dynasties suddenly supplanted.” ( p. 32 ) He was unimpressed and irritated by the prince he met and one senses an implicit support for Indira Gandhi for abolishing the Privy Purses. Naipaul continues with his discussion of Narayan’s novels, taking up *The Vendor of Sweets* next. He finds it a confused book, “and its confusion holds much of the confusion today” ( p.42 ). The retreat of Jagan, the protagonist of the novel, is like a retreat from civilization and creativity and to Naipaul it is “...the death of a civilization, the final corruption of Hinduism.” ( p.43 ) something that links up with the theme of the book. In the last few pages of the first part Naipaul talks about the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi, something that he supports implicitly. He agrees that “The old equilibrium had gone, and at the moment all was chaos.” ( p.48 ) But, out of this chaos a new order of things was going to emerge and India was going to experience new ways of seeing and feeling.

## Part II

The second part of *India: a Wounded Civilization* starts with Naipaul talking at length about Bombay (Mumbai now), a city where skyscrapers and chawls co-exist. This was the city where he landed on his first visit to India in 1962 as chronicled in *an Area of Darkness*, the city where he was considered part of the crowd and did not like it at all as he wanted to be treated as someone special. He talks about the seamy side of Bombay, “the polluted Arabian sea slapping against the stone steps, the rats below the Gateway not furtive, mingling easily with the crowd, and at nightfall as playful as baby rabbits.” ( p.57-58 ) Reading Naipaul’s account of Bombay one is reminded of two recent mega books about the city Suketu Mehta’s non-fiction titled *Maximum City* and Vikram Chandra’s fiction titled *Sacred Games*.

Naipaul concerns himself with the poor in Bombay and the way they live. He talks about the chawls, “substandard accommodation for factory labour, one room per family, the urban equivalent of plantation barracks...the equivalent, in twentieth-century Bombay, of early industrial England’s back-to-back workers’ terraces.” (pp. 60-61 ) The parallel with plantation barracks immediately strikes a chord and he can relate to the sense of belonging among the people who live here. This brings him to the Shiv Sena, an assertion of the Maratha identity in a metro city that has transcended such sectarian appropriations. In this book, Naipaul is critical of this organization, often termed ‘fascist’, led by “a failed cartoonist who is said to admire Hitler” though later he accepts it as “a reworking of the Hindu system”. In the book he shows a greater understanding of the Shiv Sena and talks to some

Sainiks at length. The most important thing that he discovers in the course of these talks is the extent and nature of Shiv Sena's control over the metro city. *India: A Wounded Civilization* was published a little more than three decades back. Today, one feels the Shiv Sena does not have such a strong hold on the city any more. The Maharashtrian Navnirman Sena, led by Bal Thackeray's nephew Raj, has stolen some of the thunder, though the nephew has very little of his uncle's mass appeal.

Naipaul visited a "squatters' settlement" in Bombay which had eight Shiv Sena committee rooms. The members of the committee whom Naipaul met, were all young but not strong or tough looking. Naipaul noticed, "They were all so small; their average height was about five feet. Generations of undernourishment had whittled away bodies and muscle..." ( p.66 ) and their leader "coarse-featured and dark" worked with Air India as a technician. The leader expected Naipaul to be shocked by the squalor of the slums, but he was not, at least he did not say anything to criticize what he saw around himself. On the other hand, there is an implicit support of the way the committees of the Shiv Sena functioned and maintained a state of order in the chawls.

The Shiv Sena, Naipaul felt, was a middle class assertion of identity. To quote, "For the Sena men, and the people they led, the world was new, they saw themselves at the beginning of things: unaccommodated men making a claim on their land for the first time, and out of chaos evolving their own philosophy of community and self-help" ( pp. 71-72 ). A little more than three decades later perceptions have changed. Bal Thackeray no longer has the clout he used to earlier, as has been discussed earlier.

Naipaul then talks about a journalist who spoke at length on Indian identity, or rather the lack of it, unwilling to put his thoughts on paper because while the press censorship lasted, possibly apprehensive where it might land him. For the journalist, Indian identity was not something developing and dynamic, but something fixed, "...related to a set of beliefs and rituals... a code, an entire civilization." ( p.71 ) Naipaul connects the loss of the past with the loss of civilization, "the loss of a fundamental idea of India, and the loss... of a motive for action." (ibid. ) What Naipaul failed to see or deliberately ignored is how colonization can obliterate one's sense of a national identity, something that takes time to rebuild after decolonization. It was this kind of identity that the Sena men were trying to instill in their own way, as Naipaul saw it. When Naipaul says that the past is dead for them, he interprets the word very narrowly, to mean the immediate past and not one's heritage.

