

**INDIAN ENGLISH
LITERATURE
(DEG23)
(M.A. ENGLISH)**



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Lesson - 1

INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY - PRE-INDEPENDENCE ERA

STRUCTURE

- 3.1.1 Objectives
- 3.1.2 Introduction
- 3.1.3 Indian English Literature - (*Pre Independence Era*)
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 - (i) "Our Casuarina Tree" -
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3.11 Objectives :

1. To present to the student a brief historical survey of early Indian English Literature.
2. To acquaint the student with the basic features of early Indian poetry in English.
3. To acquaint the student with Toru Dutt's contribution to Indian poetry in English.
4. To present the autobiographical element in Toru Dutt's poems "Our Casuarina Tree" and "Sita".

3.1.2 Introduction :

Indo-Anglian literature or Indian English literature as it has now come to be known, has since come a long way from being viewed patronizingly by the British rulers of colonies in India as the anglicization of the native scholar to making occasional forays into the English literary scene, to being acknowledged as a legitimate, serious and popular genre of modern English literature. What began as exotic writings on British colonial India by English authors, blossomed in the course of time into a full-fledged literature produced by native and expatriate Indians. "Indian writers have contributed a peculiar quality, a distinctive touch which those who have not breathed the air of this land and lived in the midst of its people, can hardly aspire to appreciate." It is no exaggeration to claim that Indian English literature has enriched world literature with the writings of celebrated personalities like Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo, Manmohan Ghose, Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Amrita Pritam, Anita Desai, Harindranath Chattopadayaaya, Nirad. C. Chaudhari, Kamala Das, Keki, N. Daruwalla, Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Humayun Kabir, Arun Joshi, Sashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amitarr Ghosh, Shashi Deshpande, Girish Karnad, Asif Currimbhoy, Karanth, Dubey, Badal Sircar, Tendulkar, Bharati Mukherjee, V.S. Naipaul, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth and

Jhumpa Lahiri to mention only a few. If the native Indian writer deliberates over issues that catalyse his society then the expatriate Indian writer writes about cross cultural issues, his personal conflict to come to terms with his 'Indianness', the 'quest' for his roots and sometimes the 'release' of homecoming. Thus Indian English literature is conspicuous in relation to English and American literature as it is 'eclectic' and thematically 'universal'. The early exponents of Indian English literature were social and spiritual reformers. Some of them were artistically and aesthetically inclined. The early moderns were revolutionaries, whereas the present Indian writers in English have become liberal cosmopolitans in outlook trying their hand at a wide range and variety of themes. Indian English literature is thus poised for new triumph in new ventures in form and idea, emerging as a rich tapestry of Indian as well as world cultures.

3.1.3 Indian English Literature - Pre-Independence Era :

Several terms Indo-Anglian Literature, Indian Writing in English, Indo-English Literature and Indian English Literature have been used to denote original creative writings in English by Indians. However the term Indo-Anglian Literature is more apt as it implies the historical origin of such literature "as a product of fruitful encounter between Britain and India". Thus Indo-Anglian Literature may be defined as a literature originally written by Indians with the ability to express themselves in English.

The term Indo-Anglian was first used by J.H.Cousins in 1883 to refer to the publication "Specimen Compositions from Native students", a collection of essays written by Indian students in English and published in Calcutta. However, it was Professor K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, who gave the term 'currency' and 'authenticity' by giving the title 'Indo-Anglian Literature' to his first book on the subject.

Indo-Anglian Literature excludes the works of English authors on Indian themes, like Edwin Arnold, Rudyard Kipling, EM.Forster and M.M.Kaye. It further excludes translations from the several Indian languages into English as they are not primarily written in English. V.K.Gokak observes that Indo-Anglian writing is 'direct and spontaneous' and the Indo-Anglian writer uses English for 'self expression.'

English writings by Indians attracted public attention during the first quarter of the 19th century. However, it finds its roots in the Renaissance among the Bengali elite during the last quarter of the 18th century. This 'awakening' began with the introduction of English education by the British in India. Private schools imparting English education were established in Cuddalore (1717), Bombay (1718) and Calcutta (1720). India's first newspaper "Hicky's Bengal Gazette" began publishing in 1780. The Calcutta Madrasa was established by Warren Hastings in 1784. Sir William Jones, an eminent and enlightened Englishman, organised the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, where the Indian classics were studied and discussed in depth by eminent Englishmen John Wilson, Sir Edwin Arnold, and Sir William Hunter, to mention only a few, whose writings about India generated great interest in England. Enchanted by the Indian classics and the Sanskrit language, Sir Jones published English translations of Hindu classics like 'Sakuntala' and 'Hitopadesa'. He also wrote several odes to Hindu deities and a verse tale based on a Mahabharata story entitled "Enchanted Fruit". Another, Englishman Jonathan Duncan founded the Sanskrit College at Benares. Two Englishmen David Hare and Sir Edward Hyde collaborated with Raja

Rammohan Roy, the dynamic “Father of Modern India” to establish the Hindu College in 1817 at Calcutta, which was the first Anglo - Bengali institution. He was the forerunner of a tremendous literary and religious awakening and reform in the country. The Serampore College was established 1818 by missionaries like William Carey, who greatly influenced the new intellectual movement in Bengal. The introduction of English education in India induced a ‘new awakening’ among the Indian elite prompting several English educated Indians belonging to the upper classes to express themselves in the English language. “To be Indian in thought and feeling and emotion and experience, yet also to court the graces and submit to the discipline of English for expression was a novel experiment in creative mutation”.

In 1792, Charles Grant, a distinguished and enlightened civil servant of the East India Company advocated establishment of English schools to educate the Indians. In 1835 Macaulay presented his ‘Minute’ on education to Lord William Bentinck, recommending English education ‘to the natives to make them good English scholars’. A decree to this effect was passed in 1835. In 1854 a standard system of English education came into existence and in 1854 the first four Indian universities were established.

The pioneers in Indo-Anglian Literature belong to this period which was ‘subdued’ and ‘unobtrusive’. “Such was the moment the phoenix hour that bred Indo-Anglian Literature; sometimes with self-consciousness but sometimes as naturally-unself-consciously-as leaves grow up on a tree”.

Early Indo - Anglian Prose :

The first publication in Indian writing in English was “The Account of the Jains (1808)”, a translation of the history of the Jains authored by Cavally Venkata Boraiah. However the first original work in English “A Defense of Hinduism” was by Raja Rammohan Roy and was published in 1817. He can be regarded as the first of the masters of Indo-Anglian prose. Other social reformers of the time such as Keshub Chandra Sen, Dwarka Nath Tagore and members of the Brahma Samaj effectively used ‘utilitarian English prose’ to express and communicate their ideas. They can be credited for laying the foundation for the development of Indo-Anglian prose.

Early Indo - Anglian Novel :

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee became the first writer of a novel in English, “Rajmohan’s Wife” (1864). S.K. Ghosh’s “1001 Nights”, S.B. Benarjee’s “Indian Detective stories”, Toru Dutt’s “Bianca” and Romesh Chandra Dutt’s English translations of Bengali works “The Slave Girl of Agra” and “The Lake of Palms” are some of the few works that comprise early Indo-Anglian prose fiction.

Early Indo - Anglian Drama :

The first Indian play in English “The Persecuted” was written in 1852. But it was Rabindranath Tagore with the English translations of his plays and Aurobindo Ghosh with his poetic plays who contributed greatly to early Indian Drama in English. Other early Indian dramatists were G.V. Desani, Bharathi Sarabhai, Harindranadh Chattopadhyaya, Pratap Sharma, Nissim Ezekiel and Santha Rama Rau.

3.1.4 Early Indian Poetry in English :

The history of Indo-Anglian poetry begins with the first of its pioneers, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. Though sometimes considered a Eurasian poet due to foreign parentage, he was born and brought up in India, taught in an Indian college and was inspired by Indian themes and sentiments. His first collected work "The Poems" was published in 1827, followed by "The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and other Poems" (1828). These two volumes of verse include narrative poems, ballads, lyrics and sonnets. They reveal the influence of the English romantics, particularly Byron and Scott. Like Toru Dutt, Derozio was a 'precocious poet' whose remarkable poetic talent and meteoric rise to fame was cut short by sickness and untimely death. Kashi Prasad Ghose followed Derozio and was the first Bengali poet to write poetry in English. He published "The Shair and other Poems" in 1830. Other writers of this period were Mohan Lal, Hasan Ali, P. Rajagopal and Raj Narain Dutt who wrote "Odyrn, An Arabian Tale." Another early Indo-Anglian poet was Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, a product of the Hindu College, Calcutta, which produced a galaxy of writers and thinkers of the time. He wrote two volumes of poetry "Visions of The Past" (1848) and "The Captive Ladies" (1849). His chief source of inspiration were the English romantic poets, especially Byron. He was the first to make a conscientious effort to 'Indianize' Indo-Anglian poetry, by referring to Hindu mythology, using local imagery and expressing Indian sentiment in his poetry. In 1851 Har Chunder Dutt, Toru's uncle, published a volume of verse "Fugitive Poems" and "Writings, Spiritual, Moral and Poetic." Soshee Chunder Dutt an uncle of Toru Dutt, also made an attempt to achieve 'Indianness' in his poetry, 'A Vision of Sumeru' and 'Other Poems' by frequent reference to Hindu mythology.

Girish Chunder, another of Toru's uncles, wrote a series of sonnets entitled 'Cherry Blossoms' imitating English poetry of the time. Omesh Chunder Dutt, yet another of Toru's uncles contributed 73 poems to the Dutt Family Album which was published in 1870.

B.M. Malabari's poems were published under the title "The Indian Muse in Indian Garb." His Indianness is visible in his poems of a patriotic nature. However it is in the poetry of Toru Dutt that the 'soul of India is truly revealed'. Though her "A Sheaf Gleaned In French Fields", a collection of English translations of French romantic poetry of the 17th century gained her international recognition, it was her volume of verse based on the puranic legends entitled "Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan" as Sir Edmund Gosse put it, was her 'chief legacy to posterity'. It is a significant landmark in the history of Indo-Anglian literature. Then there was Nobokissen Ghose who was better known as Ram Sharma whose collected poems is an exhaustive compilation of more than three hundred pages. His poems like "The Last Day", "The Bhagabati Gita" and the "Song of the Plough" are of epic proportion.

The turn of the century saw other great pioneers of Indo-Anglian poetry like Manmohan Ghosh, the brother of Aurobindo Ghosh. His 'Love Songs and Elegies' was published in 1898 and his 'Songs of Love and Death' was published posthumously after his death in 1928. George Sampson considered him 'the most remarkable of Indian poets who wrote in English' for the technical perfection and lyrical quality of his poems.

The dawn of the twentieth century also saw the emergence of the most prominent of the Indo-Anglian poets, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh (Sri Aurobindo) and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. Sarojini Naidu achieved undisputed success in the usage of

typical Indian imagery and the expression of the Indian personality. "Her technical skill is high, and as a word - artist and master of melodious verse she is among the most brilliant and accomplished of Indian poets." A large body of her poetry published under the titles 'The Golden Threshold', 'The Bird of Time' and 'The Broken Wing' is Indian in spirit, thought, emotion and imagery. While Toru Dutt narrated the 'puranic' legends of ancient India, Sarojini Naidu has memorialized her dreams and fancies which are all from India and of India. Her brother Harindranath Chattopadhyaya was noted for his lyrical gifts of a rare order. Some of his poems are gems of pure delight, full of the joy of life.

Rabindranath Tagore is hailed as the greatest of the Indo-Anglian poets. His 'Gitanjali' which is a transcreation of the Bengali original brought him international fame and won him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. He is acclaimed as one of the greatest lyric poets of the world. Edward Thompson remarks, "he perfected a kind of incantatory rhythmic prose and demonstrated the Indian sentiment, thought and imagery can be as well expressed in English as in any Indian language".

Aurobindo Ghosh the "sage of Pondicherry", better known as Sri Aurobindo, was a prolific poet who during his long poetic career wrote lyrics, narrative poems, a comic epic and a large body of philosophic poems. Prof. K. Srinivasa Iyenagar considers him as 'the most outstanding of the Indo-Anglians. His poems like 'Urvashi', 'Love and Death' and 'Savitri' are Hindu in setting, sentiment and expression. "But his greatest achievement is in the fact that his poetry carries an aroma of the spirituality of India and achieves a rare fusion of personal vision and the spiritual personality of India." "He alone among Indian poets, attained proficiency in the use of the blank verse." In 1909 Roby Datta published a volume of verse entitled "Echoes from East and West"

3.1.4 Early Indian Poetry in English :

Features :

Romanticism, Christianity and Western Science, libertarian and nationalistic ideas from the French Revolution were the all-incompassing influences on much of early Indo-Anglian poetry. It was a period of incubation and Henry Derozio, the first Indo-Anglian poet, was the moving spirit. Christianity, Romanticism, French Revolution, Byronism - all coalesced in the poetry of this Eurasian clerk, teacher and journalist of Calcutta. The essence of his poetic personality can be summed up in the words - melancholic, reflective, occasionally passionate. Romanticism, derivativeness and Indian themes were the features typical of the first quarter of the 19th C. Indo-Anglian Poetry.

In fact Indo-Anglian poetry is said to have been born under a Romantic star as it was abundant in verse romances and lyrics in the Romantic vein. Michael Madhusudhana Dutt, Shoshee Chander Dutt, Toru Dutt, Ramesh Dutt, the Ghose brothers, Tagore and Sarojini Naidu - in the works of these poets we have the zenith of Indian Romanticism in English Verse.

3.1.5 Toru Dutt -(1856-1877) Life and Works :-

Torulata Dutta popularly known as Toru Dutt was born on the 4th of March 1856 to Govin Chunder Dutt and Kshetramoni in Calcutta, as the youngest of three children, after Abju and Aru. Toru's father Govin Chunder Dutt an accomplished poet in his own right, belonged to the famous Dutt family which produced some of the stalwarts in Bengali literary and social life. A kindhearted man with compassion for others, he was free of prejudice and intolerance. He enjoyed the privilege

of being a favourite student of Professor David Lester Richardson, Principal of the Hindu College, Calcutta, which produced a galaxy of writers and thinkers of the time. Govin Chunder Dutt took to writing from an early age and published a small volume of verse which received appreciative reviews in *'Blackwood's Magazine'* and *'The Calcutta Review'* in 1948. Govin's poetry was later incorporated into the *Dutt Family Album* a collection of poems written by several members of the Dutt families.

After his studies, Govin Chunder joined Government service and rose to be Assistant Comptroller General of Accounts. But he incurred the displeasure of the British government for raising the issue of the Government's partisan attitude towards the Bengalis. This led to his transfer to Bombay and later to his voluntary resignation. Being well-to-do, Govin Chunder turned his attention to literary pursuits. He devotedly compiled the *Dutt Family Album*, a collection of 197 poems out of which 66 poems were written by him. The *Dutt Family Album*, is truly "A Memorial of a gifted family."

Toru's mother Kshetramoni came from a devout Hindu family. She was well versed in Bengali and the Hindu scriptures and myths and legends. It was due to her gentle influence in the home, her songs and her gift of story telling that Toru imbibed so deep a love for the ancient ballads of India.

In 1862 Govin Chunder and his family converted to Christianity. For a while, Kshetramoni continued in her Hindu faith and Govin seemed to have feared an estrangement from his wife. However his fears were shortlived, as Kshetramoni became an ardent Christian. Though she knew little English when she married Govin Chunder, she later became fluent in the language and translated a book entitled "The Blood of Jesus" into Bengali, which was published by the Tract and Book Society of Calcutta. Commenting on Kshetramoni's influence on her daughters, Bishop Clifford remarked "I learned to realise that if Toru inherited her rich intellectual gifts from her father's side of the family, she must have received the moral beauty and sweetness of her character largely from her mother."

The three children were tutored by Babu Sahib Chunder Banerjee, a pious elderly Christian and a great favourite of the children. An English teacher, Mrs. Sinaes taught them to play the piano and sing. The two sisters further developed these talents in Europe and excelled as pianists and singers possessing deep contralto voices. However their happy childhood was marred by the untimely death of their brother Abju in 1865.

In 1860 the Dutt family left for Europe. Govin Chunder was determined to give his children the advantages of foreign travel and education. The Dutt family landed at Marseilles and went on to Nice where they stayed until the spring of 1870. The two sisters attended a French school at Nice. Having set foot on French soil, at an early age of thirteen, Toru, 'a linguistic prodigy' learnt French with remarkable ease and speed Toru adored France, drank deep of French romantic literature, French life and culture, translated several French poems into English and wrote a novel in French. But their sojourn in France was brief, as Aru fell ill. Govin Chunder decided to take his family to England and they left for England in the spring of 1870. In London, they resided at Brompton and Toru and Aru began to work at their translation of French poetry into English. In 1871, the family moved to Cambridge where both the sisters attended the 'Higher Lectures for Women' and became intimate with Mary Martin, daughter of Rev. John Martin of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, who was so to be the recipient of most of Toru's letters. From Cambridge the Dutt family moved to St.

Leanord-on-Sea before returning to India. The Dutts returned to Calcutta in September 1873. Tragedy struck the family again. Aru succumbed to consumption and passed away on July 23, 1874, at the age of twenty. A gifted poetess Aru Dutt translated eight French poems for the 'Sheaf' of which "Morning Serenade" caught the attention of the noted English critic Sir Edmund Gosse moving him to 'Surprise almost rapture'. Commenting on her sister's untimely death Toru wrote : Of all sad words of tongue and pen The saddest are these - it might have been.

In 1875 Toru along with her father started learning Sanskrit. Her first publication "A Sheaf Gleaned In French Fields" was published in March 1876. Toru mastered Sanskrit within a space of ten months. Her acquaintance with the Indian Sanskrit classics the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, *Sakuntala*, the *Vishnu Purana* and the *Bhagwata Purana* gave her imagination free play and despite her failing health, she translated a few pieces from the original Sanskrit into English verse. By 1877 Toru's health had completely deteriorated. She passed away on the 30th of August 1877 and was buried at the C.M.S. Cemetery in Calcutta beside her brother and sister.