The contrast between the old India and the new one is carried on in the last chapter of this section. He found the Bombay-Poona (Mumbai- Pune now) region one of the most industrialized in India. However, old India where Naipaul went,

was just a few hours away, land which was more yellow and brown than green, as well as rocky. The sight of the farmer and his wife digging their section of the trench made Naipaul think of old India though on second thought he conceded that much in the scene was new. The realization that India was a blend of the old and the new possibly came to him at this point of time though he was not ready to acknowledge it as yet.

The perception of the old and new co-existing in the same place is carried on in the description of life in the village where improved agriculture had brought in prosperity without disturbing traditions. The grandest house was that of the Patel, the village headman, in which the visitors were invited to look around. The Patel himself had a presence: with eyes that appeared to exercise a special kind of authority, “an authority that to him and the people around him was more real, and less phantasmal, than the authority of outsiders from the city.” ( p.84 ) The extent of power that the Patel wielded over the people in the village is described in detail and that gives a clear picture of the feudal set up where the landless labourers employed by the landlord were virtually his servants, compelled to be in bondage to him. Though Naipaul did not use the term *bandhua mazdoor*, this is what he describes. The similarity between this being indentured strikes the reader at once. Naipaul’s detailed description of the set up, substantiated by a newspaper report cited by him, locates the landlord or Patel at the centre of power. His words, “Backed up by the people like the sarpanch, minor politicians, minor officials, courted by administrators and the bigger politicians, men like the Patel now controlled; and nothing could be done without them. In the village they had become the law.” (p.27 )

In the course of his travels through parts of central and western India, Naipaul noticed “sodden little clusters of African-like huts” (p. 88 ) abodes of people fleeing from not only landlessness but tyranny that could not be shaken off for generations. He rightly deduced that some of them would have become outlaws. He connected this with the Naxalite movement, “a tragic attempt at a revolution” in Bengal and Kerala (now Andhra too). An Indian would immediately feel that this analogy does not hold water. The Naxalite or the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) movement was an ideological one, largely urban inspired, especially in Bengal. None of the leaders were dispossessed or landless peasants, they only worked with farmers. Naipaul said that according to Vijay Tendulkar, the Marathi playwright, the Naxalite movement as it developed in Bengal, became confused with the Kali cult. This analogy reveals Naipaul’s inability to comprehend socio-political movements in depth and he resorted to bizarre analogies to cover it up. It is also exoticizing, keeping in mind the target (read western) readership and the Indian context. However, when he said, “Naxalism was an intellectual tragedy, a tragedy of idealism, ignorance, and mimicry” (p.92 ) borrowing someone’s else’s idea of revolution because they had not been able to make a plan on their own. This

section concludes with a reference to the rising awareness of the masses who had risen against political leadership which had exploited them so far.

### Part III

The third and concluding part of *India; A Wounded Civilization* starts with a detailed reference to MK Gandhi before he came to be known as the Mahatma, in the context of his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Naipaul reads the description of the voyage by Gandhi as ‘an internal adventure of anxieties felt and food eaten’ (p.98). It was a business trip to South Africa two years later that was meant to be short but lasted twenty years; that saw him evolve as the Mahatma, “the great-souled, working through religion to political action as leader of the Indian community, and through political action back to religion.” (p.100) Naipaul rightly observes that in Gandhi’s autobiography as in the autobiographies of many Indians, the outer world matters only so far as it affects the inner.

From Gandhi, Naipaul moves on to Dr Sudhir Kakar, the well known psycho-therapist who has published many books since Naipaul met him in New Delhi, working on one. He agrees with Kakar’s view that the Indian ego is underdeveloped, something that the discriminating Indian reader would question. Naipaul’s observation, “It is less easy (as compared to Westners) for Indians to withdraw and analyze.” (p.103) shows his colonial mindset, something that Naipaul has not been able to get rid of. The same applies to Naipaul’s concept of “India’s intellectual second-ratedness” (p.104). Controversial observations like these which are common in Naipaul’s books on India (or for that matter anything else), have resulted in large scale criticism of his works.

Naipaul takes up *Samskara*, UR Ananthamurthy’s novel and the issues it involves. He outlines the plot and analyses it, an analysis that many Indians might not agree with, something that Naipaul anticipates. A reading of Ananthamurthy’s novel in English translation is sure to help the student in assessing Naipaul’s critical analysis of it. He concludes, “When people live instinctive lives, something like a collective amnesia steadily blurs the past.” (p.112) this lack of historicity, something that will be discussed in detail is what contributes to lack of perception among Indians in a major way, according to Naipaul.

VS Naipaul has never been the stereotypical western traveler to India and sightseeing has not been his priority. During his travels in India, he has interacted with many individuals. He talks about some of these interactive occasions, poking fun mainly at persons whom he found superficial or stupid or both. The reference to the young foreign academic is an instance. To quote, “he was shallow and brisk and common, enjoying his pickings, swinging from branch to low branch in the grove of Academe.” (p.117) Similarly, doing something that might be considered politically correct like romanticizing poverty, is criticized. “Intermediate technology

should mean a leap ahead, a leap beyond accepted solutions, new ways of perceiving coincident needs and resources.” ( p. 121 ) Naipaul feels that in India it has regressed to sentimentalities that have no significance in modern society like improving the bullock cart impracticalities like a plastic spraying machine with a heavy motor “which would have crippled the peasant called upon to carry it or any length of time” ( p.122 ) Naipaul concludes, “Those tools were designed in an institute where there appeared to have been no idea of the anguish of the Indian countryside, the landless or bonded labourers, the child labourers... the petty chopped up fields, the nullity of the tasks.” ( p.124 ) Naipaul tries to show that the two ideas of the beauty of a simple life and the beauty of the poor are separate and assert two opposed civilizations which cannot be reconciled.

Many of the traditions in India died with the coming of the British for lack of patronage and other reasons. Some of them like painting and architecture have not been restored, according to Naipaul, who feels that the traditions of classical dance has been revived. One agrees with the latter and not the former. It is not wholly true that modernity or what is considered to be modernity, has overwhelmed the tradition of painting. Naipaul’s appreciation of art is limited to miniatures, he never talks about the Bengal School or Baroda School, which are two of the recent movements in painting in India. As for architecture is concerned, Naipaul says that it has become a modern course of study, “another imported skill, part of someone else’s tradition.” ( p.127 ) Is there an option, one wonders. There is a global standardization of architecture and India cannot stay out of it.

To match technology to the needs of a developing country, one needs the best skills and clarity of vision. “Old India, with all its encouragements to the instinctive non-intellectual life, limits vision.” ( p.128 ) This lack of vision is linked with the oldness of India and suggests a kind of decadence, according to Naipaul. He goes on to say that India attempts to understand its past with the help of foreign academic disciplines which fail as the yardsticks and criteria are different in the two countries. Towards the end of Chapter 6, Naipaul refers to the Emergency, but he is not critical of it. He justifies it in a way when he says, “ The Emergency – coming so soon after Independence – dramatizes India’s creative incapacity, its intellectual depletion, its defencelessness, the inadequacy of every Indian’s idea of India.” ( p.134 )

Predictably Naipaul does not react as sharply to the Emergency as some other writers like Salman Rushdie did. His support to Mrs Indira Gandhi can be seen in a statement like this, “The very fairness of the Emergency answered the public mood, assuaged old frustrations.” ( p.141 ) He does not think much of Morarji Desai and says, “ And the Gandhianism of a man like Mr Desai was as exhibitionist and shallow as the Gandhianism of the men he opposed; it offered nothing.” (p.141) One by one, Naipaul attempts to expose leaders who opposed Indira Gandhi – Jaya Prakash Narayan (“...part of the sterility he is protesting against”), a blind

old Congressman who contested elections from Rajasthan and lost (“Blind to his own political nullity”), among others. *India: A Wounded Civilization* concludes with a critique of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave, “Gandhi’s successor... more a mascot than a mahatma.” (p.159). Naipaul is very dismissive of him, saying that he offered Gandhianism as a kind of magic and himself as a magician thus presenting him as a comical figure. The book ends with Naipaul reiterating the view that India should break with the past and get out of the intellectual vacuum it had got into, for a better future.

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#### 23.4 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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- 1 How does VS Naipaul view the role of Shiv Sena in Indian politics?
- 2 How does Naipaul connect the loss of the past with the loss of civilization in the Indian context?
- 3 What does Naipaul think of the Naxalite movement? Do you agree with him? Give a reasoned answer.