Toru's first appearance in print was in *The Bengal Magazine* which published two of her essays in 1874, one on the French poet Leconte de Lisle and the other on Henry Derozio, one of the pioneers of Indo Anglian poetry. In 1875 The Bengal Magazine published Toru Dutt's translations of the two speeches made by Victor Hugo and M.Thiers. However Toru Dutt's first major work was 'A Sheaf Gleaned In French Fields' published in 1876, a collection of French poems translated into English numbering 173, the works of seventy French poets of which eight were translated by Aru and the rest by Toru. Most of the poets represented in *The Sheaf* belong to the French Romantic School and to the nineteenth century, and express the perennial sentiments of separation and loneliness, dejection and agony and the mystery of death and immortality and love of freedom. The Sheaf includes poems by outstanding poets like Victor Hugo, Sainte Beuve, Lamartine, Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle, and many others like Le Comte F.de Gramont and Josephin Soulayr, T. Gautier, Barbier and Mme. Desbordes, Mme. Valmore de Parney, du Bellay, du Bartas, Scarron, Mime.Viot, courier, Morean, de Pierre Cornielle, Florian, de Vigny, Chenier, Musset, Beranger, Brizeux, Dupont, V.de Laparde, Mme. Ackermann and Emil Deschamps. Sir Edmund Gosse hailed the Sheaf as "an important landmark in the history of progress and culture" and as a "genuine Hindu product". E.J.Thompson compared Toru with ESSmily Bronte and Sappho and particularly praised her handling of the blank verse. The journal *The Friend of India* thought of Toru Dutt as a harbinger of the idea of women's liberty in India. However was after Toru's death that her father Govin Chunder Dutt found the manuscript of the 'Ancient Ballads' among her papers which was published in 1882 under the title "*Ancient Ballads of Hindustan*". The book contains nine ballads and legends. viz., 'Dhruva' and 'The Royal Ascetic and the Hind' adapted from the *Vishnu Purana*, Savitri, Lakshmana, Jogadhya Uma, Buttoo, Sindhu, Prahlad, Sita and seven miscellaneous non-mythological poems 'Our Casurina Tree' "Near Hastings" "France - 1870", " One The Fly - Leaf of Erckmann - Chatrian's Novel Entitled 'Madame Therese", "Lotus", "Baugmaree" and "The Tree of Life" are found in the collection. Toru Dutt's reputation as a pioneer in Indo-Anglian poetry rests mainly on it. They are the most personal of her poems her 'chief legacy to posterity'. Toru was moved by the beauty and sanctity of these age old legends. In a personal way these stories unlocked the nostalgic and wistful memories of childhood, stories which her mother an enchanting singer and gifted story teller narrated to them. Toru was the first Indian poet to present and interpret these stories to the English speaking world. With her unique power of poetic expression and mastery over the English and Sanskrit languages,

exceptional skills at translation, Toru conveyed to the west the intellectual and philosophical traditions of India.

Toru also wrote two novels, 'Bianca' and 'Le Journal de Mademoiselle d Arvers' the former an incomplete romance in English and the latter a novel in French. Both these works have simple plots which sustain the story element, poetic language and clearly drawn characters.

Toru Dutt wrote several letters to her English friend Mary Martin. She wrote 53 letters to Mary between December 1873 and July 1877. They were collected and published by Harihar Das in his book "The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt" (1921). These letters reveal her intimacy with Mary and also her 'sensitive feminine nature - that of a woman child, pure, sweet, modest and essentially, lovable with a real Indian's love for home and country'. They reveal her character, her eagerness to live a full life, her radiant personality full of mirth, laughter, fun and beauty and her mature and positive attitude towards life. Toru also wrote quite a few letters to the French authoress Clarisse Bader who in one of her letters described her as 'a refined and charming soul'- her letter revealed a frankness, sensibility and charming goodness and simplicity, which endeared her to me, and showed me the native qualities of the Hindu women developed and transformed by the Christian civilization of Europe." Her letters reveal a comprehensive view of her hopes and longings and daily doings. In her letters she spoke out and laid bare her soul; her deep affection for England; her passion for her garden house, its flowers and fruits and birds, her absorption in Sanskrit studies, and like the refrain of a tragic chorus, her courageous hope that she would triumph over illness and disease."

The only work that Toru Dutt saw published in her lifetime was "*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Field*". The review of the Englishman went,

There is evidence of rare ability, promise of great achievements, in this volume of poetry by a young Bengali lady. To expect translations made from one foreign language into another by one so young, as we understand Miss Toru Dutt to be, would be to expect a miracle. Yet there are pieces in the work before us, which though they must have presented considerable difficulties to the translator, are almost perfect Miss Dutt's metre often limps, her grammar is not always faultless, and her expressions are sometimes quaint or tame. But faults of this kind were inevitable; and it is in the highest degree creditable to her that they are not more frequent. If the translations were arranged in the order in which they were written they would probably show a rapid progressive improvement in all these respects."

In August 1876, "*The Examiner*" published a two column notice by Edmund Gosse on "*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*". "This remarkable volume seems expressly arranged to tantalize the sympathetic reviewer. . . . It is obvious, then, that to have translated pieces from the best French poets, such as might come under a pupil's notice in any ordinary school anthology into English prose, would have been a respectable feat for an Indian girl. What, then is our surprise, to find Miss Toru Dutt translating, in every case into the measure of the original, no less than 166 poems, some of them no less intricate in form than perplexing in matter! This amazing feat she has performed with a truly brilliant success."

Another interesting review came from E.J. Thompson which partly ran thus :

"Toru Dutt remains one of the most astonishing women that ever lived, a woman whose place is with Sappho and Emily Bronte, fiery and unconquerable of soul as they; and few statements,

one feels, can more triumphantly sustain fair examination than this. The remarkable verses in which she chronicles the dream that fore-ran death go to strengthen this same conviction of power and fire. These verse, intensely personal all, and by that intensity breaking from convention and fetters, show her feeling her way to freer rhythms, and even handling blank verse of which no English woman has given a satisfactory example in a way that premised ultimate mastery or atleast a very great degree of strength and adequacy. These poems are sufficient to place Toru Dutt in the small class of women who have written English verse that can stand. *The Sheaf* is remarkable after other fashion. Merely to have translated so much and so well from one alien tongue into another must be a feat hardly paralleled; and the book contains much work that is individual and beautiful.”

Thompson felt that the notes were in themselves an impressive evidence of the vast knowledge of French literature that Toru possessed. The French papers were all praise of the book. *The Courrier de L' Europe* contained a small notice by Chatelain, and the *Revue des Deux Mondes* published a good review by Andre Theuriet.

Sir Edmund Gosse, the renowned English critic, estimated the *Sheaf* as “a wonderful mixture of strength and weakness, of genius overriding great hurdles and of talent succumbing to inexperience. it is obvious that the Hindu poetess was chanting to herself a music that is discord in an English ear. On the whole the attainment of the book was ‘simply astounding.’”

Harihar Das contradicts Gosse’s assessment of the book, and is of the opinion that “Toru’s command of English is wonderful” and that “it is difficult to realise that the book is not the work of an English writer”. In this connection one is reminded of Mlle Clarisse Bader who remarked that “This Indian girl, so fond of our European civilization, instead of increasing the number of Indian poetesses of whom we have heard through the writings of M.de. Tassy, has taken her rank and place among the writers of England.”

Toru was competent in handling the apparatus of translation in the *Sheaf*, and showed that the translator is also the creator. Her translations are fairly close “It was Toru, the first of the major Indian writers, who proved that the translation is not an isolated phenomenon but an index of personality meaningful in its relatedness with greater heritage, cultural and literary. She gave a status to translation.”

Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan :

After the publication of “*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*” Toru expressed her desire to bring out another *Sheaf*, a *Sheaf* gleaned in Indian fields. However, it materialized only after her untimely demise. Her father Govind Chunder discovered the second *Sheaf* among her papers entitled “Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan”, ‘essentially native in genre and outlook.’ To Toru the ancient myths and legends were neither ‘exotic nor alien.’ An Indian woman writing in a foreign medium, she was “autochthonous” like her successor Sarojini Naidu. As a child she had heard the stories of the great Hindu epics and the puranas, the stories of mystery, miracle and local tradition narrated by her mother. Later studies in Sanskrit gave a keen poetic edge to her rendering of the stories and legends of India.

Ancient Ballads appeared in 1882 with an introduction by noted English critic Sir Edmund Gosse. The volume contains nine Ballads and Legends i.e., “Savitri”, “Lakshman”, “Jogadhya Uma”,

“Buttoo”, “Sindhu”, “Prahlaad”, “Sita”, the legend of “Druva” and “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind” and seven non-mythological poems “Our Casuarina Tree”, “Near Hastings”, “France - 1870”, “On the Fly-Leaf of Erckmann - Chatrian’s Novel Entitled ‘Madame Therese’”, “Lotus”, “Baugmaree” and “The Tree of Life”.

The common feature in all the ballads is the octosyllabic metre borrowed from the English ballad form. Toru also experimented with the blank verse. She also tried her hand at pentameter, in “Sita” and at a variation on the octosyllabic measure in “Sindhu” On the whole this remarkable poetical volume marked “the beginning of a new phase in the developement of Toru’s genius, namely, her desire to give expression to her intense love of her own land and its traditions.”

Ancient Ballads’ is considered the most popular of Toru’s works. Commenting about it Sir Edmund Gosse wrote “We believe that the original English poems which we present to the public for the first time today, will be ultimately found to constitute Toru’s chief legacy to posterity”. Harihar Das thought that it was “the best work in English” and adds “It shows how Toru’s intellect, while thoroughly assimilating the spirit of French and English literature, found eventually its truest expression in Sanskrit literature and this was the final phase in evolution of this sensitive intensely Indian poetess.” Another noted critic T.O.D. Dunn observed that “unlike her predecessors, Toru Dutt did not willfully anglicise her ideas. For the first time in literature of this kind, there is struck a genuinely Indian note . . . and through the medium of a perfect English expression, there is conveyed something of the sincerity of a mind proud of the intellectual traditions of its native land . . .”

Lotika Basu, feels that *Ancient Ballads* is a document which “for the first time reveals to the West the soul of India through the medium of English poetry.” Dr. Amarnath Jha a famous advocate of Indian creative writing in English wrote “She has a rare gift of story telling, of arousing interest and curiosity, of creating suspense and of drawing character. But perhaps in descriptive poetry, she is even superior.” Das Gupta praises the novel method of presentation and the depth of thought in the “*Ancient Ballads*”. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar remarked that by the time Toru wrote *Ancient Ballads* she was already “a good craftsman in verse. Her feeling for words was impeccable, and her eye and ear were alike trained for poetic description or dialogue. But these tales - some of them, at least - were more than mere poems of action or character - they trafficked with the supernatural”. Padmini Sen Gupta feels that Toru’s ballads “run much more smoothly and do not ‘limp’ as much as her French translations and are at the same time almost inspired.”

Ancient Ballads immediately reveals that Toru belonged to the Romantic tradition of poetry. B.N.Seal hails her as ‘the first neo-romantic Bengali writer. Toru’s treatment of the myths and legends has a ‘romantic suggestion’ and introduces ‘a kind of mediaevalism’ into Indo-Anglian verse, and the feel of Indian life expressively communicated in a foreign language. Apart from the nine ballads and legends, the ‘Ancient Ballads’ also contains seven miscellaneous poems which are autobiographical in tone. These poems were found among Toru’s papers after her death. The most popular among these poems is “Our Casuarina Tree”, the rest being “Near Hastings” and “France - 1870” two poems based on Toru’s experiences in France, “On the Fly-Leaf of Erckmann - Chatrian’s Novel Entitled ‘Madame Therese’” a paen of praise for the woman who saved the honour of France, two sonnets “Lotus” and “Baugmaree” excellent lyric effusions inspired by Toru’s aesthetic sensibility and “The Tree of Life” which is a record of a ‘rare mystic experience Toru had when she was bed-ridden and nursed by her father and suggests the poet’s premonition of her death and her yearning for immortality.

In its entirety, *Ancient Ballads* contains narratives charged with lyric effusions of joy and sorrow, anger and pathos, despair and hope - at once personal revealing her endearing patience, courage, serenity and the stateliness and poise of her spirit as she lived her brief life that was marked by frequent unfathomable tragedy. Yet, her greatness as a poet lay in her potentiality "to touch the chord of our racial and religious ethos by her inimitable rendering of those deathless stories from the Indian classics". Like Derozio her literary output was small yet significant. Both passed away in their prime. The former admired as "the marvellous boy who perished in his prime" and the latter hailed as "the extraordinary child of the green valley of the Ganga". One can only wonder at what these two extraordinary poets could have achieved in the realm of poetry had they lived a few years more.

3.1.6 Analysis of the Poems :

(i) OUR CASUARINA TREE

The Dutt's country house in Baumaree (Bagmari) near Belgachia on the outskirts of Calcutta, seems to be the backdrop for Toru's poems 'Baumaree', 'The Lotus', 'Sita', 'Our Casuarina Tree' and the *Ancient Ballads* in general. One of Toru's ardent admirers, Mrs. Elizabeth S. Cotton, in a letter to the noted critic Harihar Das expressed her desire to visit the garden house at Baumaree. "For years I have regarded Calcutta as a place sacred to the memory of the gifted Toru Dutt, and I have come to see if possible the home where she lived and left to a sorrowing world so few but precious fruits of her great genius. I would like to see the Garden-House where, as Mr. Edmund Gosse expressed it, she plunged into the mysterious depths of Sanskrit literature". Toru's frequent references to the garden in her letters to her English friend Mary Martin reveals her love and attachment to her garden which she called "a primeval Eden". An interesting description of the Dutt's Baumaree Garden House is found in Toru's uncle Romesh Chunder's writings : "It was an extensive garden covering many acres of land, and shaded by fruit - trees, and there was a rustic bridge over a canal, which was the delight of our boyhood In the midst of this forest of fruit - trees rose the comfortable and spacious one-storeyed bungalow - house - a perfect picture of repose." Toru's familiarity, deep bonding and attachment with the garden especially the trees is revealed in her sonnets 'Baumaree', 'The Lotus' and her much acclaimed poem 'Our Casuarina Tree'. Toru describes the scenic beauty of the garden the garden which is girt round with its 'sea of foliage' of varying shades, with its vivid splashes of different colours, full of the light green graceful tamarinds, the mango clumps of deep green colour, the palms standing erect like grey pillars, the seemuls leaning over the quiet pools, the bamboos stretching eastward.

Her love for the majestic trees in the garden is evident in the letters to her friend Mary Martin, where she mentions 'a Jhua tree where they had buried their pet cat, a tamarind fruit tree which was inhabited by monkeys, the glorious bloom of a seemul tree etc.

'Our Casuarina Tree' Toru's celebrated poem reveals her almost 'mystic affinity' with trees. On the surface, the poem appears as a poetic evocation of an old casuarina tree in the garden at Baumaree. The gnarled trunk of the giant tree is thickly entwined by a 'huge python' like creeper in full bloom with a profusion of crimson flowers. It is home for countless birds, the Kokilas with their sweet song, the swarming bees and their insistent drone and monkeys at play - a spectacle of delight, the first to greet the poetess every morning when she flung open her window at dawn. Sometimes the poetess would see in the early light a grey baboon sitting solitary like a statue

watching the sunrise. The hoary tree's shadow falls across the pool making the white water-lilies appear 'like snow enmassed.'

But the old casuarina tree is particularly 'dear' to the poetess as it brings to her mind childhood memories as it branches out into the past and recaptures past experiences evoking intense nostalgia. From her heart wells up an agonizing yearning for her childhood companions who are no more, driving the poetess to inconsolable tears.

Beneath it we have played, though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
'For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear !
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes !

There is a wistful query as the poetess' memory is further activated by 'echoes' from the past, a reference to Eliot's *The Wasteland* and Arnold's *Dover Beach* The Idea in the lines.

'that dirge - like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle beach?

Is juxtaposed with the present 'eerie speech' or 'lament' of the tree in response to the poet's sorrow. "A romantic weirdness is inseparable from the concept of the tree as a plaintive note emanates from it forever." The sweet melancholic lament of the sombre tree encompasses the exotic memories of the poet's past spread over distant lands like France and Italy yet always conscious of home and reminiscences of the tree so dearly loved in childhood.

To the poetess the aged casuarina tree becomes the symbol of immortality. like those in Wordsworth's "Borrowdale." An 'elegiac sensibility' pervades the last stanza of the poem. The tree bears in it 'the seeds of immortality'. It lives on, commemorating her 'loved ones' who are 'in blessed sleep for aye repose' and thus will it remain, a living monument, connecting the past, the present and the future.

Mayst thou be remembered when my days are done
with deathless trees . . . like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
"Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
And Time the shadow;" and though weak the verse
That would they beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,
May love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.

This beautiful poem is written in eleven line stanzas with the rhyme scheme abba cddc eee. There is a maturity in the handling of the rhythm and phrase and the form of the stanza could be a subtle imitation of the ten line stanza of Keat's odes.

(ii) SITAs

"Sita" is the last of the nine legends in the "Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan." It is the shortest of all the poems in the collection, with just twenty two pentametre lines. It is a sequel to 'Lakshman' the fourth poem in the collection. Legend goes that Sita, the daughter of King Janaka and wife of Prince Rama suffered the misfortune of being taken captive by Ravana and

that Rama waged war against Ravana, put him to death and rescued Sita. Back in Ayodhya Sita should have passed her days in peace, honour and domestic bliss. Instead king Rama, deeply troubled by a wayward and slanderous remark mocking the chastity of Sita, decides to put her away. Consequentially Sita is abandoned in the forest. She finds succour and shelter in the ashram of the venerable sage the 'poet anchorite' Valmiki. The poem presents Sita in her 'second exile' in the hermitage of the sage.