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#### 23.5 LET US SUM UP

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Naipaul talks at length about Bombay and the life there in chawls.

He looks at Shiv Sena as a middle class assertion of identity.

He contrasts between the old India and the new one on various levels.

He attempts to analyse the Naxalite movement.

Naipaul discusses UR Ananthamurthy’s novel *Samskara*, in an attempt to connect it with the decadence in India.

Naipaul talks at length about Gandhi and concludes that neither nor his successors can lead India into the future.

He strongly feels that for new technology to be successful in India, a fittingly modern mindset is needed.

He justifies the Emergency declared by Mrs Indira Gandhi, his favourite world leader as a tool to strip India of its decadence and corruption.

In this unit you have become acquainted with VS Naipaul's background, Indian origin and his three well-known books about India. You have also learnt that Naipaul labels India "*a wounded civilization*" because he feels that it his society held in the grip of a decadent tradition.

Naipaul begins by referring to temples, monuments, ruins and history. Then moves on to books. He looks at R.K. Narayan's works which he felt are about surviving the shock of an encounter with western culture. Another writer he considers is Vijay Tendulkar and his treatment of violence. Naipaul also refers to Gandhi's autobiography and U.R. Ananthamurthy's novel.

A third area he covers is political movements, particularly the rise of the Shiv Sena

and the Naxalite movement. The Emergency of 1975 forms a background to the book: history, writers, politics, and then he moves on to people and places. Here he chooses to describe feudalistic constructs of society which exploit the poor. Naipaul also devotes some time to painting and architecture.

The work is divided into three parts. Part-I is history and culture, with reference to R.K. Narayan's view of life as depicted in his novels. Part-II about urban India, political movements, rise of Shiv Sena, city slums and Vijay Tendulkar. Part-III opens with a reference to Gandhi's autobiography but shifts to an advocacy of increased use of technology and justification of the Emergency bringing his book full circle back to the beginning.

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### **23.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS**

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- 1 Write a note on VS Naipaul's view on Mahatma Gandhi.
- 2 How and why does Naipaul justify the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi? Do you agree with him? Give a reasoned answer, substantiating from the text.
3. What are Naipaul's views about R.K. Narayan's novels ?
4. What in Naipaul's view, has been the impact of the colonial power on Indian culture ?
5. Comment upon the title, *India : A Wounded Civilization*.

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## UNIT 24 : NAIPAUL'S *INDIA : A WOUNDED CIVILIZATION* (A CRITIQUE) - II

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### STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Colonial Migration
- 24.2 Introduction to Travel Writing
- 24.3 *India: A Wounded Civilization* as Travel Writing
- 24.4 *India: A Wounded Civilization* as Political Commentary
- 24.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 24.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.7 Unit End Questions
- 24.8 Suggested Readings

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### 24.0 OBJECTIVES

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The main objectives of this Unit are, firstly to look at colonial migration to set the right background and secondly to critique *India: A Wounded Civilization* as travel writing, after looking at travel literature as a newly evolved genre. The Unit also looks at the book as political commentary and Naipaul as an interpreter to the west.

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### 24.1 COLONIAL MIGRATION

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A reading of the medieval history of India shows that migration to other countries, especially to countries of Africa from the western coast mainly for trade reasons and to country of south east Asia for a variety of reasons including socio-economic ones, was common. This is different from late nineteenth and early twentieth century migration on a large scale which is clearly an offshoot of colonialism, something that provides a background to a study of Sir VS Naipaul and his works.

As Europe extended its imperialist tentacles over countries of Asia and Africa, it also embarked upon industrial and commercial ventures in some of the colonial outposts, the main ones being sugar, coffee and tea plantations. In most cases the colonial governments worked in close collaboration with planters (all white) and did not think it economically or politically correct to recruit local/indigenous people. India and China became the main alternative sources of cheap labour.

Seasonal employment and socio-economic imbalance afflicted the peasants in these two countries, both off-shoots of European colonialism. As a result the peasants, especially in the interiors, were in dire straits, looking for alternative



employment to make both ends meet as villages were afflicted by drought or famine (often a man made one as the British sent out large supplies of foodgrain to their own soldiers, especially during World War I). Predictably, they fell for labour recruiters who made large promises and what seemed to these poor peasants, a very lucrative and tempting offer which would bail them out of a severe financial crisis, or so they thought.