The poetess gives a 'romantic' description of the forest scenery wherein Valmiki's ashram is located. It tends to remind one of the similar scenery of the Dutts garden at Baumaree with its majestic trees the tamarinds, the palms and the seemuls, the Jhua and the casuarina girt round with creepers festooned with flowers, the countless birds and their 'sweet song' the quiet pool filled with white water-lilies, the hyacinths, the red - lotus' and the roses. The hermitage is located in a clearing in the depths of the forest where the sunlight scarcely penetrates the dense foliage. The clearing is bordered by tall trees entwined by creepers blooming with gigantic flowers. There is a still placid lake on which elegant white swans glide while the colourful peacock rises 'whirring from the brake' and herds of nimble wild deer bound through the forest glade. At a distance patches of ripe yellow corn glisten like gold. A mystical atmosphere pervades as 'strange altars' near the hermit's dwelling are alight emitting 'blue smoke'.

But the serenity of the locale and its breathtaking beauty does not offer any solace to Sita, for so intense is her misery. The 'fair lady' silently grieves over her fate. From this juncture onwards the poem takes on a purely personal tone. The tragic story of Sita the embodiment of chastity and gentle grace, evokes childhood memories, the times of happy fellowship when the poetess and her brother and sister huddled around their mother at twilight to hear her recite the stories from the Indian religious epics. The poem gives an idea of the happy childhood they spent in Calcutta before her brother Abju died.

Three happy children in a darkened room !
 What do they gaze on with wide - open eyes ?
 Three happy children in a darkened room !
 What do they gaze on with wide - open eyes ?
 But who is this fair lady ? Not in vain
 She weeps - for lo at every tear she sheds
 Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,
 And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.
 It is an old, old story, and the lay
 Which has evoked sad Sita from the past
 is by a mother sung...

How vivid must have been the mother's songs sung in Bengali! No wonder Toru wept, always, on hearing the ancient 'lays' chanted every evening. There is a profound sense of sadness permeating from the person of Sita, one of the noblest among the noble women who fill the pages of the great Hindu epics. Toru's love for this moving tale of Sita is summed up in her letter to her French authoress friend Clarisse Bader - "Can there be a more touching and lovable heroine than Sita. I do not think so, when I hear my mother chant, in the evening, in the old days of her country, I almost always weep." To Toru, "Savitri, Sita and Jagadhya Uma are the ideal representatives of

Indian womanhood and proffer an opportunity for her to reveal the mysterious feminine nature.” Her praise of Indian women is expressed in another letter to Bader : “You will see how grand, how sublime, how pathetic, our legends are. The wifely devotion that an Indian wife pays her husband, her submission to him even when he is capricious or exacting, her worship of him as her “god and her life” as old Spencer has it.”

From the concluding ‘elegiac note’ of the poem arises the poignancy of parting and separation combined with a profound nostalgic yearning for her beloved childhood companions who are no more.

“When shall those children by their mother’s side
Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide ?

3.1.7 Critical Evaluation :

In the words of Dr. Iyenagar “In the organisation of the poem as a whole and in the finish of the individual stanza’s, in its mastery of phrase and rhythm, in its music of sound and ideas, “Our Casuarina Tree’ is superb piece of writing and gives us a taste of what Toru might have done had not the race of her life been so quickly run.” The poem is more than a poetic evocation of a tree; it is recapturing the past and immortalizing the moments of time so recaptured. The tree is both a tree and a symbol and in it are implicated both time and eternity. Harihar Das says, “For its rich imagery, the music of its verses and the tenderness and pathos in which it is instinct, we would place it none in the volume.” E.J. Thompson regards it as “the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner, shows her already possessed of mastery over the more elaborate and architectural forms of verse”. He further comments on the poem as follows :-

“One of the stanzas, drops into conventionality and uses adjectives and though that are second hand and ‘otiose’. But the poem’s strength is independent of this; and its blending of pathos and dignity of spirit, its stretching out of ghostly arms to those other haunted trees of words worth in ‘Borrowdale’, the conclusion - so recalling the last work of another poet, far inferior in genius but dying equally young, Kirke White, in the touching close of his ‘Christiad’ - All this forms a whole of remarkable strength and beauty and should achieve her hope of placing the tree of her childhood memories among those immortalized by “Mighty poets in their misery dead.” Mukherjee is of the view that the poem will live in literature for the superb construction of its stanza and the succession of rich and vivid images in which it is filled. It is, he observes ‘one of the great architectural pieces’. Lotika Basu also is all praise for the “riper perfection” in this wonderful poem. The poem will always be hailed for its mellow sweetness and structural perfection, flawless diction and the rhythm which has a flow and sure movement in it.

Artistically, the poem is among the best of the ballads, simple and vivid in style, tender and beautiful in content. It is a fitting tribute to Toru’s mother’s exceptional gift of storytelling and a salutary homage to her deceased brother and sister. The juxtaposition of Sita’s grief with that of the three weeping children and finally with that of the poetess herself, renders the poem very personal, stirring a chord of pathos in the reader.

An Estimate of Toru's Poetry :

Toru Dutt's literary achievement during her short span of life, rests chiefly on her poetical works comprising two volumes of verse and a few short poems. She can be estimated as one of the 'major' Indo-Anglian poets as her work is the 'first tangible achievement' in Indo-Anglian poetry. Though her poetic output is meagre it is of lasting value. As a poetess she "compels attention." The arresting feature of her poetry is its lyrical effusions of varied emotions reminding one of Keats and Shelley. Like them Toru had a 'mystic affinity' with nature. She was particularly sensitive to sound and colour quite evident in her poems "Baugmaree", "The Lotus" and "Our Casuarina Tree." Toru wrote fundamentally of her race and her land. She could interpret the culture and traditions of her country to the west. She passionately admired France yet was essentially Indian at heart and her Ancient Ballads bears witness to it, which surely prompted Sir Edmund Gosse to remark that Toru's ballads "breathe a vedic solemnity" and that "no modern oriental has given us so strange an insight into the conscience of the Asiatic". Possessing a maturity far beyond her age, she championed the cause of liberty, human dignity and in a way the emancipation of the Indian woman through her writings.

Toru was adept at descriptive poetry for like her mother she was gifted with the art of story telling. She was a scholar in her own right with an enviable knowledge of French and English literatures and the puranas. Her poetic diction is simple and lucid. She showed a propensity for the sonnet form. Her skill in using the rhymed octo-syllabic ballad is commendable. Thus Toru Dutt has surely carved a niche for herself, among the celebrated in Indo-Anglian poetry.

3.1.8 Sample Questions :

1. Give a brief historical survey of Indian English literature in the Pre-Independence era.
2. Discuss the features of the genre of writing called "Indo - Anglian".
3. Discuss the autobiographical element in the poem "Our Casuarina Tree".
4. "Sita is the apotheosis of Indian womanhood". Discuss in relation to Toru Dutt's 'Sita'.

3.1.9 Suggested Reading :

1. K.R. Srinivasa Iyenagar - Indian Writing in English
2. K.R. Ramachandran Nair - Three Indo - Anglian Poets
3. A.N. Dvivedi - Toru Dutt
4. Padmini Sen Gupta - Toru Dutt (Sahitya Akademi)
5. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* by Toru Dutt with an introductory Memoir by Amarnatha Jha.

- M.S. Sridhar

Lesson – 1 Indian English Poetry – Pre – Independence Era

Toru Dutt Our Casurina Tree

Like a huge Python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.
When first my casement is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest ;
Sometimes, and most in winter, - on its crest
A gray baboon sits statue - like alone
Watching the sunrise ; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play ;
And far and near kokilas hail the day ;
And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows ;
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
The water lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played ; though years may
roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
What is that dirge - like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well known to the eye of faith!
Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
When slumbered in his cave the water - wraith

And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon
When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon:
And every time the music rose, - before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those
Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,
Dearer than life to me, alas ! were they !
Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done
With deathless trees like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
' Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
And Time the shadow' and though weak the
verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.

2 SITA

Three happy children in a darkened room!
What do they gaze on with wide- open eyes?
A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries
And in its centre a cleared spot – there bloom
Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace
Tall trees; there in a quiet lucid lake
The white swans glide; there ‘Whirring from the brake’.
The peacock springs; there, herds of wild deer race;
There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain:
There, blue smoke from strange altars rises light,
There dwells in peace the poet – anchorite
But who is this fair lady? Not in vain
She weeps – for lo at every tear she sheds
Tears from three pairs of Young eyes fall amain,
And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.
It is an old, old story, and the lay
Which has evoked sad Sita from the past
Is by a mother sung ...’Tis hushed at last
And melts the picture from their sight away,
Yet shall they dream of it until the day !
When shall those children by their mother’ s side
Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?

Lesson 2

Rabindranath Tagore: *Gitanjali*

Structure

- 3.2.1. Objectives
- 3.2.2. Introduction
- 3.2.3. The Writer - His Life and Works
- 3.2.4. Analysis of the Text: *Gitanjali*, the masterpiece
- 3.2.5. Critical Evaluation
- 3.2.6. Symbolism
- 3.2.7. Summary
- 3.2.8. Glossary
- 3.2.9. Sample Questions
- 3.2.10. Suggested Reading

3.2.1. Objectives

This unit is structured keeping in view the objectives viz.,

1. to make the students understand the mysterious poetic world of Tagore in his *Gitanjali*.
2. to enrich and elevate their minds from the level of mundane obsessions to the higher plane of spiritual and universal outlook.
3. to make them understand not only the poetic content as presented in *Gitanjali* but appreciate the very exquisite contribution to India and to the world at large by the celebrated poet Tagore.

3.2.2. Introduction

Though an Englishman by birth, C.F. Andrews loved India passionately and joined Tagore at Shantiniketan in 1913 which was modelled on the ancient forest schools of India for the sole reason of experiencing heavenly radiance and enjoying the 'inner beauty' i.e. beauty of the mind. This Shantiniketan school 'The Darling of our hearts' as Gurudev Tagore named it, became a symbol of world culture Viswa Bharathi University at Bolpur in West Bengal reflecting Tagore's noble universal ideology. The very aim of education is to uphold human values in all aspects resulting in a peaceful and knowledgeable society.

Progress in every walk of life was very much noticed in our country during the latter part of nineteenth century, the Renaissance time, in which period a sage and scholar, the myriad-minded genius

Rabindranath Tagore, was born to enlighten the entire humanity in the world dexterously fulfilling the arduous and august task of VISWAKAVI. *Gitanjali* the most famous of his great many works was originally written in Bengali and translated into English by the poet himself. These prose renderings of songs are devotional songs; though appearing to be very personal they are applicable to the entire mankind for their spiritual, devotional and mysterious nature. The spirit of emancipation and the realization of TRUTH are predominantly dealt with in order to effect real freedom from all sorts of bondages on this earth.

W.B. Yeats, the famous Irish poet who adopted a plainer style and themes of social interest, eulogizes the commendable work of art *Gitanjali* in his introduction wherein he admits that in the cyclical process of history, there is a failure of obedience and order and that when passions rage, faith is lost; this is the theme of his poem 'The Second Coming'! He admits that "We had not known that we loved God, hardly it may be that we believed in Him, yet looking backward upon our life we discover in our exploration of the pathways of woods, in our delight in the lonely places of hills, in that mysterious claim that we have made unavailingly on the women that we have loved, the emotion that created this insidious sweetness".

3.2.3. The Writer – His Life and Works:

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) proved to be a versatile genius though he received education mostly at home. Born in the old ancestral house of the Tagores in Calcutta, the poet of poets, the youngest son of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore (fourteenth child) was not allowed to move out of the house as pleasure demanded, the fact of which had been narrated by Tagore in the books entitled *My Reminiscences* and *My Boyhood Days*. The school for him was like a prison with hard benches and dull prison like walls where the pupils worked for a long time. He was taught by a private tutor but the former preferred to be with his mother eager to hear a story from her that was more impressive than the lesson. Later he was sent to St. Xavier's College where Father de Penaranda could stimulate the poet's imagination and the result was that Tagore translated 'Macbeth' into Bengali.

As he was very much interested in reading poetry and drama, Tagore could participate in the discussions on literary criticism along with others even at an early stage writing poems under the pen name of 'Bhanu Simha', some of which were published in the Magazine 'Bharati'. The social influence on Tagore by the Brahma Samaj, the reforms affected by Iswarachandra Vidyasagar and the speeches by Raja Ram Mohan Roy were not only informative but formative. Another noticeable and significant influence on

Tagore was by his own father who taught him incessantly the real wisdom contained in the Upanishads, the Gita and other Hindu epics. The Catholic spirit in Tagore made him understand various classics and epics to promote interest to imbibe knowledge from a great many sources, to get the truth, to see the real and to preach the same in order to focus light to those groping in darkness.

We cannot find a branch of literature which Tagore left untouched. Plays and poems, novels and stories, fables and songs could come out from the mystic bard's overwhelming poetic flow only to make the reader flabbergast at the very content that can reach people across the continents. Tagore could notice the heart beat of Nature and hence became a prolific painter and profound singer. Feeling takes a turn, becomes a symbol and transforms into a concrete work of art emanating the power of music and the value of a suggestion in all the works of Tagore, especially in *Gitanjali*, for which the poet and philosopher was awarded the most prestigious Nobel Prize in 1913 in recognition of his meritorious contribution to literature.

Tagore delivered lectures both in India and abroad on Indian religion, philosophy, human dignity and world vision. Verily Tagore's works stand as a model for most of the native and other writers as he embodies cultural and national consciousness leading to universalism and abhorrence of dictatorship. Be it his speech or writing, it was to project and correct social and inhuman conditions among his countrymen, caste system, Hindu orthodoxy, political strategy, child psychology and women's rights and conditions.

Tagore read widely and wrote extensively. Prominent among the publications from 1878 to 1900 include *Valmiki Pratibha*, *Sandhya Sangeet*, *Nalini*, *Bhanu Simha*, *Alochana*, *Samalochana*, *Chitra*, *Europe Yatrir Diary*, *Nadi*, and *Baikunther Katha*. In the second group of publications *Kalpana* and *Gitanjali* are significant though *Gora* and *Phalguni* are marked realistic. Among the publications from 1925 to 1941 the plays *Grahe Pravesh*, *Ritu Rang* and *Chandalika* are esteemed high. The list of the writings of Rabindranath Tagore makes every reader, viewer or listener praise the poet's versatility coupled with spirituality. His celebrated works include *The Crescent Moon*, *The Gardener*, *Post Office* and *The Home and the World*. It is not an exaggeration to state that Tagore's plays are still performed all over the world; his songs and poems are known to a higher percentage of people today than in his life time. Gandhi had close friendship with this great teacher and called him Gurudev. This 'Sun of India' was compared with Dante, Wordsworth and Walt Whitman. Tagore had personal contact with Murray, Einstein and Russell. He was very much under the influence of Bergson's theory of change. Christian theism and Buddhism influenced him to the maximum extent to state the fact of universal humanity. India is proud of this sentinel of the East who devoted his life for cultural union between the East and the West.

3.2.4. Analysis of the Text: *Gitanjali*, the masterpiece

Humanity at large must be grateful to the universal poet, Rabindranath Tagore, for giving all of us, a treasure of true knowledge and devotion, *Gitanjali*, Song offerings, gratefully offered to the Almighty. The Nobel Laureate composed a plethora of songs reflecting the poetic zeal and Indian culture, himself being a painter of merit and a master of music. Every reader astonishingly appreciates the exquisite content and the essential devotion in the songs. The mystical depth in these poems/songs is to be reached to appreciate their complete essence. Tagore had come under the influence of Shelley, Wordsworth and Browning and had been conversant with the renowned works of great mystics as is evident in certain song compositions. *Gitanjali* contains the traces of not merely the Indian epics and Upanishads but the psalms of David and the mystical poetic element in the western literature. Though mysticism is in clash with the objective reality, it becomes an indispensable spiritual effort seeking tryst with the divine. A true and prodigious poet or a seer automatically becomes a mystic. Then his view of God and the creation is of great interest to us.

Rabindranath Tagore as an ardent devotee of God makes an appeal to the supreme Lord to pardon him for not heeding his call, in poem 27:

“Light, Oh where is the light? Kindle it with the burning fire of desire!
There is the lamp but never a flicker of a flame – is such thy fate, my heart?
Ah, death were better by far for thee!”

Tagore makes us think that Life without God-awareness is to be pitied. Not mere lamp, but a flicker of flame is essential. In one's life time one must experience the mystical touch of God. The devotee is unable to hear the call from the supreme to have 'Love-tryst'. The poet warns us not to waste a life-time without God awareness, for, death is better. W.B. Yeats in his 'Introduction' to *Gitanjali* is right to state "Tagore like the Indian civilization itself has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity". All desires vanish except that of God and Tagore speaks out that other desires make the human soul attached to the mundane affairs but the desire for the Lord is a fertile desire. The poet longs to have a spiritual merger with the supreme.

The Eastern artists have strong belief in the soul of the universe, though the Westerners may not. Hence among the latter philosophical ideas too form part of Art. God for us is not a distant God but belongs to our homes as well as to our temples. His nearness is felt even in domestic incidents. Tagore emphasizes that Art is nothing but the overflow of the personality of the artist and gradually it gets

integrated with the universe around him. An artist builds a new world of imagination consisting of truth and beauty. The function of art is to construct this ideal world, this paradise.

In fact an ideal poem is literally a song. A poet, a painter, a musician, an architect sees the whole not a part alone; sometimes sees the part contributing to the whole. Rabindranath Tagore gave importance to the whole and made the details contribute to a coherent scheme. The subject of a poem as Arnold puts it, should take precedence over brilliance of diction and imagery. This aspect of an ideal poem can be explicitly observed in the very opening lines of *Gitanjali*.

“Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.”

An ideal song of Bhakti in the great Indian tradition is pure devotion; as a child seeks its mother, as a lover seeks his beloved. God is so kind that he fills the human body again and again with fresh life but we the human beings are so indifferent that we heed not His sweet call. Tagore aptly remarks that the receiving hands of man are small but the gifts of God are infinite. It is His will to make us eternal. How kind God is! Going deep into Bhaktitattwa Tagore pronounces,

“This little flute of a reed Thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.
At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.”

The touch is divine. It is immortal. The joy is boundless. It is inexplicable. The immortalising touch makes one feel an indescribable joy and only a mystic can experience it. A devotee derives supreme joy on hearing the divine melody. Though he tries to imitate and excel the same, he feels the want of that melody. It is purely divine melody. It is exclusively His melody.

In poems 7 & 8, the poet longs to have the company of the divine self. He is even ready to be honoured by death, for, he does not want the body to be wasted in the earthly routine, with the material paraphernalia. The child who is decked with a prince's heavy dress and ornaments loses pleasure in his play because his dress causes hindrance at every step. A devotee, like the child, does not pay attention to the earthly possessions since he aims at union with the Divine and does not want to remain overburdened with the unnecessary robes and chains.

Nobility at its peak can be estimated from the 35 th song/poem “Where the mind is without fear”. The poet makes a sincere prayer for his country, for himself, for every one as a matter of fact. Prejudices separate people from one another. It is obvious from Frost's poem on “Mending Wall” wherein he presents two sects of people with a symbolic twist and in sharp contrast those who are for doing away with all

prejudices, differences and distinctions which keep man and man separate and those who strive purposefully to maintain these differences as a matter of status quo. If prejudices of any sort regional, cultural or linguistic are not maintained, universal integration is possible. Tagore's prayer is that his country should be a heaven of freedom where the people can speak the truth without fear and can face any situation with legitimate pride, where knowledge is unhampered by any kind of restraint, where people are not influenced by prejudices, where hypocrisy does not exist, where all striving leads to perfection, where the power of reason is free from superstition and where the supreme Almighty directs the minds of the people towards ever-widening spheres of thought and action. A fearless state of the mind can be reached through proper and pious deeds motivated by noble thought processes. But to err is human and hence Tagore in the very next poem (poem 36) surrenders to God:

“This is my prayer to thee my lord - strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.
Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.”

In Song 39 the poet believes that mercy of God is capable of making the stubborn-minded persons soft-natured. Real peace showers at times of crisis because of the mercy of God. Desire blinds the mind but Divine mercy shows the Truth. Though grace is lost temporarily it comes again with a burst of song.

Tagore asserts the importance of work in contrast with meditation in poem 11. This is real KARMA YOGA as envisaged in Indian culture.

“Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in the lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? - - - He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust.”

Leaving everything unattended is a sin. Tagore exhorts us not to waste time in mere telling of beads, putting off responsibilities and neglecting the poor, the hard working and the downtrodden. Work is a kind of worship. Helping those working hard in sun and in shower is real worship. “Help ever hurt never” should be the motto of life. The indolent cannot reach the higher rungs.

We can notice a wonderful fusion of words and melody in the following song (57):

“Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light! Ah!
The light dances, my darling at the centre of my life; the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love; the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth.”

This is a most lyrical presentation coupled with spiritual radiance. The words roll, the words dance, the words make us thrill and the words bring us delight by mere utterance. The poet refers to the heart of the

devotee where an ineffable light is bright, emanating rays that reveal to everyone the fact that this world is full of light for those who have the eyes to see it.

Life, God's love and power, light and bliss are the main aspects of mysticism. Death leads to life again and hence it is not dreadful. The poet, a mystic, is ready to worship Death, Lord's servant.

“Death, thy servant, is at my door. He has crossed the unknown sea and brought thy call to my home. - - - I will worship him with folded hands and with tears. I will worship him placing at his feet the treasure of my heart.”

Death follows His instructions. One glance from death, the poet is ready to leave this world, for, he has borne his sorrows and joys all through his life and now death is the fulfillment of life. As the bride leaves for her husband's abode from her parent's house man leaves this world to merge with the Supreme. These thoughts are expressed in songs 90 and 91.

The statement that *Gitanjali* is a renaissance poem in the sense that the time of its emergence is Renaissance period in India is lopsided. Freedom, intense desire for freedom, to be free from bondages, to experience eternal bliss, to move to the higher, transcendental levels, to merge with the universal self — that is the very state of Renaissance. Tagore, the mystic prays, “In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet”. He adds,

“Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its Voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee”.

3.2.5. Critical Evaluation

The Nobel Laureate Tagore deals with the universal theme of progress of the mind in his song offerings. It is a continuous process from generation to generation of all the people, for all the people, by all the people. Sri Aurobindo in ‘Thought the Paraclete ‘projects the Supramental level, the journey of the mind to Supermind where a differentiation can be perceived – the world of darkness is below and the world of light far above. The Mysticism in Aurobindo's works takes the form of an institution. It focusses the attempt in the realisation of the Supermind. It is a struggle, a challenge, and a daring step to find the truth whereas in Tagore's works one finds the diffusion of the mind. His expression is that of a devotee, a philosopher and artist. What is mentioned in the Upanishads is expressed in most of Tagore's writings. It is practical, intellectual, spiritual and devotional. The traditional Vaishnava element is crystal clear in a plethora of song offerings. The poet-God relationship is that of a son and a father, a wife and a husband, a servant and a master and a lover and his beloved: Aurobindo's way aims at higher consciousness, while Tagore's is total surrender to the Almighty and in doing so Tagore separates the two, man and God, man's

craving for God's love i.e. Vishistha Advaita. It is said that man is Earth's child but heaven's heir. There is a relationship between man and nature, and man and God. At a higher plane man establishes the truth that Nature is God's manifestation and that there is no difference between Nature and God. Tagore ardently believes that the human mind can recognize the reunion of both man and God since separation of the two leads to bitter sensationalism which would certainly be eschewed one day or other. It should not be forgotten that *Gitanjali* is not to be read as a poem of life, it is totally a long poem dealing with escape from life, an escape not as a coward shunning all responsibilities, but an escape from passions and bondages of life. Treading on the materialistic base, in 'Gitanjali', one enters the mystically lighted world and perceives the spiritual goal where the individual self merges with the universal self.

Gitanjali is to some extent a metaphysical poem in the sense that it deals with the concepts of life and death. It is not completely metaphysical since logical reasoning, which is a characteristic of metaphysical poetry, is missing. There is imagination and there is symbolism but it is mystical. The concepts of life and death are derived from Upanishadic source. As W.B. Yeats pleasantly comments, it is the work of a 'supreme culture':

"A tradition where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion and carried back to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble."

One of the characteristics of metaphysical poetry is union of passion and argument. This can be illustrated from John Donne's (1572-1631) 'Lover's Infiniteness' wherein the poet begs his mistress:

"The ground, thy heart is mine whatever shall
grow there, dear, I should have it all".

Here passion is interwoven with reasoning. In *Gitanjali* the poet prays to God to take him to the passionless state i.e. his abode, the place of supreme Bliss. The thought goes on as a continuous thread bearing beautiful flowers forming a garland to be offered to the Lord. We hear the didactic voice clearly in song 4:

"Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs. I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind."

The mystic and the teacher in Tagore endeavours to keep himself pious, for the body is in constant touch with the Supreme Task master. The ethics of living and controlling the mind emerge from a metaphysical base when Tagore further writes "And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act."

It is said metaphysical poetry exists in association with a mind that is didactic in tone. The concept of evil comes to the surface in Tagore's lyrical statement "I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart" (song 4). Intensity and heightened style can be illustrated from *Gitanjali* but owing to these characteristics we cannot conclude that *Gitanjali* is completely metaphysical. Moreover, Tagore unlike a true metaphysical poet, illustrates veiled concepts. In some poems the style is metaphysical but the content is devotional and mystical. It is a truism that a mystic cannot be bare in expression. As regards the scholarly presentation *Gitanjali* is a metaphysical poem. It presents ancient Indian culture, the essence of Vedas and Upanishads and other scriptures but with regard to love it is not at all love at physical level; it is Supramundane, it is divine love, love for God.

A truly metaphysical poem must deal with a universal theme and there must also be the effect of an integrated personality. The former aspect is very much justified in *Gitanjali* as the themes involved are no doubt of universal character. The second aspect needs no discussion as Tagore was well-versed not only in Indian culture and tradition but in western philosophy, Persian and French sermons. The very background and the domestic front made Tagore not only a sage but a dignified scholar imbibing each and every noble thought from a noble work. He read and reread Kalidasa's works, intensively inspired by his father's tireless work and vigorous intellectual activity. Another metaphysical aspect in *Gitanjali* is that emotion thrills the reader. It is a sort of refined emotion that comes instantaneously from certain melodious and intellectual expression related to destiny of man, music in nature, the speed of time, God and the very nature of human life.

It is not mere lyrical beauty but beyond that there is a revelation, a vision and that is what a reader should experience. *Gitanjali* is not only a metaphysical poem but a Renaissance poem; it is a mystical poem. Mysticism is not a new aspect to the western poets. The pre-conceived idea of God, introspection of the self, spiritual quest and the metaphysical concept of death are common among certain great poets. William Blake, William Wordsworth, John Donne, R.W. Emerson, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning and Walt Whitman had a mystic turn of mind. The spiritual elements, the trust with the divine, appear to be common among the advocates of mysticism either in the East or in the West, at the higher poetic plane.

3.2.6. Symbolism:

The well chosen symbols in *Gitanjali* make the readers extol Tagore for his exuberant poetic style which is melodious and mystical. These symbols are natural and ingeniously used to explain the exalted

subject. The human body is compared to a 'frail vessel'. God fills this vessel with fresh life: "This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new". The word "melodies" is very significant here. The symbol 'the little flute of a reed' is specially intended to sound out the Divine melody that captivates the entire creation of the Lord. This is what we can say of the high poetic imagination which Tagore transformed into sweet and musical words.

Offering flowers to the Almighty is quite common especially on Indian soil but in the song offerings the 'flower' is a destructive symbol:

"Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop into the dust"
(Song 6).

The mystic compares himself with the flower and prays to God to pluck it so as to be used in the divine service. His should not be a routine end, drooping and dropping into the dust. Though the flower (his life) may not find place in the garland for the Lord, at least it may be honoured by death. He affirms that he does not want the offering to be delayed. He eagerly awaits the hour of offering.

"On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying, and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded" (Song 20).

"The lotus blooms" means an indication of God's presence but the poet is unaware of it. Now he regrets for not noticing the Divine as his mind has been straying. The fragrance makes him long for him. It is a sudden revelation to him from within. Man owing to preoccupations and mundane priorities, neglects the path of light and hence the poet says,

"Languor is upon your heart and the slumber is still on your eyes. Has not the word come to you that the flower is reigning in splendour among thorns? Wake: oh awaken! Let not the time pass in vain!"

Here the flower denotes the aspect of the glory of God which is always present but not perceived because of life's engagements and miserable conditions. A mystic needs symbols to explain clearly what he intends to present. Here the flower is reigning but the poet does not bestow attention on it; 'Don't waste time, seek the truth' it is a kind of admonition. The symbols used in *Gitanjali* are delicate and simple but charming and effective unlike ghastly symbols used by Western or Urdu poets. Flower boats, prince's robes or lights – these symbols cause a pleasant but poignant effect. In most of the Indian classics especially in Kalidasa's masterpieces, Nature occupies a significant place in the descriptions of forests, seasons, sunrise, sunset and her mirage where peace reigns supreme. Tagore picks up these nature fresh symbols from various rich sources including the exquisite and extensive landscape of Bengal.

Contrary to the pleasant and softer symbols, we find 'sword' as a bolt from the sky in poem 52:

“Ah me, what is it I find? What token left of thy love? It is no flower, no spices, no vase of perfumed water. It is thy mighty sword, flashing as a flame, heavy as a bolt of thunder”.

Tagore, the mystic, becomes bold to accept the gift from God - a sword, mighty sword, flashing as a flame. It is going to cut off inexorably all bondages with its sharpest edges. He decides to leave off petty decorations. No doubt, it is painful to prepare for death but the mystic gladly accepts it. Tagore presents a dark view of death through the symbol of Sword. Here morning time in this song reflects the idea of a new life at the end of the present existence and the mystic feels happy that his heart has touched the Divine feet of the Lord.

“On the slope of the desolate river among tall grasses I asked her, ‘Maiden where do you go shading your lamp with your mantle?’” (Song 64)

God is a constant companion of man. He gives colour in the life of man. He exists forever – past, present and future. All the beautiful objects of nature are his gifts to man. Man does not comprehend universal life. Life exists in all forms of objects. The limbs of man are made active with the touch of universal life. The human self is only a part of the universal self, or universal life man cannot achieve the Infinite except through the finite. The human soul in its journey or progress from the finite to the Infinite experiences diverse vicissitudes. The mystic cannot realise the Divine truth because it remains concealed like a veiled woman as expressed in Poem 66:

“She who ever had remained in the depth of my being, in the twilight of gleams and of glimpses, she who never opened her veils in the morning light, will be my last gift to thee, My God, folded in my final song”.

The woman has her impact on the self but the mystic lets it remain concealed and finally only at the meeting with God will she be recognized.

The mystic's experiences, movements and joyous feelings cannot be easily understood by common folk since the colours, tunes and perfumes of life fascinate them. The sunbeam in life comes from the eternal source only because of the mercy of God. In the great flux of time the life span of human beings is very short. The speed of time makes the mystic aware of the constant event of death in life. Everything on earth runs back to the Divine; the incessantly flowing river finally reaches the Divine feet. The flower that sweetens the air has its last service at the Divine feet. The words of the poet are uttered in praise of God. The mystic longs to reach the Abode of God, which is infinite, and when death knocks at the door, he is ready to set before, to offer the full vessel of his life unflinchingly. Tagore, the mystic unhesitatingly invites death addressing it as the last fulfilment of life, for it is a means of deliverance. It is not the end of life.

Life is never lost. It exists in the continuous process of birth, death and rebirth. The human soul attains freedom to merge with the Divine. Tagore's *Gitanjali* is, indeed, a treasure, depicting the voyage of the soul to the eternal abode, a mark 'of supreme culture.'

3.2.7. Summary

In this unit we have discussed Tagore's masterpiece *Gitanjali* at length. As you have understood now, it is a collection of song offerings originally written in Bengali and translated into English by the poet himself. W.B. Yeats in his Introduction very much extolled the collection, as 'the work of supreme culture'. The quintessence of Tagore's *Gitanjali* lies in its noble theme of the voyage of the soul from the transient mundane level to the transcendental eternal state, through total self surrender to the Almighty.

As you are aware now the symbols used by the poet are not only simple and delicate but charming and significant except for the dreadful sword that cuts off all bondages to make the soul merge with the universal self. You must have perceived the fact by this time that man cannot achieve the Infinite except through the finite. *Gitanjali* presents the spiritual struggle for spiritual release and hence is termed a metaphysical poem. It cannot be totally metaphysical since logical reasoning is missing. It is metaphysical in the sense that it deals with the concepts of life and death and so the theme is universal. It is not only metaphysical but a Renaissance poem and Tagore, the mystic prays to God to make his motherland a heaven of freedom as a true patriot. The reader must also have noticed the difference in approach between the two great mystics, Sri Aruobindo and Tagore. The former presents the supramental level journey of the mind to the Supermind level while Tagore's approach is total surrender to the Almighty, the traditional Vaishnava element.

You can now perceive the truth that the love of God gets meaning only from the existence of a Sadhaka, a devotee and that there is an ineffable light in the heart of the devotee and that the darkness of night, here ignorance, can be dispelled when this light inside strikes the chords of love of God. Nature of life, yearning for love, tryst with God, idealising the perfect, eagerly craving for the union with the supreme, Death knocking at the mystic's door, welcoming death as the last fulfilment of life and the voyage to the eternal Home in one salutation to the Almighty constitute the phases in this supreme work of art which is the essence of the flight from life. *Gitanjali* is, verily, a masterly work by a masterly mind whose genius was recognised and extolled by William Rothestein and William Butler Yeats first on alien ground.

3.2.8. Glossary

Poems.

1.	Frail Vessel	:	weak human body
	Flute of reed	:	flute made of delicate material
	Ineffable	:	Cannot be described
	Infinite gifts	:	Cannot be measured, innumerable
	Small hands	:	finite nature of man
2.	dissonant	:	discordant
3.	Meshes of thy music	:	It refers to charming and beautiful creation of God with melody and grandeur
4.	love in flower	:	here the seat of God is the human heart. Flower stands for purity.
	My action	:	Behaviour of the Sadhaka
5.	endless toil	:	Mundane affairs away from God
	Minstrelsy	:	the art pursued by a Medieval singer
6.	little	:	insignificant
7.	jingling would down thy whispers:	:	simple living leads to God's abode, luxury makes one retreat.
8.	Bondage of finery	:	Material life causes hindrance in the progress of Sadhana
9.	Unclean hands	:	purity of mind, word and action is stressed
10.	Obeisance cannot reach down	:	because god is with the poor
11.	Meet him and stand by him	:	Love fellowmen and help the poor is the message
12.	the traveller at the end	:	Searching for God elsewhere is a mistake. Peace of soul resides in one's heart only.
13.	Blossom	:	here it indicates god realisation
14.	languidly	:	without any interest
15.	Corner seat	:	insignificant place, not showy
16.	Festival	:	God's grandeur can be seen in this world as in a festival
17.	Market day	:	the latter phase of man's life, first part is over
18.	Long rainy hours	:	The crude and rough part of life
19.	The morning	:	Time of union with the Almighty
20.	Lotus	:	A powerful symbol for God's Presence.
21.	Launch out	:	Voyage is to be started to seek the Truth
22.	deep Shadows	:	the miserable part of human life
23.	Sky groans	:	gloom, disease and depression
24.	Sack of Provisions	:	here traveler is the mystic sense of inadequacy in finding god.
25.	Veil of night eyes	:	Death refreshes life, it does not end life.
26.	breath	:	God's presence
27.	Never a flicker	:	The loss of God's presence
28.	Trammels	:	hindrances that hold captive in the material world
29.	Tinsel	:	Sham, Showy, Cheap
	Dark shadow	:	False Values of life
30.	to my tryst	:	to unite with the supreme