This was the beginning of the indenture system, a form of colonial migration that was introduced in the nineteenth century, to be discontinued by a law in 1917. A person migrated to a plantation to be employed for a period of five years for a specified wage, a term that could be renewed. At the end of the indenture, the person could settle down in the colony where he was given a small plot of land or go back to India, for which he was given subsidized air passage. The terms and conditions were put down in the agreement governed by an Immigration Ordinance, enacted in the country of destination. Since the emigrants were mostly uneducated, they referred to the 'agreement' as 'girmit' and to themselves as 'girmityas'. However, most of the emigrants did not return to the country of origin, after they completed their term of indenture. Those who made an attempt, went back as they could not relate to the country of origin any more and whatever meager assets they had, had been grabbed by relations and neighbours.

Initially, almost all emigrants were male, later a quota of 40 per cent females for every shipload was imposed by the colonial government. Most indentured emigrants went as individuals and not with friends or family. On the long and tortuous voyages, they befriended each other and referred to each other as *jahazi bhai*, a fraternal bond that was established in spite of differences of caste, creed or religion. The *jahazis* often got themselves assigned to the same plantation and barracks. These new parameters of kinship became important in their lives and gave them a sense of solidarity in an alien land.

Life in the colonies was hard. The conditions of indenture favoured the colonizer and the indentured labourers were little better than slaves. They had no contact with the outside world and led isolated lives in the barracks. As a result memories of India, hazy by now were glorified and India was visualized as a place where everything was in order, a *Ramrajya* from where they had been banished beyond the *kala pani*. This had direct reference to *Ramcharitmanas* that most of them carried to the country of adoption and looked up to as not just a holy book but a friend, philosopher and guide. Since it served as a role model, many of the second generation immigrants who had never seen India, imagined that there would be *Ramrajya* in India. Little wonder that a close contact with the harsh physicalities of India shocked them. Naipaul's visits to India and the books that he wrote about this country based on his visits, contain passages with sharp reactions.

The diasporan writer either romanticizes his or her mother country while writing

about it, or is overly critical, mostly unable to find a via media. His or her impressions might be classified as travel writing but his travel impressions are seldom represented in a balanced manner. This applies to Naipaul as well and, in his own words, he is at once “too close and yet too far”. A look at travel writing in general and colonial travel writing in particular, sets the tone for *India: A Wounded Civilization* to be considered from a number of angles which would put it in perspective, vis a vis the young reader of today.

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## 24.2 INTRODUCTION TO TRAVEL WRITING

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### General

For a long time travel writing was not given the recognition or accreditation due to it in the literary tradition though widely read and enjoyed. Travellers like Marco Polo or Ibn Batuta, to name a few wrote about their travels. So did many English men of letters from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries who undertook the Grand Tour to other parts of Europe to add finishing touches to their education. Some of the better known among them were Sir Philip Sidney, Samuel Johnson, Horace Walpole, William Wordsworth and Lord Byron. They were read with a degree of interest but did not create a stir as explorers like Christopher Columbus or Vasco da Gama did when they discovered America or India respectively. Why was this so? There were a number of reasons behind this. Firstly, after the Industrial Revolution in England, there was an upward movement in the economy. Along with the increase in production came an increased urge to find new markets for one's goods, preferably markets that would buy raw materials at a low price. A stable and flourishing economy along with a strong army and navy aroused the desire to explore and conquer other countries which would then be ready made markets for the goods produced in the colonizer's own country.

### Colonial travel writings

It was around this time that many persons who travelled from countries of Europe to the colonies, felt the need to write about their travel experiences. The main motive behind such writings was not just to share one's experiences with the reader, but to assert one's superiority over the destination country and the people there. This can be termed the Prospero Syndrome – a tendency to look down on the people at the destination and denigrate them as savages so that one's superiority as a colonizer remained intact. To quote Marie Louise Pratt, “No one was better at the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene than the string of British explorers who spent the 1860s looking for the source of the Nile.” (p.201)

India featured prominently on the itinerary of the colonial traveler, mostly a white male. It gave him great pleasure to travel around the Great Indian empire and see how much the British had done for the poor natives who were incapable of looking after themselves or doing something substantial without the supervision of the

colonial masters. Rudyard Kipling's travel essays, written for the *The Civil and the Military Gazette* and *The Pioneer* later collected in *From Sea to Sea and Other Essays* volumes I and II. There were many women travellers too, those who came as missionaries, or single women who had come to India, hoping to find husbands for themselves. Their travel accounts, sometimes in the form of letters to those back home, are very interesting.