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|-----|----------------------------|---|---|
| 31. | Prisoner | : | one's own wealth makes one a prisoner in this world |
| 32. | Still waits | : | God's love is great than that of man |
| 33. | They break into | : | unholy priests |
| 34. | Fetters | : | Shackles in the material life |
| 35. | Narrow domestic walls | : | Caste, creed and colour |
| 36. | insolent might | : | arrogantly impudent persons |
| 37. | Silent obscurity | : | peaceful death |
| 38. | Petition for light | : | appeal of God |
| 39. | thy light and thy thunder | : | God is creator and destroyer |
| 40. | angry storm | : | the fury of death |
| 41. | my basket | : | my life, no vision of God still |
| 42. | Vanish into the night | : | it means death |
| 43. | the signet of eternity | : | The idea of God-realisation |
| 44. | perfume of Promise | : | the presence of the Divine |
| 45. | Silent Steps | : | Gods's glory is realised |
| 46. | thy messenger | : | death is God's messenger |
| 47. | Night is nearly spent | : | disillusioned state |
| 48. | struggle | : | the Mystic or Sadhaka experiences difficulties in the process of God-realisation |
| 49. | Carol of this novice | : | The song of the poet |
| 50. | Grain of gold | : | Boon of God |
| 51. | Greet him with empty hands | : | At the time of death one has to greet the lord with empty hands |
| 52. | The mighty sword | : | stands for death |
| 53. | cestasy of pain | : | Severing of life from the source |
| 54. | enfold it in sweetness | : | the poet cherishes the memory of the time when water was given to the thirsty person. |
| 55. | Languor | : | faintness |
| 56. | will is taking shape | : | decisions are made in human heart, the place of God |
| 57. | the centre of my life | : | the heart of the devotee |
| 58. | twin brothers | : | Life and death are not different entities |
| 59. | Hear has touched | : | felt the experience of touching the Divine feet |
| 60. | empty shells | : | All material life is useless and meaningless |
| 61. | The sleep | : | Sleep here stands for death |
| 62. | Coloured tops | : | The Divine is white, the earthly things look coloured. |
| 63. | in the play of the many | : | Seeing god in different objects of life. |
| 64. | your lamp | : | the lamp symbolizes the knowledge of God |
| 65. | eternal harmony | : | The sweetness of his music has the source in Divine music |
| 66. | She | : | the divine truth remains concealed like a veiled woman |
| 67. | Infinite Sky | : | White radiance of eternity |
| 68. | with hues ever-changing | : | The white light gets different colours at mundane level |
| 69. | Pride | : | because of continuous process of life-death-birth life is eternal |

70.	All this rush on	:	The speed of time indicates the readiness of death.
71.	Maya	:	The original Sanskrit word is retained to make the sense clear.
72.	hidden touches	:	the touch of the divine thrills the mystic
73.	thy wine	:	Life giving juices (organic) not in the modern sense
74.	to fill my pitcher	:	the mystic goes to death for renewal of life
75.	last meaning	:	the last works of poets are in honour of the Almighty
76.	tumultuous with toil	:	Too many preoccupations
77.	With them	:	The mystic's attention is not diverted towards earthly allurements
78.	Perfection	:	God is perfection incarnate
79.	emptiness	:	dissatisfaction with the material world
80.	remnant of a cloud	:	ready to respond to the call of the lord
81.	lost time	:	No time is lost, God's creation goes on
82.	yet there is time	:	Time is an endless process
83.	Mother	:	Divine mother; when a chain of pearls is offered to the Divine Mother, the poet states that he gets grace from her.
84.	Rustling leaves Rainy darkness	:	Desires and sorrows are the result of the pangs of separation.
85.	dropped the sword	:	Even great warriors after death reach the Lord with empty hands
86.	take up the lamp	:	When death, the servant of God comes, the poet's heart is full of fear but becomes bold to welcome death
87.	Brink of eternity	:	the stage before union is stated here
88.	lamp unlit	:	When the lamp is unlit the mystic cannot worship. He cannot receive God's call.
89.	untimely leave	:	No one estimates the time of the call from the Lord
90.	Vintage	:	the best of the yield, the best of the actions
91.	Last fulfilment	:	Death is not the end, it links up
92.	Spurned	:	rejected
93.	departure	:	going to die
94.	my path	:	through which the soul moves for union
95.	the power	:	life giving force
96.	Honey	:	the Beauty of life
97.	boisterous	:	wild, turbulent
98.	never . . . escape	:	confidence in one's own strength
99.	wise this time	:	the mystic eagerly awaits the meeting with God.
100.	Perfect pearl of the formless	:	God who is formless (<i>nir guna tatwa</i>)
101.	many a star	:	the songs of the poet
102.	smiling	:	Smiling at the ignorance of the people
103.	homesick cranes	:	The mystic is always homesick, a right comparison.

3.2.9. Sample Questions

1. What are the characteristics of mysticism? Illustrate from Tagore's *Gitanjali*.
2. Is *Gitanjali* a metaphysical poem?
3. How did Tagore symbolize nature in *Gitanjali*?
4. *Gitanjali* is not a poem of life but an escape from life-Discuss.
5. Evaluate the concept of death from the source *Gitanjali*.
6. What differences can be perceived in the mysticism of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo?
7. Which mood predominates in *Gitanjali*, the joyful or the tenor of death?
8. Annotate the following :
 1. My work becomes an endless toil in a shoeless sea of toil.
 2. Thou made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music.
 3. My obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, lowliest and lost.
 4. Where the old tracks are lost new country is revealed with its wonders.
 5. The steps that I heard in my playroom are the same that are echoing from star to star.
 6. The air is filling with the perfume of promise filling.
 7. They build there houses with sand and they play with empty shells.
 8. I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the One in the play of the many.
 9. Thy worship does not impoverish the world.
 10. The stars have wrought their anklets of light to deck thy feet but mine will hang upon thy breast.
 11. I put my tales of you into lasting songs.

3.2.10. Suggested Reading

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LESSON 3

SRI AUROBINDO'S POETRY

Structure

3.3.1 Objectives

3.3.2 Background – The Writer and the Period.

3.3.3 The Writer – His Life and Works.

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A. “The Symbol Dawn”

- i). Analysis of the Text
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B. “Thought the Paraclete”

- i). Analysis of the Text
- ii). Critical Evaluation
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C. “Rose of God”

- i). Analysis of the Text
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- iv). Summary

3.3.5 Sample Questions.

3.3.6 Suggested Reading.

3.3.1. Objectives:

From a reading of this lesson, the student understands that

- * The central idea of Indian Philosophy and Philosophical Outlook – in nothing but a prayer for knowledge.
- * “The Symbol Dawn” is a symbolical and mystical Invocation to the Divine, to bring in a new world of knowledge, completely devoid of darkness, ignorance and death.

- * it is a metaphysical poem, presented in the Epic form. The basic theme of the poem is the evolution of man to supramental level, overstepping the limitations of death. So it is the essence of the Life Divine translated in Poetic terms.
- * The two poems of Sri Aurobindo, "Thought the Paraclete and "Rose of God" are the poetic embodiment of the two systems of Yogajñana and Bhakti.
- * Aurobindo's poems are a rare combination of Philosophy and Poetry.
- * 'Overhead Poetry' is a special school of Poetry which is complex and difficult to comprehend, to grasp and appreciate.
- * Thought is the function of the mind and is meaningfully used for mind in the poem.

3.3.2. Background – The Writer and The Period:

Sri Aurobindo is one of the outstanding figures in Indo-Anglian Literature. He is one of the stalwarts of Indo-Anglian Literature in the Pre-Independence Era. He is a phenomenon by himself and contributed richly to the English writing in India and to Modern Indian thought and culture.

There are people who see in him the promise of the superman, the propounder of Integral Yoga, the prophet of Life Divine. There are others who feel attracted to the patriot, the fiery evangelist of Nationalism. There are still others who are drawn to the teacher, the scholar, the interpreter of veda, the critic of life and literature and there are many more to whom he is a man of letters in excelsis, a master of prose art, and a dramatist and poet of great versatility. When we consider Sri Aurobindo as a writer, he was not merely a writer, who happened to write in English but really an English writer – almost as much as, say, a George Moore, a Laurence Binyon or a W.B. Yeats.

To acknowledge and salute the poet and the master of the 'other harmony' of prose is not, of course, to deny the teacher or the fighter or the patriot, the yogi, the philosopher or the prophetic engineer of the Life Divine. But they are indeed all of a piece: or, rather, it is the same diamond – the Immortal Diamond with different facets turned to our gaze at different times. Sri Aurobindo is a riddle of extraordinary career. Without question, Sri Aurobindo is the one uncontestedly outstanding figure in Indo-Anglian Literature.

3.3.3 The Writer – His Life and Works:

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on 15 August 1872. His father, Krishnadhan Ghose, was a popular Civil Surgeon, while his mother Swarnalatha Devi, was a daughter of Rishi Rajnarain Bose, one of the great men of the Indian Renaissance in the nineteenth century, who embodied the new composite culture of the country that was at once Vedantic, Islamic and European. Aurobindo was sent to England in 1879, along with his two elder brothers, Manmohan and Benoy Bhushan. And his stay there for a period of

about fourteen years made English his mother tongue for all practical purposes and he came to acquire a complete mastery over that difficult language as if he was born to that heritage.

At Manchester, Aurobindo was taught privately by the Rev. William H. Drewett and Mrs. Drewett who grounded him well in English, Latin, French and History. At St. Paul's, Dr. Walker the High Master himself took a deep interest in Sri Aurobindo's education and pushed him rapidly in his Greek studies. It was a fruitful period and Sri Aurobindo, besides securing the Butterworth Prize in Literature and the Bedford Prize in History, won a scholarship that enabled him to proceed to King's. At Cambridge he made a notable impression on Oscar Browning, passed the ISC Open Competitive Examination (although he could not finally join the service) and secured a first in classical tripartite at the end of his second year. He read widely, spoke often at the Majlis and wrote poetry. He left England in 1893, having received an appointment in the service of the Maharajah of Baroda.

He taught French for a time and ultimately became Professor of English and Vice-Principal. During these years he fast achieved the feat of re-nationalizing himself. His mind had returned from "Sicilian Olive – groves" and "Athenian Lanes" to the shores of the Ganges, to Saraswathi domains. He gained a deeper insight into Sanskrit and Bengali and also cultivated Marathi and Gujarathi. He read with avidity and he wrote copiously.

The political scene in India, depressed him and he contributed a series of articles to the columns of Indu Prakash under the telling caption "New Lamps for Old". He wrote a series of articles on the art of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and showed his interest in literature. In April 1906 he attended the Barisal Political Conference and took the plunge into politics at last. He left the Baroda college and assumed charge as Editor of the "Bandemataram", a new English daily started by Bipin Chandra Pal. A year later he was arrested in connection with the publication of certain articles in his paper, but was later honourably acquitted. It was about this time, he came under the influence of Yogi Lela, and had his first realization of the Vedantic – Advaitic experience of utter silence of the mind for three whole days. It was during his detention in 1908, in the Alipur Jail, that Sri Aurobindo had the ineffable mystic experience of 'Narayana Darshan' and this effected a profound change in his entire outlook. His heart was not in politics, he felt the strong pull of spiritual life, and hence in February 1910 he left Calcutta and ultimately reached Pondicherry on 4th April 1910, and remained there for the rest of his life.

During his first years at Pondicherry, the years of "Silent Yoga", disciples slowly gathered round and so an Ashram came into existence. In 1914, Madame Mirra Richard (now known as the Mother) who was herself on a spiritual quest, met Sri Aurobindo. She took full charge of the Ashram in 1920 and came to be known as Mother. For a period of about 12 years (1926-1938), Sri Aurobindo was in complete retirement, seeing hardly anybody, but keeping in contact with his disciples through written replies to their spiritual problems. This period was followed by 'darshan days' for visitors and disciples.

While Sri Aurobindo certainly played several 'parts' during the many decades of his terrestrial existence, it is no less true that they had an integral relation to one another. The politician, the poet, the philosopher and the yogi were all of a piece and made the sum – the power – that was Rishi Aurobindo.

In his philosophy and yoga, Sri Aurobindo went further and turned the current of human progress itself towards the goal of supermanhood, and laboured for long years fashioning the means of attaining the goal. At this juncture, the Great Epic in Blank verse, Savitri was produced. Sri Aurobindo's seventy-fifth birth day coincided with the dawn of Independence in India. He passed away on December 5, 1950 and was buried in Pondicherry Ashram. His books are: Songs of Myrtilla 1895, Urvashi 1896, Love and Death, a Long Poem, Perseus, the Deliverer (Blank verse Play), Vasavadatta, Rodogune, The Viziers of Bassona, Eric, "The Symbol Dawn".

3.3.4. The Texts

4. A. *The Symbol Dawn*

4.A.i). Analysis of The Text:

"The Symbol Dawn" is the opening canto of Savitri. It has 341 lines. The first 185 lines describe the progress of dawn and the remaining 156 lines describe Savitri's waking to earth consciousness on the day Satyavan's death was destined to take place. The earliest part sketches the background of human predicament and spiritual sloth and inertia against which the grim debate between Savitri and Death would be played out in the climactic part of the poem. Moreover, the waking of Savitri in the second part is parallel to the spiritual awakening in the former part. Apart from the central Symbol of Dawn, there is the image of a sleeper waking with all its implications.

There is the description of the dawn, the slow gradual ushering in of the day. On the metaphorical level is the process of a person waking out of deep slumber. On a higher plane there is the description of a soul caught in the darkness of ignorance and inconstancy receiving the first hint of higher illumination. The above said points contrast with Savitri's own form of waking "among these tribes of men:

The opening line – "It was the hour before the Gods awake", indicates the point of time before the outbreak of dawn on the physical plane, and also the point of time before consciousness itself comes into being. The word "awake" hints that the divine in men would certainly wake up, and that the condition of negation, the darkness, is only temporary. Night – the primordial inconstancy – lay in a dazed state.

Out of this condition of stupor, there is a vague sense of dissatisfaction, same desire to come into being. This feeling seems to be the first stage of consciousness. Perhaps this is the desire for light or some

possible spiritual change. But across the path of this 'Divine Event', the breaking of Dawn, the mind of Night (the primordial inconscience) lay in a stupor.

On the physical plane, this section describes the outbreak of dawn, leading to daybreak. It was dark, very dark to begin with. The common saying is that it is the darkest before daybreak. The 'Sleeper' lost to all outside conscience, is forgetful of everything of the previous day. When the breach is made in his inner core of sleep, there is a gradual, however fast, process of waking up, the return of consciousness. The point of waking – the glory of waking from sleep to wakeful consciousness, is only one moment, and it is followed by the gathering of all wits around the waking person.

On the spiritual yogic dimension, the individual is inconscient to begin with, but there is the essential urge for self-improvement, which is necessary for yogic achievement. In the process comes the supramental illumination.

Section 2:

The dawn that has been described by the poet so far is important, because it is not every dawn, (though typical of every dawn) but one which heralded the day. Special significance is given to Savitri, for that was the day when Satyavan was fated to die. Twelve months have been over since the marriage of Savitri and Satyavan and the fatal day has dawned. She was living among the tribes of men, though she was 'heaven transplant on the earth', the daughter of and ambassadress from the Supreme Mother.

Since she has partaken of the human characteristics, she too would wake up at daybreak. This day was foretold by Narada one year earlier, and could not break normally for Savitri. The other people surrounding her were ignorant of what was destined to happen. Savitri alone was burdened with foreknowledge. At the same time, she was also aware that she had come down to earth with the mission of rescuing humanity from the grip of Time and Fate and Mortality, and above all save Satyavan from the grip of the Grim God of Death.

So she had undertaken a vratha, and during the night preceding the dawn, she had gone on a yogic journey, to the centre of her being in order to regain her spiritual strength, and get ready for the battle royal with Death. So her waking up is different from the rest of the creatures. For this was the day when Satyavan was 'fated' to die and 'must' die, since apparently there was nothing to prevent the law of mortality operating. So she took up "the load of an unwitting race".

The poet quickly traces the growth of Savitri from childhood to young age and her becoming familiar with the great human problems with a constant and intense experience of pain in her heart. The opening canto, 'The Symbol Dawn' announces the problem, the central concern of the poem, and indicates through exemplification, the symbolic level on which the poem must be approached for a proper understanding and appreciation.

4.A.ii). Critical Evaluation:

Savitri is a metaphysical poem presented in the Epic form. The basic theme of the poem is the evolution of man to supramental level, overstepping the limitations of death. So it is the essence of the Life Divine translated in poetic terms.

The first canto is found to be a very difficult one by many genuine lovers of poetry. It is so because Savitri is not like ordinary poetry, an aesthetic creation either of the higher vital or refined intellectual being. It is psychic, mystic and spiritual poetry and in the first canto the sublime dominates. The very concepts and symbols used by the poet are so unfamiliar to the ordinary present day mentality that one has to acquire a capacity to appreciate this high poetry. It is a question of cultivating taste.

The Symbol – Dawn here is related to the Vedic goddess Dawn, Usha. Some acquaintance with the Vedic Dawn might help the reader to form a correct conception of the Symbol – Dawn of Savitri. Dawn here symbolises the continuity, the ever fresh continuity of the process of Time. It is in effect Time, Eternity in contrast to the Timeless, Eternity of the Absolute.

It opens with the Symbol – Night which turns into the Symbol – Dawn. It figures the very beginning of the Universe from the Night of Nescience to the awakening of the Dawn of the Spirit. In sublime and cosmic sweeps it covers the whole period of evolution and brings it up to the human stage. It focuses our attention on the fundamental problem of man in the situation of Savitri, the main character of the poem, who is described here in short with her human – divine qualities. We yet know nothing about the life of Savitri on earth. Suddenly we find this human-divine heroine brought face to face with the central problem of man concentrated into “Earth, Love and Doom”. Earth represents the masked Infinite that appears as original Nescience. It contains within it the upward drive and the downward drag of the evolutionary movement that has created the cosmos.

Love represents in its origin and purity the Divine grace that sacrifices its perfection in order that creation may be saved from the prison of Inconscience. Love therefore is the immortal element in mortals. It maintains some of its original divine glow even when it manifests itself in human life and underhuman forms. It is a sign from Heaven in man assuring him of his divine origin and destiny.

Doom is the present apparent determinism of Nature trying to perpetuate the rule of Ignorance in mankind. It denies and contradicts man's deepest aspirations and opposes any attempt at self – exceeding. Its chief fulcrum is ego in the human being and desire in its dynamic support. All these forces working in conjunction in the human being give rise to pain and suffering. Savitri is faced with the apparently unchangeable determinism of cosmic nature. The only support she has was that of the spirit within her.