### **Postcolonial travel writing**

As the colonies gradually attained independence and sovereign status, equations changed between the colonizer and the colonized. This had an impact on the travel literature produced around this time. Writers like VS Naipaul, brought up and educated in the colonial tradition, continued writing in that tradition, even in the postcolonial time frame. One experience particularly associated with the postcolonial situation is displacement, displacement that can be related to a history of transportation, migration, expatriation, diaspora or exile which can currently be linked to political asylum. All these are travel related experiences and can account for a large body of travel writing.

However, the term postcolonial is somewhat deceptive. As an umbrella term it blurs distinction between colonies that became independent early or late in the twentieth century and between postcolonial cultures now located in the so-called third and those in the so-called first world. The term also problematizes relationships between dominant and subaltern groups within postcolonial societies, notably that between European settlers and indigenous people. Moreover, as David Spurr points out, the 'postcolonial' cannot be clearly demarcated from the 'colonial'. To quote him:

I shall refer to the postcolonial in two ways: as an historical situation marked by the dismantling of traditional institutions of colonial power, and as a search for alternatives to the discourses of the colonial era...in neither the historical nor the cultural sense does the postcolonial make a clean break with the colonial. The relations of colonizer to colonized have neither remained the same nor have they disappeared. ( pp 6-7 )

All this makes it very difficult to define postcolonial travel writing to the extent that some scholars have expressed the opinion that there is no such thing. In this sense it might be argued, travel writing is European and has been involved in one way or another with the history of colonialism. This is a statement that an Indian scholar/critic, familiar with writings in Indian languages (excluding English ) would not agree with. I can think of a series of travel books in Bangla titled *Rammani Bikkhe* ., each volume taking up travel within a region or state in India. These were published in the '60s and '70s and cannot be termed 'European' and do not refer to the colonial history except where it has an impact on local culture/tradition

as perceived by the traveler. Keeping this in mind, it would be more balanced to say that there is a significant difference between European and non-European traditions of travel and textualizing travel experiences. As for travel writing in English by writers from former colonies, a great many were published by UK based publishers and it was not clear who the target readers were – those in the writer’s own country or those in the mother country. Since we are studying VS Naipaul, one can look at *The Middle Passage*, travel book on Trinidad commissioned by the then Prime Minister of the country. However, a reading of the text makes it clear that Naipaul is writing with the British and not the Trinidadian reader in mind, often substantiating his observations with accounts of British travelers in West Indies. Keeping this in mind, we approach VS Naipaul as a travel writer with special reference to *India: A Wounded Civilization*, in an attempt to find out whom he writes for and whether or not he can be termed postcolonial.

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### 24.3 INDIA: A WOUNDED CIVILIZATION AS A TRAVEL TEXT

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It would be clear to you by now that a travel writer’s impression of a destination or destinations are subjective, i.e. coloured by his or her preferences, prejudices, politics, in short his entire perspective on life. This in turn, impacts his or her travel writing. VS Naipaul’s problematic relationship with India, in turn problematizes his travel impressions on this country. At the outset he warns the reader that he cannot travel like any other tourist in the country of his origin, sightseeing is not his priority. As he himself puts it, he is at once too close and yet too far. This paradoxicality is at the base of all his impressions about India and any attempt to critique *India: A Wounded Civilization* as a travel text on India must take note of it.

In an earlier section of this Unit, I have talked about the ‘girmity’ people who travelled across the seas to work as indentured labour in plantations in far flung colonies. They always carried their copies of the *Ramcharitmanas* and in some cases the *Geeta* as well, to safeguard themselves in an alien land, across the *kala pani*. Since they could not for the most part go back to India, they romanticized their memories of India. It was a country with *Ramrajya*, all that good governance stands for, a racial memory that they passed down to their children. A close encounter with the harsh physicality of India was bound to shatter this romantic view and evoke sharp impressions about this country. In 1971 Naipaul came to India on a visit during the mid-term election called by Mrs Indira Gandhi and wrote a long article titled “The elections in Ajmer” which has been included in *The Overcrowded Barracoon and Other Articles*. He came back in August 1975 and stayed on till October 1976, travelling to different parts of India in the course of his visit.

The first thing one notices is the absence of anxiety which had made his hysteric during his first visit in 1962. Anxiety is something associated with colonial travelers,

especially as they traveled through the colonies which were considered backward. Absence of it can be read as symptomatic of a shift from the earlier colonial stance taken in writing *An Area of Darkness*. For example, his impressions of Bombay (now Mumbai) are more analytical, less frenzied as compared to the earlier book. To quote :

The Indian-Victorian-Gothic city with its inherited British public buildings and institutions the Gymkhana with its wide veranda and spacious cricket ground, the London-style leather-chaired Ripon Club for elderly Parsi gentlemen. ( p.59 )

However, like a typical western traveler, Naipaul can appreciate an Indian city mainly because of its “Indian-Victorian-Gothic” outlook and buildings like the Gymkhana, all of which speak of a colonial past, rather than a heritage that is intrinsically Indian.

His response to the beggars of Mumbai is a curious blend of reactions that might be traced to a western traveler and his own brahmanical upbringing. Like a western traveler he can say, “The poor are needed as hands, as labour; but the city was not built to accommodate them.” ( p.58 ) Almost in the same breath he spoke of begging as “precious to Hindus as religious theatre, a demonstration of the working of *karma* , a reminder of one’s duty to oneself and one’s future lives.” ( p.58 ) Paradoxicality like irony is an integral part of Naipaul’s writing.

It is possible that Naipaul’s inability to connect with his Indian antecedents and relate to his Indian origin is responsible for a total rejection of India’s pastness and historicity. He had read about the past splendour of Vijayanagar but the ruins did not impress him. In these ruins, he felt, Hinduism “had already reached a dead end, and in some ways had decayed, as popular Hinduism so easily decays, into barbarism.” (p.16 ) Observations like this, meant for the western reader, distances Naipaul from India.

Yet his sensitivity to his environs produced some fine descriptive passages of the places visited. The description of a ‘model’ village in the Kota-Bundi region of Rajasthan, can be cited as an example:

The street was unpaved, and the villagers, welcoming us had quickly spread cotton rugs on the ground that had been softened by the morning’s rain, half-hardened by the afternoon’s heat, and then trampled and manured by the village cattle returning at dusk. The women had withdrawn- so many of them, below their red or orange Rajasthani veils.

Only girls, children, but already with children of their own. ( pp.29-30 )

Evocative passages like this reveal the artist in Naipaul, a persona that tends to get lost in the multiplicity of authorial voices.

In some ways *India: A Wounded Civilization* is a book that reflects Naipaul’s

attempts to understand India, more than *An Area of Darkness*. The change of perspective in the title and a reading of the text confirms it. Naipaul's second book on India assembles a postcolonial traveller's impressions of this country, arising from his visits to India and travels within it. Naipaul was not bound by an itinerary because he was not the stereotypical tourist. Destinations were important, not because the natural or man made attractions they offered, but because of the people who lived there and the socio-political-economic movements that he saw in the subcontinent. He made attempts to interpret/analyse some of these movements in an attempt to assess them. This will be taken up in the next section.

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#### 24.4 INDIA: A WOUNDED CIVILIZATION AS POLITICAL COMMENTARY

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Naipaul's first book on India, *An Area of Darkness* had been conspicuously silent on current events and the political scene in India. For example, Naipaul talks fondly of the good time he had in Kashmir, staying in Mr Butt's houseboat or the Liward Hotel, but he never makes references to the Kashmir problem which had reared its ugly head at that point of time. Of all places visited in India, Naipaul enjoyed his stay at Liward Hotel in Srinagar the most and describes it in great detail and with great fondness. This was possibly because there were no crowds and he received a preferential treatment, something he missed in Bombay and Delhi. Moreover the weather was pleasant and Naipaul said, "Kashmir was coolness and colour: the yellow mustard fields, the mountains, snow-capped, the milky blue sky in which we discovered the drama of clouds." (*An Area of Darkness*, 101 )

The romantic/ descriptive tone adopted by Naipaul in his description of Kashmir shows a definite orientalist bias. His lack of interest in politics made his attitude towards the Kashmir problem very superficial. To quote him, "...without newspapers and the radio, it was possible to be in Kashmir for weeks without realizing that there was a Kashmir problem." (*AD*, 139 ) Kashmir was an idyllic place to him and the presence of the UN vehicles that watched over the ceasefire line "seemed as anachronistic as the clock in *Julius Caesar*" (*AD*. 143 ) This was one of the few places in India where the physical India corresponded to the India of Naipaul's dreams and provided a resting place for his imagination by sustaining his dreams. This is where he could identify with India and Indians, looking down condescendingly at foreigners.