Apart from this, the central crisis of the poem is clearly stated in the very first canto so that the reader gets interested in Savitri and the problem that faces her. The reader sees “her soul confronting Time

and Fate” and is anxious to know the result of her struggle with the blind forces of evolution and Nature that wanted to bring about the predicted death of Satyavan. She wanted to change the determination of cosmic nature. It is in this spirit that she remained outwardly immobile but gathered force for the great struggle because “This was the day when Satyavan must die”.

4. A.iii). Glossary:

tenebrous	: dark, gloomy.
somnambulist	: walking in sleep.
transcendences	: limits.
hieroglyphs	: symbolical.
consecration	: made holy.
errant marvel	: something living, not an abstraction.
Enchanted	: Enchanted has the double sense of “having beauty and being magical”.
lucent corner	: the image of the sky is continued.
Epiphany	: means manifestation.
Wrap	: “surround” not necessarily conceal.
Revealing	: full of things revealed.
A little	: “for a short time or duration”.
lines	: “gives a lining to” or “covers on the inside”.
“fluttering hued”	: a fine expressive word coined by the poet. Fluttering indicates, a changing movement and hue suggests colour.
Rumour	: “Sound”, “noise” as in “rumour of the sea”.

4.A.iv). Summary:

In the opening canto, the special status of Savitri, her divine origins are stressed. At the same time, Savitri's predicament on the “Fatal day” is presented. It was like any other day – for all the others, except Savitri. She alone knows the struggle ahead, the battle that she has to fight. Moreover, she must come out of it, win it before the following dawn. Satyavan's impending death is but a link in an endless chain of thwarted purposings in this foul earth. And it is the burden of Savitri's destiny to fight with the shadow and confront the riddle of man's birth and life's brief struggle. She is Savitri, the anxious agonized wife, bearing the weight of the intolerable incident and circumstances. She is the great world Mother. She is an embodiment of the human and the divine. Hence she faces the future with calm and quietness.

4. B. *Thought the Paraclete*

As some bright archangel in vision flies
Plunged in dream - caught spirit immensities;
Past the long green crests of the seas of life,

Past the orange skies of the mystic mind
 Flew my thought self - lost in the vasts of God
 Sleepless wide great glimmering wings of wind
 Bore the gold - red seeking the feet that trod
 Space and Time' s mute vanishing ends. The face
 Lustred, pale – blue - lined of the hippogriff,
 Eremite, sole, daring the bourneless ways,
 Over world - bare summits of timeless being
 Gleamed; the deep twilights of the world - abyss
 Failed below. Sun - realms of supernal seeing,
 Crimson - white mooned oceans of pauseless bliss
 Drew its vague heart - yearning with voices sweet.
 Hungering, large - souled to surprise the unconned
 Secrets white - fire - veiled of the last Beyond,
 Crossing power - swept silences rapture - stunned,
 Climbing high far ethers eternal sunned,
 Thought the great - winged wanderer paraclete
 Disappeared slow - singing a flame - word rune.
 Self was left, lone, limitless, nude, immune.

4.B.i) Analysis of the Text:

In the first place, “Thought the Paraclete” is an attempt to naturalize the catullan hendecasyllabics in English verse. The two poems of Sri Aurobindo “Thoughts the Paraclete” and “Rose of God” are the poetic embodiment of the two systems of Yogajñana and Bhakti. They are of course, poems first and last, but one understands them better for their philosophical background.

The first stage of the ascent is that the mind outgrows the limitations of its Swabhava, the tendency to act instinctively and rationally. It is self – lost and feels its way in the upward march. As the poet says –

As some bright archangel in vision flies
 Plunged in dream – caught spirit immensities
 Past the long green crests of the seas of Life.
 Past the orange skies of the mystic mind
 Flew my thought self lost in the vasts of God.

The first movement is suggested by the change from green to orange, and further change from orange is also indicated. While describing the second movement, the poet makes use of ‘hippogriff’. The ‘hippogriff’ is most probably a reference to the horses that draw the chariot of the Ashwins, the Lords of Bliss. They are the forerunners of Dawn. The horses symbolise the Life-forces. In the poem, the ‘hippogriff’ is later referred to as “the great winged wanderer paraclete”. Thus the Paraclete in the title itself could be the Swan of Vedic symbolism and the poem a description of the flight of the Swan.

The leap that the mind now accomplishes is above the limitations of Time and Space. The stage of the Higher Mind is reached and there is already the consciousness of the unifying principle, which adds to the momentum of the flight presently. Thought achieves the condition of the Illumined Mind also, in which

the one unifying principle behind the puzzling variety is seen not as passing glimpse but as a stable, consistent, concrete reality. This realization results in the reassuring reflection of bliss and the face is lustered pale blue-lined. The process of groping is over, and now Thought is a determined and undaunted 'Pilgrim of Soul'. Thought is the function of the mind and is meaningfully used for mind in the present poem.

The colour is aptly signified here. The movement from the Higher Mind to the Illumined Mind, from the Illumined Mind to the Intuitive Mind, and from the Intuitive Mind to the Overmind is suggested by the shift from orange to gold red and from gold red to crimson – white.

Hungering, large souled to surprise the unconned
Secrets white – fire – veiled of the last Beyond,
Crossing power – swept silences rapture – stunned.

The third movement is described in these lines. Thought is now at the threshold of Jnana and in possession of the secret of Immortal Bliss. It crosses different intensities of Bliss or Sat – Chit – Ananda and is poised to becoming one with the Universal Self, losing its separate identity after Sravanam Mananam or recapitulation and Nididhyasanam or meditation should take place. And so thought sings the flame – word tune – the word that is incantation in its final leap from Bliss to mingle with Brahman. The words – 'white fire', 'veiled' and 'flame – word' are significant because even the Brahmasutra describes a released soul as possessing a flame-like power of animation, 'Pradipavadavesah'.

In the final movement, 'Self' was left, lone, limitless, nude and immune. This movement is described briefly in a simple line because here Thought loses its identity and by this loss it gains all. The poet too has presented infinite meaning in a simple line filled with poetic and mystic power. The individual self is gathered into the Universal Self. The released soul is identical with Brahman. The Jiva realises that what he needs is the Purusha, as the Upanishads point out: "Jattwamasi", "Aham Brahmasmi". All the attachments drop off and the self is nondual, and limitless in its capacity for expansion and animation, having achieved the amplitude of Divine consciousness. In this way, the evolution from Asat to Sat from Tamas to Jyotis and from Mrityu to Amrita is complete.

In a masterly analysis of the poem in its different aspects, Prof. Srinivasa Iyengar points out that the poem is yet another experiment that Sri Aurobindo successfully made to naturalise the classical quantitative metres in English, even like in this poem, 'Ascent' where again the same idea embodies the Catullan effectiveness. Prof. Iyengar also discusses the Christian associations of the word 'Paraclete' – it reminds us of Archangel Gabriel or the Holy Ghost. The ascent – descent principle is central in Aurobindo's philosophy – the ascent of the aspiring soul and the descent of Divine Grace.

4.B.ii). Critical Evaluation:

Sri Aurobindo is one of the great intellectuals of India. He is not only a poet, philosopher and patriot but also a mystic and a revolutionary. The poems of Sri Aurobindo reflect and analyse the Indian philosophy in general and 'the philosophy of Aurobindo' in particular. His poems are the best examples of his philosophy and intellectual sublimity. Again the poems are the best examples of a special school of poetry called Overhead Poetry.

"Jatasya Maranam Dhruvam". Everyone who is born must die, who is dead must be born again. There is no escape from this eternal cycle of birth and death. This is the crux of Indian philosophy and thought. The physical body is transient and the soul is eternal. It has no birth or death. The soul changes the physical body just like a human being, who changes clothes. It is the constant endeavour and trial of the human soul to break away from the physical shackles and bondages. The highest goal of the human soul is to attain complete freedom and total liberation from the physical world, and also wants to escape from the cycle of birth and death and finally merge with the Universal soul or Brahma or Paramatma. Once the Atma reaches and merges with Paramatma there is eternal and sublime Bliss or Chidananda. To attain this final goal or Moksha, the ultimate merge with the Brahma or Universal Soul or Paramatma is all-pervasive and omnipresent.

There are three different ways or methods for the human mind or soul to reach Moksha:

- i. Karmayoga: through noble and good actions.
- ii. Bhaktiyoga: through unconditional and total devotion and complete surrender at the feet of God or Paramatma.
- iii. Jnanayoga: knowing the ultimate truth or Brahmajnana through highest knowledge and intellectual endeavour.

Of all the three, the third one, namely, Jnanayoga, is sublime and most difficult. There are many physical, emotional and psychological barriers in this path. Sri Aurobindo's thought and philosophy advocates liberation or Moksha through Jnanayoga.

The present poem, "Thoughts the Paraclete" is the best example and exposition of the travails of the human mind and soul to set itself free from physical bonds and cross all physical and emotional barriers in its upward journey to reach its final goal of merging with the Universal Soul or Paramatma or Brahma, to attain eternal sublime on bliss.

In its journey towards Brahma, the human soul uses "thought" as its medium. This journey is possible because each human being has a spark of the divine in him. This spark of divinity enables him and helps him to attain Moksha or Salvation. Salvation is the knowledge of Ultimate Secret of all Creation or Brahma Jnana. The human mind is a unique gift of God and must be used properly in the realisation of

God Himself. 'Divine Bliss' is reflected through the mirror of mind. Mind is a mediator between human consciousness and divine consciousness. Our poem is a unique and special attempt to project in poetry and imagery, the ultimate experience of self-knowledge and entering the realms of the divine consciousness, through self – realisation.

The flight of the human mind is like the flight of a rocket, which soars high into space, after shedding different stages and attitudes, before entering the omnipresent space. Various stages of the flight of human soul is suggested through poetic imagery, symbolism and special colour scheme. The colour scheme of the poem is very important and plays a vital role in the proper understanding and appreciation of the poem. The use of the colour imagery adds poetic and mystical value to the poem.

God is the embodiment of perfection, we pray to Him because we desire to pray from imperfection. An awareness of imperfection and a desire for perfection imply Prapatti or self – surrender. The desire for perfection is not a desire that constricts the soul as other desires do, because it is the desire for desirelessness. In the words of Sri Aurobindo: "A mystic poem may explain itself or a general idea may emerge from it, but it is the vision that is important or what one can get from it by intuitive feeling, not the explanation or idea; "Thought the Paraclete" is a vision of revelation of an ascent through spiritual planes, but gives no names and the photographic descriptions of the planes crossed". (Life Literature – Yoga, Some Letters of Sri Aurobindo, 1967. (pp.149-150).)

4.B.iii) Technical Terms:

1. Paraclete: advocate – The Holy spirit as advocate/counsellor.
2. archangel: Divine entity above human beings and below God.
3. Spirit: The eternal human soul, always struggling, endeavouring to get liberation from the physical bondages and cycle of birth and death.
4. hippogriff: classical reference to a horse which has mystical and divine powers of reaching the realms of God.
5. Eremite: Archaic form of Hermit. A Sage or Saint visualising the ultimate reality and truth.
6. Abyss: Bottomless pit, full of dangers and difficulties.
7. ethers: Ether is an element in Nature, which is omnipresent even in space and vacuum.
8. Immune: Immune is a state in which no external influence affects.

4.B.iv. Summary:

The poem "Thought the Paraclete is an attempt to project in terms of poetry, the flight of 'Thought' as it takes off from normal intellectual plane, and sweeps across the illumined, intuitive and Overmental regions, finally disappearing bound for the ultimate.

The central idea of the poem, which is the transformation in Self, brought about as a result of the ascent of consciousness to the supramental level, is suggested by the imagery and the music, rather than closely argued out in terms of logical reason. We are expected to proceed from light to light, from one luminous revelation to another, and on to the next, and so on, till we arrive at and are lost in the rich illimitable calm of the wonderful last line.

There are four separate 'movements' in the poem. The first (comprising the opening five lines) movement describes limited human thought invading the realms of the Invisible and being, "Self-lost in the vasts of God". The second movement (comprising the next ten lines) follows – Thoughts' progress from Mind to Higher Mind, and from Higher Mind to Illumined Mind, from Illumined Mind to Intuition and from Intuition to Overmind. The next six lines describe the third movement. They tell us how the thought is racing beyond the Overmind and disappearing in the region of the Supermind. The last line marks the concluding movement: the realization of the infinite self is now complete, the ego is dead, the self is bare of all the sheaths of Ignorance – it is "lone, limitless, nude and immune".

Through these four movements Aurobindo makes a unique attempt to project in poetic terms a 'unique' experience of self-seeing. The evolution of the mind is conceived of as upward movement and the different states of the flight are described almost like the shooting up of the rocket, which at a certain stage casts off the outer capsule.

The beginning of the mind's flight from the stage of the normal functioning as the result of a divine spur, the quick progress of the mind to higher states like the higher mind, illumined mind, intuitive mind and overmind, the further movement from the supramental region and the final withdrawal of the individual self into the Infinite self – all these stages are poetically suggested. "Thought" is the function of the mind and is meaningfully used for "mind" in the poem.

4.C. Rose of God:

Rose of God, vermillion stain on the sapphires of heaven,
Rose of Bliss, fire - sweet, seven tinged with the ecstasies seven !
Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O miracle, O flame,
Passion flower of the Nameless, bud of the mystical Name

Rose of God, great wisdom bloom on the summits of being,
Rose of Light, immaculate core of the ultimate seeing !
Live in the mind of our earthhood; O golden Mystery, flower,
Sun on the head of the Timeless, guest of the marvelous Hour.

Rose of God, damask force of Infinity, red icon of might,
Rose of Power with thy diamond halo piercing the night !
Ablaze in the will of the mortal, design the wonder of thy plan,
Image of Immortality, outbreak of the Godhead in man.

Rose of God, smitten purple with the incarnate divine Desires
 Rose of Life, crowded with petals, colour's lyre !
 Transform the body of the mortal like a sweet and magical rhyme;
 Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood, make deathless the
 children of Time.

Rose of God like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,
 Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire passion of Grace !
 Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss ;
 Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life Beatitude's kiss.

4.C.i) Analysis of the text:

"Rose of God, vermillion stain on the sapphires of heaven Rose of Bliss, fire – sweet, seven tinged with the ecstasies seven!".

The five petals of Rose symbolise the five Divine Essence. Accordingly, the first divine Essence is "Bliss", in other words happiness. In the first stanza, the poet humbly prays that every heart should possess Bliss which should leap up in every heart.

In the very first stanza, the poet addresses God – "Rose of God ...". The colour of the rose is vermillion. He is addressing God who is on the Sapphires of Heaven. The words 'fire-sweet', 'seven-tinged', 'with the ecstasies seven' and the references to 'flame' are noteworthy because the aspiration for the Divine is conceived of as a psychic flame with seven tongues. Divinity is conceived as a psychic flame with seven tongues. Usha, the Goddess of Dawn is described in the Vedas as the mother of Seven Cows. She has seven names and seven seats. Hence 'Seven' has Vedic and mystic undertones. Moreover, 'Seven' has Upanishadic associations. The fourth line – "Passion – flower of the Nameless, but of the mystic name" looks difficult because the rose cannot be both a bud and flower at the same time, but it implies that rose at once symbolises the "Sugar and Nirguna Brahman".

Thus Sri Aurobindo gives a clear picture of the significant quality of God, Bliss, and prays that it should leap in the hearts of the human beings.

The second essence of God is "Light". And he humbly prays that human minds must be illuminated with "Light". The second stanza seeks illumination, light of knowledge in the human mind. Man must be brought out of darkness and his mind must be illuminated; filled with knowledge. In this stanza the poet addresses God as 'golden mystery flower'. It is suitably mentioned – 'Light the guest of the marvellous Hour'; because guest brings liberation.

In the third Stanza, the poet desires that God's "Power" should set the 'human will' – glittering and shining and accomplish the act of transformation. The poet compares the power of God with a diamond.

The poet says that God's power should with its diamond also pierce the night. As a result the will of the mortal should be brightened. The crust of 'Tamas' is to be broken and man needs to be infused with the consciousness of the Divine.

In the fourth stanza, the poet prays God to eliminate mortality totally and bridge Earthhood and Heavenhood. By making use of two words, 'lyre' and 'magical rhyme' the poet introduces the tone of music and touch of music. The petal referred here is "Life". Hence, the poet pleads that mortality should be removed and man must be filled with life. The poet pleads that the life of man must be transformed like sweet and magical rhyme. Make the mortal immortal, Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood, make the children of Time, deathless. Human life is to be devoted to God and death should be defeated. The harmony of colours is beautifully suggested in this stanza.

The final stanza refers to – 'Rose of Love' and the colour referred to here is 'ruby'. God is like a 'blush of rapture' on the face of Eternity, that blush of happiness arises only out of Love. Love should arise in the human heart – because it is afflicted with 'natural sorrow' and loss of pain.

"Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss; Make earth the home of the wonderful and life Beatitudes' kiss".

The poet is pleading God, to let love arise from the sorrowful and yearning heart of man who is in Nature's abyss. As a result the earth will be a wonderful place filled with eternal beauty, giving eternal pleasure and happiness.

Rose of Love is the symbol of Grace, and it is Grace that can redeem humanity. The lines are filled with poetic beauty. In the first stanza – "Leap up in our heart of humanhood", 'heart' is referred to and in the last stanza – "Arise from the heart of the yearning", 'heart' is referred to because it is the heart that is the seat of emotions and the source of peace and inward voice. 'Heart' coordinates different elements of life and creates the music of harmony.

The transfiguration of the mortal into immortal is not complete, unless the four attributes of Bliss, Light, Power and Life are held together in purposive conjunction by the quality of love. Love is powerful. It is rightly said in "The Holy Bible" – "Love Conquers all". Rose is the Symbol of Love. To conclude, Divine and Eternal love should arise in the human heart which is filled with the sorrow of physical desire and mundane motives.

4.C.ii). Critical evaluation:

"Rose of God" is a prayer uttered in pure and powerful poetry. In this prayer, the mind, heart and body become 'one harp of being'. It is a prayer that rises from the deepest sanctuary of the heart. It implies an ardent aspiration, which is bound to provoke a gracious response. According to the

philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, a determined prayer by the aspirant mortal is sure to be answered by a Divine descent. The key note of his philosophy is that self-realisation is not a retirement from and renunciation of life but should rather be a return to life in an effort to divinise it and create a new heaven on earth. Aurobindo stresses that man will further grow spiritually, and that the superman, exists not at the mere vital and mortal level, but will emerge at the spiritual level.