While Naipaul had been conspicuously silent on current events like the Third General Elections in his first book, he attempts to analyse the current political set up in India and profile some politicians. He was rather impressed by Mrs Indira Gandhi and heaped praise on her in an essay in *The Overcrowded Barracoon* referring to her as that formidable lady in New Delhi who had done a "de Gaulle on the Congress and had abolished the old conservative politics that prevailed in

the Congress.

He admitted that there were excesses during the Emergency. To quote, “The opposition spokesmen in exile speak of the loss of democracy and freedom,; and their complaints are just.” ( 172 ) But he never blamed her, just found it unfortunate that her name happened to be associated with it. He exonerated her in a way when he said, “With or without Mrs Gandhi, independent India – with institutions of government opposed to its social organization, with problems of poverty . . . would have arrived at a state of emergency.” ( 168 ) Mrs Indira Gandhi remained his favourite Indian politician and the sadness at her assassination in 1984 mingled with the sadness experienced by him at his youngest and favourite sister Sati’s death, as expressed in *The Enigma of Arrival*. Naipaul’s attitude to Mrs Indira Gandhi and his views on the Emergency were a direct contrast to the views of other writers from the Indian diaspora. Salman Rushdie talked about the Widown an her Son in *Midnight’s Children*, an oblique reference to Mrs Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi. As for the Emergency, for Rushdie, it heralded, “the beginning of a continuous midnight” which would not end for two long years.”

Naipaul’s observations on Mahatma Gandhi were not fair, one feels. His statement, “For a reason which he never makes clear he was virtually uneducated, had never even read a newspaper . . . he passionately wanted to go to England.” ( p97 ) Calling a person virtually uneducated because he had never read a newspaper is unjustified especially when he came from a small place like Porbandar. Gandhi’s first passage to England, “an internal adventure of anxieties felt and food eaten, with not a word of anything seen or heard that did not directly affect the physical or mental well-being of the writer.” (98 ) can be read almost as a parallel to Naipaul’s first journey away from home, to England. However, Naipaul believed that Gandhi lacked objectivity and was personal. “His experiences and discoveries and vows answered his own need as a Hindu, the need constantly to define and fortify the self in the midst of hostility; they were not of universal application.” (100 ) Except for Mrs Indira Gandhi, he did not think much of any Indian politician. Predictably, as a political commentator, his perceptions are limited an not acceptable to Indians.

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#### 24.5 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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- 1 How did the conditions of the indentured labour compare with slaves ?
- 2 Men and women were employed in equal numbers. True or false ?
- 3 What can be termed as the Prospero syndrome ?
- 4 What were the main reasons for travelling ?
- 5 Can you distinguish between colonial and postcolonial travel writing ?
- 6 Why is Naipaul unhappy with India ? Pick out one option out of the following and

think why you consider it the best :

- (a) India is not changing, it is not dynamic.
- (b) Because there is an Emergency.
- (c) He is not welcome in India.

7 Why were the colonisers in search of new markets ?

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## 24.6 LET US SUM UP

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There was a large scale migration to colonial outposts in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This was due to a number of socio-economic reasons.

The emigrants were known as 'girmityas' and led hard lives.

VS Naipaul's grandparents were 'girmityas'.

There was a lot of travel in the colonial era.

Postcolonial travel is related to migration, expatriation, diaspora or exile.

This difference is more or less temporal.

***India: A Wounded Civilization*** chronicles Naipaul's problematic relationship with India. He is at once too close and yet too far.

The book reflects Naipaul's attempts to understand India.

In ***India: A Wounded Civilization***, Naipaul attempts to analyse the political set up in India.

He supports the Emergency declared by Mrs. Indira Gandhi unlike most other diasporian writers.

He assesses Mahatma Gandhi and other Indian politicians.

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## 24.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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1. Write a note on colonial migration.
2. How does colonial travel differ from postcolonial travel? Discuss *India : A Wounded Civilization* as a travelogue.
3. Write a note on VS Naipaul as a colonial/postcolonial traveler to India. Substantiate your answer with illustrations from the text.
4. How would you appraise VS Naipaul as a political commentator on India ? Discuss.



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## 24.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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