“Rose of God” gives us a picture of the new heaven on Earth with the flow of Divine Grace. At the same time it is an example of Overhead poetry that involves and implicates in us an act of spiritual communication.

“Rose of God” is a simple poem regarding the choice of vocabulary, imagery, symbolism and thought process. The flower rose suggests the colour rose and the rosy love inevitably leads to Dawn – the Dawn of Infinite. The rose echoes the great Dante and moreover the rose has a special place in the hearts of people, as the symbol of love and it has a special place in literature and specially in poetry. It has special charm and attraction to anyone or any gardener because it bestows great beauty and fullness to any garden. Hence the rose is a special flower and Aurobindo has chosen the rose and brought God and rose together. This poem is an effort to fill the gap between human conscience and Divine Conscience.

After reaching the highest level of Divine Consciousness, there is no difference between Atma and Paramatma. The human soul becomes one with God or universal soul. With this the colour scheme and colour imagery is also compiled because the soul attains the white Radiance of Eternity. In this poem, the philosophical argument becomes an experienced poetic and mystic vision, because the Love of God is the highest and purest form of Love. The desire for this perfection is the desire for desirelessness.

Sri Aurobindo developed a whole theory of ‘Overhead’ poetry, and in the poems of his last great period he tried to conquer the human difficulties and create a body of mantric, mystic poetry that came as a proper culmination of his long, sustained and inspiring career as a poet in the English language. All that it needed in an attractive and receptive ear, a mood of imaginative concentration that sees through forms and received formulas and reaches to the still centre, the radiant source of the poetic communication.

4 C. iii) Glossary:

Bliss	: Eternal joy and happiness.
Miracle	: Physically impossible but philosophically happening in reality.
Immaculate	: Pure white without any contamination.
Core	: Central part, most important.
Damask	: coloured like damask rose, velvety pink or light red.
Icon	: The idol of strength and power.
Smitten	: Bitter, have sudden effecton.
Lyre	: Musical instrument, producing melody.
Children of time	: Human beings, who are transient and temporary.
Externity	: Eternal entity which has no beginning, no end.
Rapture	: Ecstasy.
Beatitude	: The eternal beauty, giving eternal pleasure and happiness.

4.C.iv). Summary:

The poem “Rose of God” is a prayer and Invocation to God for granting and bestowing “Divine Qualities” to all human beings in an unconditional and unlimited way. Sri Aurobindo beautifully describes in the poem, the different shades of rose –a).red vermillion, b). golden, c). damask, d). purple, e). ruby.

The five petals of Rose symbolise the five divine essences. They are – Bliss, Light, Power, Life and Love. These are possessed by God in a limitless measure – and in fact God is these five qualities. Unfortunately our experience of these qualities is short lived. And our life is a bundle of sorrow, ignorance, incapacity, mortality and hate. Our knowledge is but ignorance and our love is severely qualified. Our power is directed towards a futile end.

Thus the poem is a prayer and Invocation addressed to God, for the grant of his qualities to humanity in an unlimited way; so that the gap between Earthhood and Heavenhood is bridged. The speciality of the poem is that Aurobindo’s God is a Universal God and the hymn could be recited in devotional ecstasy by a devotee of any religion denomination.

3.3.5 Sample Questions:

1. Bring out the character of Savitri as portrayed in the opening Canto, “The Symbol Dawn”.
2. How did Sri Aurobindo fashion a Cosmic epic poem from the Mahabharatha Legend in Savitri Book I, Canto I.
3. Comment on Sri Aurobindo’s use of the Symbol of Dawn in Savitri, Book I, Canto I.
4. “It is Savitri alone who fuses the lesser and the greater realizations into an integral and total transformation of limited human life into the Fullness and Splendour of the Life Divine” Discuss.

5. Elaborate the movements of 'thought' in the poem "Thought the Paraclete".
6. Bring out the colour significance and the traverse of the thought in Aurobindo's "Thought the Paraclete".
7. Bring out the contrast between the colours of Rose and qualities of God based on the poem "Rose of God".
8. Examine the significance of 'Rose' in the total structure of Sri Aurobindo's "Rose of God".

3.3.6. Suggested Reading:

1. K.R.S. Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, 3rd Edition, Sterling, 1983.
2. A.B. Purani, Sri Aurobindo's Savitri, An Approach And A Study: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1970.
3. A.B. Purani, Lectures on Savitri, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1962.
4. S. Krishna Sarma: Seed of Grandeur, Kamala Publication, 1970.
5. K.D. Sethna: Sri Aurobindo – the Poet, Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondy, 1970.

Mrs. Elim Jeevanajyothi

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Lesson 4

Indian Poetry in English (After Independence)

Structure

- 3.4.1. Objectives.**
- 3.4.2. Introduction.**
- 3.4.3. Features of New or Modern Poetry.**
- 3.4.4. Major New Indo-Anglian Poets.**
- 3.4.5. A Summary.**
- 3.4.6. Sample Questions**
- 3.4.7. Suggested Reading.**

3.4.1. Objectives:

The objectives of the lesson are to

- give a brief account of the distinguishing characteristics of Post-Independence Indian poetry in English.
- make a mention of some important writers of the period and their works.
- offer a brief distinction between the Post Independence poetry and pre-Independence poetry in English.

3.4.2. Introduction:

The poetry of the Indians writing in English after Independence looked entirely different. It was like the birth of a new genre as opposed to its pre-independence counter part which looked like a preparatory to post-independence writing. Much of the post-independence writing looks like a serious departure from tradition. The pressures of city life make an indelible impact on this writing.

Post-Independence poetry in English was not obsessed with the Romantic trends of pre-independence poetry. Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das and Shiv K.Kumar were now bent upon ushering in of a different kind of poetry. Their idols were the English poets like Eliot, Yeats and Dylan Thomas. At the same time however they were not ignorant of the age-old Indian tradition. The writers were opposed to mob psychology and preferred the prompting of their voices to mere popular belief.

The Indian writing of Post-independence era is characterized by a rejection of excess of romanticism, and is mostly dominated by the middle class intellectuals. Their base is urban rather than rural and poetry becomes more cerebral than emotional, in their hands. Their poetry reflects the pressures of the time. Discovery of the self and soul-search were some of its pronounced aspects. 'The era of hope, aspiration and certitude was gone, an age of merciless self-scrutiny, questioning and ironic exposure commenced' (M.K. Naik).

It also sounded a note of protest against blind acceptance of conventions and age-old superstitions. Like most of Indo-Anglian literature, it was also ' a curious native eruption', if one may borrow the words of Prof. Iyengar with regard to the whole gamut of Indian writing in English. In the words of Amar Kumar Singh, the physical and spiritual aspects of life are happily blended and reconciled in the poetry of this period. We also notice a happy synthesis of tradition and modernity, 'a synthesis of the age-old echo of India and the culture of the West... there are clear glimpses of it in the work of some of the leading modernists like Nissim Ezekiel... The poetry of A.K.Ramanujam shows how an Indian poet in English can derive strength from going back to his roots' (Amar Kumar Singh).

Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, Shiv K. Kumar, Keki N. Daruwalla, R. Parthasarthy, and Pritish Nandy among others, made a deep impression on the Post-independence scenario. Jayantra Mahapatra and Kamala Das made an equally effective impression. What is remarkable about all these poets is that they took their work, seriously.

3.4.3. Features of New or Modern Poetry:

The post-Independence period in the history of Indian English poetry is generally equated with the modern period. But not all the poets of this period can be considered 'modern' in the sense in which the term is used. Poets like Harindranath Chattopadyaya, Surendranath Dasgupta, K.D. Sethna and J.Krishna Murthi lived and wrote in the post-Independence period but they belonged more to an older tradition as they drew their inspiration from poets like Aurobindo and from indigenous philosophical and mystical traditions. However, as Iyengar observes, it is difficult to say when exactly the era of new poetry began in India. For example, the later Tagore, like the later Yeats in English literature, was as modern as the newest of the new poets. New poetry may however, be said to have begun in Indian English literature, with those writers who were hailed as the "Progressives" and the "Proletarians" and produced a literature of protest

disillusioned with romantic idealism and turning more satirical, cynical and ironic. One of the important consequences of this was that they began writing in a new style too.

Nissim Ezekiel is generally acknowledged to be the first 'new poet' in Indian English literature to express a modern Indian sensibility in a modern idiom, and his first book A Time to Change (1952) is said to be a landmark in the history of Indian English poetry. Ezekiel's appearance on the Indian English literary scene was not, however, an isolated phenomenon. It was part of a new awakening and a new trend brought about by the consequences of World War II and by the influence of the 'new poetry' in England, France and the U.S.A. Important factors like the end of colonialism, the birth of a new age of political freedom and social regeneration and a whole new attitude to life and letters were also responsible. There was a general reaction against the romanticism and philosophical mysticism of the earlier poets and an urge to discover new voices quite distinct from the old ones as also a new idiom which could help the poet to articulate his most private feelings. These trends, gathering momentum as they did in the fifties, led to the emergence of the Writers Workshop in Calcutta. P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao made an overt declaration of their aims in a manifesto which they added to Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry (1959) an anthology edited by them. These young poets made a formal rejection of the older school stating. "We claim that the phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojini Naidu". They affirmed the necessity for the private voice in poetry especially because they believed that they lived in an age that tended "so easily to demonstrations of mass approval and hysteria".

Lal and his followers condemned the spell cast over India by Aurobindo, Tagore and Sarojini Naidu. The new poets were not interested in philosophies "but in poetry of private personal concerns, a poetry which did not attempt grandiose schemes of historical or cosmic speculation, a poetry which was concrete rather than abstract, precise and lucid in statement rather than philosophically ambitions", as observed by H.M. Williams. Most of these new poets—Ezekiel, Sarat Chandra, Dilip Chitre, Keshav Malik, Agha Shahid Ali, Saleem Peeradina, R.D. Katak, Daruwalla, Gieve Patel, Adil Jussawala, Darius Cooper, Jimma Avisa, Meena Alexander, Jayanta Mahapatra, Deba Patnaik, Manohar Shetty and Shiv K. Kumar – do not have their roots in a culture which may be considered as purely Indian. Most of these poets being of middle-class, with an urban or metropolitan and often an academic background as also with experience of living in the West have become strangers to their indigenous culture. They have by choice or destiny cut themselves off from a cultural heritage which is essentially Indian and Hindu.

But taking a broader view, these poets bear witness to the very composite character of Indian culture, to its variety and heterogeneity and more importantly to the emergence of changed and changing patterns of values and sensibility which are seen in the contemporary Indian scene. They reflect perhaps the reality of the Indian socio-cultural situation which came into being in the post-Independence era.

The new poets are also not free of the charge of imitativeness and derivativeness made against the earlier poets. If the earlier poets were influenced by the Romantics and the Pre-Raphaelites; the poets of the post-Independence period may be said to have followed the footsteps of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, the later Yeats, W.H. Auden, Wallace Stevens, Tom Gunn and Dylan Thomas. In fact, their 'modernity' derives very much from the influence of their Western counterparts, for it is from them they seem to have got some of their themes as also their ideas of structure and style. At the same time there are other dimensions in their poetry which make them distinctively Indian. A considerable part of modern Indian poetry including the poetry in English draws its themes and ideas from the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha and from Vaishnava and Saiva devotional poetry and from the Indian myths and legends. Even a poet like Ezekiel, who, it is believed, does not have his roots in Indian culture and literary traditions does show an awareness of a world view which is more Indian than Western. These poets have also been moving towards establishing an indigenous tradition of Indian English verse.

Thus we can say that modern Indian poetry in English has characteristics which make it distinctive and different from the poetry of the earlier period. First of all, it has been a bold departure from the older, Miltonic, Romantic and Victorian traditions. It rejected the older themes and forms as well as national classics and mythology at best in its first phase of evolution. Most of the poets wrote in English more under an inner compulsion than any external motivation and they found delight in expressing themselves in English. In fact, they sought to demonstrate how a language like English could lend itself admirably well to the expression of a native culture and sensibility. It is a poetry of the urban and metropolitan rather than rural India and it is certainly a poetry which carries with it greater sophistication and complexity than that of the earlier years and shows considerable maturity and depth, clarity and precision, an earnest striving for perfection in the art of communication and presentation.

3.4.4. Major New Indo-Anglian Poets

Nissim Ezekiel:

Nissim Ezekiel was born in 1924 of Jewish parents. He served as a Professor of English in Bombay University. Sixty Poems (1953), The Third (1959), The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exact Name (1965), Hymns in Darkness (1976) and Latter-Day Psalms (1982) are some of his well known poetic works. Ezekiel was an awardee of the Sahitya Academy in 1982. feeling himself an outsider, Ezekiel fills his poems with a quest for identity. He preferred clarity of expression and balance of thought, -'I am at clarity above all,...I like to make controlled, meaningful statements, avoiding extremes of thought and expression'. He has also stated that Pound, Eliot, Yeats, Rilke, Macneice, Spender, Auden and modern American poetry as major influences on his poetry. In an article on "Indian Poetry in English", David McCutcheon observes:

Ezekiel, one of the few Indo-English poets...is similar in many ways to contemporary English poets like Thomas Blackburn, Thom Gunn, Philip Larkin—similar in his deft precision of phrase, everyday subject matter, self-irony, distrust of passion, hatred of pretension.

Nissim Ezekiel has been recognized as a painstaking craftsman, equally at ease with free verse or metre. Like Eliot obsessed with the perversities of London life, Ezekiel is preoccupied with the angularities of the city life exemplified by Bombay. In 'A Morning Walk' one of the poems in his The Unfinished Man, Ezekiel writes:

Barbaric city sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums.
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many-tongued,
Whose wages are in woods and crumbs.

In the words of Linda Hess, he is 'an endless explorer of the labyrinths of the mind, the devious delvings and twistings of the age, and the ceaseless attempt of men and poet to define himself,...' Yet another specialty of Ezekiel is his attempt and ability to integrate the senses and the intellect by trying to seek a balance between these two. 'The problem of maintaining a balance between the abstractions of the intellect and the particularities of sensory experience both of which are continually expanding, is a very familiar one to zekiel'.

There is a fine blend of the secular and the religious in the poetry of Ezekiel, but he is not for the esoteric or the abstruse. The complexities of Indian spiritual thinking, do not appeal to him, at all. Ezekiel respects passion, as according to him, 'The blood must leap before the spirit sings', as he writes in his The Exact Name. For him, 'the true business of living is seeing,/ touching, kissing,/ The epic of walking in the street and loving on the bed.' The Unfinished Man, another collection of poems by Ezekiel has been praised by Jussawalla as 'the most perfect book'. David McCutcheon compares Ezekiel to W.H.Auden, 'We find the same deft precision, the same mastery of colloquial idiom, the personification and generalized efforts, the stock phrases in new contexts, the juxtaposition of the commonplace and the erudite, the same compactness, startling appropriateness'. The central themes of Ezekiel's poetry have been classified as 'love, personal integration, the contemporary scene, modern urban life and spiritual values.'

A.K.Ramanujan

A.K. Ramanujan was born of Tamil parents in Mysore in 1929. He rose to be Professor of Dravidian Studies and Linguistics at the University of Chicago. He became a well known writer. The Striders (1966) and The Selected Poems (1976) represent him well. He lived in the United States for most of his life, but his sensibility is essentially Indian. The poet is constantly in search of his roots which are deeply embedded in India. Thus English gives him only the outer forms of structure, while his inner forms and inspiration are derived from "Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore'. The Indian family emerges as the central metaphor of his poetry.

In the words of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, 'He (Ramanujan) is like one caught in the cross fire between the elemental pulls of his native culture and the aggressive compulsions of the Chicago milieu'. The Striders, the first book of poems by Ramanujan, establishes what M.K.Naik describes it as 'the impossible interconnection between a Tamil Mysore Brahmin and a New England water insect'. Both Ramanujan and Ezekiel suffer from a sense of alienation. Ramanujan states:

I cannot unlearn
conventions of Despair
I must seek and will find
My particular hell only in my
Hindu mind.

As K.R. Srinivas Iyengar observes, 'In The Striders Ramanujan summons from the hinterland of memory buried moments of suspense, surprise or agony, and turns them into disturbingly vivid poems'.

Relations, a second book of poems by Ramanujan is troubled with a sense of nostalgia. Childhood memories which normally constitute the staple of Romantic poetry, occur in Ramanujan also. Some of these have nothing romantic about them,- rather they are revolting experiences like the fear of snakes, of Ramanujan as a young boy, or the sight of a dead man's body. There are others however which evoke pleasant memories.

On the other hand 'Obituary', a poem by Ramanujan, dealing with the death of his father, is ironical. In the words of Amar Kumar Singh, 'The collocation of the typical poverty of a lower middle class citizen and of the Hindu rituals of death gives the poem the tone of detached irony'.

In 'Entries for a Catalogue of Fears', Ramanujan deals with the theme of rebirth. But the poet deals with themes, lightly and not with the gravity of other writers who may deal with similar subjects, philosophically. It is such a casual response that earned him the allegation,- "Ramanujan fails to integrate self and society sufficiently to become the voice of the community."

Shiv. K. Kumar

Born in 1921 at Lahore, Shiv K. Kumar was educated at Lahore and Cambridge. He was a Professor of English at the University of Hyderabad and was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1978. Like T.S. Eliot, he is also worried about the loss of love and human values in a decadent society . Irony is a weapon in his hands. Articulate Silences (1970), Cobwebs in the Sun (1974), Subterfuges (1975), Woodpeckers (1979) and Broken Columns (1985) are his well-known poetic collections.

For Shiv K. Kumar, "Poetry is the expression of the total man'. His poetry is full of the tedium, restlessness and horror of modern life. In the words of Prasad and Singh, 'His poems burn with the smouldering flames of boredom and horror in modern urban life or explore the self through encounters with men and women, surroundings and experiences...' The Critics also draw our attention to the themes in the poetry of Kumar, 'the cohesive fabric of his poetry textures itself with the recurring themes of love, sex and companionship, their limitations, failure

and consequent suffering, anguish of urban living, birth and death, exploration of self and flux of identity...'

Keki N. Daruwalla

Born in 1937 at Lahore, Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla rose to become one of the important Post-independence Indo-Anglian poets. Apparition in April (1971), Under Orion (1970), and Crossing of River (1976), are his poetic collections. His poetry is realistic and satiric. It is steeped in images of Indian village life. Like his fellow poets, he is also averse to the pressures of city life and urbanization, 'I am not an Urban writer and my poems are rooted in the rural landscape', he writes. He believes in spontaneity as the true force behind poetic inspiration, for, 'sophistication', according to him, 'takes away the power of verse'.

Keki N. Daruwalla is highly objective. He takes care to present local surroundings. The poet is concerned with the 'here' and 'now'. Apparition in April deals with barrenness and sterility extending beyond one area. Crossing the Rivers is about the rhythm of life with its cycle of birth, growth and death. The important river in the poem is the Ganges, and a pilgrimage to the Ganges (and the holy city of Varanasi) symbolizes the soul in its odyssey to self-discovery. S.M. Punekar salutes Daruwalla as 'the complete Indo-Anglian poet'. Nissim Ezekiel hails him as possessing "literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness" which according to him, are usually lacking among Indian poets writing in English.

P.Lal

P.Lal, besides being a poet himself, is also a promoter of poetry, with his writers' workshop. He is known for his 'Kavita Manifesto' of 1959, which he announced along with K.Raghavendra Rao. This manifesto was in sharp reaction to the earlier generation of poets. But the reaction was hyperbolic and distorted. The manifesto was a starting point for the new poetry of the sixties. It included a desire for (1) a faith in 'a vital language', (2) a poetry dealing with concrete experiences in concrete terms, (3) poetry free from propaganda, (4) a discipline which would not come in the way of experiment, by leading to obscurity, (5) condemnation of all forms of imitation, (6) a preference for realistic poetry over Romantic poetry, ...to 'leave the fireflies to dance through the neem', (7) poets to be offered patronage to carry on with their vocation, unhampered, and (8) the need for the private voice.

The manifesto is not very logical, and it is one-sided, besides being undemocratic, but it surely sets the tone for the entire revolt of the sixties.'

R. Parthasarathy

Another is Parthasarathy with his renowned Rough Passage. Like A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy is from the south, an expatriate writer and showing a similar preoccupation with familial and cultural past. Both write poetry which is often personal, reminiscent and confessional. But Parthasarathy's expatriate experience is of a different nature. Having felt uneasy in India, he went to England with high expectations but was 'disenchanted.' He returned to India with the hope of identifying with her totally but found that his ten years of experience as a poet writing in English tended to alienate him from his own civilization. Disappointment is Parthasarathy's "principal theme, whether with the edgy complications of love, with the insoluble problems of poetic composition or ;with England in the face of the actuality of what he expected ... He accepts disappointment with an irritable but unprotesting glumness, a slightly morose recognition of the way things are".

Jayanta Mahapatra with his exploration of intricate human relationships, and Kamala Das with her disarming frankness about issues on which others may hesitate to speak frankly, are the other great samples of Post-Independence Indian writing*.

This being a brief discussion of representative writers of the period in question, the students would do well to further their study with the select Bibliography provided under 'Suggested Reading'.

3.4.5. A Summary:

Indian poetry in English after independence looks entirely different from the poetry before independence. The latter was Romantic as opposed to the realistic poetry of the Post-Independence era. Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Shiv K. Kumar who may be described as some of the representative poets of the period were influenced by Eliot, Yeats, and Dylan Thomas. They believed in the private voice rather than the voice of the masses guided by conventions and superstitions. They were basically middleclass intellectuals. Their poetry

* The students may refer to lessons on Jayanta Mahapatra and Kamala Das for elaborate details on these writers and works

reflected the pressures of the age. They believed in a blend of tradition and modernity. Ezekiel's quest for identity, Ramanujan's search for roots, Shiv K.Kumar's advocacy of human values and Daruwalla's belief in spontaneous genesis of poetry are some of the features of their poetry.

3.4.6. Sample questions:

- a. Give a brief account of the distinguishing features of post-Independence poetry in English.
- b. Write a note on any of two poets in English, of the post-Independence era.

3.4.7. Suggested Reading:

- M.K. Naik (ed.), Aspects of Indian writing in English: Essays in Honour of Professor K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, (Macmillan of India, Delhi, 1979).
- Ashley E. Myles (ed.), Anthology of Indo-Anglian Poetry, (Mittal publications, New Delhi, 1991).
- Meenakshi Mukherjee (ed.), Considerations, (Allied publishers Pvt. Ltd; Bombay, 1977).
- Amar Kumar Singh, Enlightening Studies in Indian English Poetry (Manank publications Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1993).
- Madusudan Prasad (ed.), Living Indian English Poets: An Anthology of Critical Essays, (Sterling publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, (1989).
- Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (ed.), The Oxford Indian Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets, (Oxford University Press, Bombay, Second Impression, 1993).

- Prof. T. Viswanadha Rao

Lesson-5

Nissim Ezekiel & .A.K. Ramanujan

Structure

- 3.5.1 Objectives
- 3.5.2 Introduction
- 3.5.3 The Writers-their lives and works.
 - A. Nissim Ezekial
 - B. A.K. Ramanujan
- 3.5.4 Analysis of the Poems
- 3.5.5 A brief critical evaluation of the literary texts and the Writers' works.
- 3.5.6 Summary.
- 3.5.7 Key words
- 3.5.8 Sample Questions
- 3.5.9 Suggested Reading.

3.5.1. Objectives

- a. to provide a brief biographical and intellectual background of the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel and A.K.Ramanujan.
- b. to offer critical analyses of the prescribed poems.
- c. to focus on seminal aspects of the poetry of the writers under consideration.

3.5.2. Introduction

Born of a Jewish background, Nissim Ezekiel feels a sense of alienation from the typical Indian context steeped in Hindu culture. ' I am not a Hindu, and my background makes me a natural outsider. Circumstances and decisions relate me to India', he said. Parathasarathy opines, 'Ezekiel's poetry is both an instrument and the outcome of his attempt as a man to come to terms with himself. One finds in the poems an imprint of a keen, analytical mind trying to explore and communicate on a personal level feelings of loss and deprivation.' William Walsh points out that there is a 'discontinuity between the private voice and public image' in the poetry of Ezekiel. Hence we find Ezekiel departing from Indian tradition and his mechanical responses are Western in their connotations. He was one of those poets who tried to create a new kind of Indian poetry in English. He was influenced by Writers like Eliot. The pictures of city life or megalopolis dwarfing the individual which date back to the French symbolist Baudelaire and which Eliot copies in The Waste Land, give a clue and inspiration to Ezekiel who sees nothing better in the city life exemplified by

Bombay. Irritated with such deviations from Indian tradition on the part of Indian writers in English, P. Lal has prescribed some norms for Indian writers trying to compose poems in English; "...no Indian writer, in English or any of the other Indian languages, should commit pen to paper until he has spent ten years of his adult life, carefully pondering the Indian classics, learning the Indian tradition, and absorbing the Indian myth".

As for Ramanujan, his long stay abroad makes him feel a sense of alienation from which he wants to extricate himself by a constant obsession with the Indian past 'both familial and racial' as M.K. Naik characterizes it, and calls it a major theme in Ramanujan's poetry. Ramanujan belongs originally to a typical middle-class South Indian Brahmin community. His observations are influenced by this social background, consciously or unconsciously. His childhood and memories of a snake charmer allowing snakes to move about, the shock that he felt as a child to see deformity and ugliness in humans, and the first stunning exposure to death as a reality, made a deep impression on his being. Searching for roots, Ramanujan was attracted by stories of the past and contrasted them with the dull routine of the present.

Ramanujan was no blind follower of tradition. He disliked the routine procedure adopted by many, of accepting the tradition as axiomatic, without questioning its premises. His poems bear an ample testimony to this. The poet tried to offer a dispassionate distinction between the usable component of tradition and the unusable, superstitious elements thereof. A.K. Mehrotra rightly observes, 'Ramanujan's deepest roots are in the Tamil and the Kannada past, and he has repossessed that past, in fact made it available in the English language. I consider this a significant achievement.'

5.5.3 The Writers-their lives and works.

A Nissim Ezekiel

Nissim Ezekiel was born in the year 1924. The place of his birth is Bombay. His parents were Jews. No wonder Ezekiel became a Professor of English in Bombay university, as both his parents belonged to the academic community. They were both academic administrators. His father was the principal of many colleges whereas his mother was the principal of a school. The teaching instinct came to Ezekiel naturally. All his activities were coloured by his love of teaching. Whatever he did was marked by the indelible imprint of a teacher.

Ezekiel did his M.A. in 1947. Later he went to U.K. to study philosophy. He had also the experience of working at odd jobs. His first collection of poems A Time to Change was published in 1952. Ezekiel distinguished himself by publishing many collections of his verse. He has also edited many books. He was a visiting professor at the university of Leeds in 1964; was on the international visitors programme, USA (1974); and cultural award visitors, Australia (1975). Ezekiel was given the Sahitya Academy award in 1982.

Ezekiel's works include Sixty Poems in 1953, The Third in 1959; The Unfinished Man in 1960; The Exact Name in 1965; Three Plays in 1969; Snakes Skin and other Hymns in 1974; Hymns in Darkness in 1976 and Latter Day Psalms in 1982. Ezekiel uses both meter and free verse. He claims to be influenced by great writers like Ezra Pound, Eliot, Auden, Spender and Yeats. The poet affirms that he loves clarity and balance. Not being a Hindu, the poet calls himself an outsider. His poems are a struggle for identity and his being an outsider lies at the root of his search for identity.

B. A.K. Ramanujan

Born of Tamil parents in Mysore in 1929, A. Krishnaswamy Ramanujan had his school education in Mysore. After completing a term on a Fulbright scholarship, he joined the teaching profession. He loved the typical mobility more characteristic of an American than an Indian. He was unhappy that students were not up to the mark and their writing abilities were far below the expected average. He started equipping himself in linguistics and this academic journey landed him in the University of Chicago where he worked as a Professor of Dravidian studies. He concentrated on the study of folklore. He has translated prolifically from Tamil into English. Poems of Love and War, published in 1984, is a collection of Tamil verses translated into English. Striders (1966) and Relations (1971) are the well-known collection of poems in English, composed by him.

The strange thing about him however is that although he lived for more than two decades in U.S.A; he retained the Indian sensibility. He has himself stated that English gave him the 'outer forms' while the South Indian languages like Kannada and Tamil gave him the 'inner forms'. Precision and economy are the watchwords of Ramanujan's poetic vocabulary. Metre as well as free verse are employed by the poet, equally well. The poems of Ramanujan are centred around the Indian family as its chief focus. The Striders, The

Interior Landscape, Relations, Speaking of Shiva are some of his important works. Ramanujan's Selected Poems were published in 1966.

3.5.4 Analysis of the Poems

A. Nissim Ezekiel

(1) Night of the Scorpion

Ezekiel's 'Night of the Scorpion' is a satire against the superstitions in the Indian country side. Ezekiel describes the night when his mother was stung by a scorpion. There was heavy rain on that day for almost ten long hours. To save itself from the rain, the scorpion hid beneath a sack of rice. Tired of the long wait, it came out and in the darkness it stung Ezekiel's mother and ran away. His mother cried in pain. The farmers of the village came running like a swarm of flies and chanted the name of God a hundred times to save his mother from the evil effects of the sting of the scorpion.

It was pitch dark and using candles and lanterns they searched for the scorpion in vain. They wished that the victim's sins of a previous birth may be burnt away. Others said that her present suffering may lessen the misfortunes of her next birth. They thought the pain would cancel her sins so that the good that she did in this life may become more prominent and help her to become virtuous. Some went a step further and philosophically theorized that the poison might take away desire and ambition from her flesh, thus making her pure of soul.

The poet's mother suffered all through in spite of all the prayers of the villagers. The poet's father was no believer, although he tried every thing possible to reduce his wife's pain, but in vain. Following the popular belief that the poison of the scorpion's sting troubles the victim for twenty four hours, the poet says that his mother lost her pain in twenty hours.

The poet's mother thanked god that the scorpion stung her and not her children.

2. Enterprise

"The Enterprise" is published in a collection of poems called 'The Unfinished Man'. The poem is about a group of pilgrims full of hope at the outset. But when they encounter trials and tribulations on their voyage they become doubtful and start losing their faith. They are more worried about their safety than God-realization. Some critics read an autobiographical meaning into the poem by bringing out Ezekiel's remarks that the poem was written for what he describes it as 'personal therapeutic purposes'.

The poem begins with some people having started on a pilgrimage when the journey began. The pilgrims were exalted and their earthly burdens looked light. The second stage was marked by frustration and the heat of the sun scorched them mercilessly. In the beginning they observed things around and the ordinary commercial transactions of farmers. They crossed three cities where people had been taught the distinction between evil ('The way of serpents') and of innocence ('of goats'). But when the pilgrims were confronted with a desert, some of them gave up in disgust, one of whom was a good conversationalist.

Another phase was reached when some of them lost their way. Thereupon a section of them left the group. Eventually they were deprived of their daily necessities. The journey broke their backs. When they reached their so called destination, it looked unattractive and even unidentifiable. They wondered why they had gone there. The trip was worthless, as it was not marked by great deeds. Ezekiel concludes that we should obtain spiritual evolution at home, and not by physical journeys to some imaginary or conventionally accepted place of grace.

B. A.K.Ramanujan

1. The Striders:

'The Striders' is a poem chosen from the collection of that name by Ramanujan, published in 1966. A thin volume of more than two score poems, The Striders contains the title poem of that name. A strider, we are told, is the name of a New England water bug or insect. The poem has been compared to 'The long-legged fly' by W.B. Yeats.

The poet gives an impressive description of the insect. It is described as 'thin stemmed' and 'bubble-eyed'. It is light and weightless. Like a prophet who walks on water, the insect also walks on water. The comparison looks ironic and Metaphysical in its vein. The being is also endowed with amphibious abilities and it is described as being able to sit on land or in water, with the same degree of comfort. It is this seeming equanimity that prompts the poet to compare it to the prophets of old.

2. A River:

'A River', one of the poems published in The Striders, has the river Vaikai flowing through Madurai, as its background. The river has been a well known seat of culture in Tamil Nadu. The poet describes Madurai' as a

City of temples and poets
Who sang of cities and temples.

The poet however is highly critical of the apathy and lack of concern shown by the so-called elite at the sorrows and sufferings of humanity. Poets who seem to be fascinated by the rivers in spate seem to be equally unconcerned about the sufferings caused by these rivers, a point which irritates Ramanujan.

The river Vaikai which is by no means perennial, bares itself in summer, being thoroughly dried up. The watergates are clogged by women's hair, and the dry sand looks like the ribs of a human, devoid of flesh. The river in spate has been a subject of many poems by others. Ramanujan offers a contrast between the dried up river and the river in flood. He refers to the vast devastation effected by the river Vaikai, in spate. While in flood, the river is the very incarnation of death, it carried off three houses of poor villagers, washed away a pregnant woman, and it did not spare even a couple of innocent cows. The poet is puzzled and disgusted that no poet ever contemplated the possibility of expressing sorrow at the death of a pregnant woman who died by drowning. Who knows, the poet muses, she might be bearing twins in her belly? The poet is surprised and shocked by the indifference of the people, who take the loss of the living creatures, casually. It looked to them 'usual'. The expression 'as usual' carries the poet's satiric sting. The poet also gives a picturesque description of the natural setting of the river with cattle 'lounging in the sun' and 'wet stones glistening like sleepy crocodiles'.

3. Obituary

Yet another poem prescribed for study, is 'Obituary'. An obituary is a commemorative column in newspapers, mostly. The poet chooses to remember his dead father. His father died poor and left no worth while legacy, behind. He left a dusty table full of papers which were of no consequence and also, as the poet mockingly alliterates, 'debts and daughters'. Daughters are no better than debts, given the Indian social context where the daughters are looked upon as belonging to the debit side rather than the credit side.

The dead father left only his ashes, behind. The ashes were consigned ritually to the river waters which acquired a holiness by the confluence of three rivers. His mother was now a poor widow, an outcast for all practical purposes, being avoided as inauspicious on all social occasions worth the name. To add to the woes of an already depleted set of resources, there were the annual obsequies to be performed, religiously with almost unaffordable though unavoidable expenses.

The poet continues in this vein to add that his father whose birth was through a caesarean operation, died of a cardiac arrest. Only a son could remember such details, which

to the others would have been really insignificant. The poet much later comes across his father's name in an obituary column of an old newspaper used as a wrap for some eatables from a grocery. The Poet ironically says that some paper somewhere has spoken kindly of his father, either in the form of a passing reference or in the form of a brief and formal obituary.

Thus 'obituary' is a touching but ironic poem about the death of an ordinary mortal, dealing with a situation that might occur to any one, any where.

4. Entries for Catalogue of Fears

This poem is full of negative reflections, of psychosis, and fears that grip men. The narrator observes that he cannot distinguish a fear from a hope or a hope from the frightful face of a human in the window of a house on fire. The narrator is more confident of fear than of hope. The origin of fears cannot be traced easily. They are born blind and advance rapidly.

The narrator is a psycho, who fears altitudes and imagines things like insects, knives and mocking voices laughing at him or her. While giving a lecture, the narrator feels, suddenly that his or her nails have grown unusually long, though no one seems to believe it.

The miserly narrator, collecting breadcrumbs in a bag, for ants or 'shelled peanut' in the hand for birds, considers it a great charity! Aged sixty and with one glass eye, the narrator is not yet reformed and takes the name of God, only occasionally, and notices the hand of destiny in the fall of 'a tubercular sparrow' becomes pseudo-philosophical by trying to see the 'one in the Many'. The narrator who had a double vision, and was unable to see even an object clearly and notice it as one, is now able to see the one in the many 'with a small adjustment of glasses',- in other words, the person who was always confronted and troubled with a multiplicity of options and innumerable doubts, is now able to integrate his vision! This is highly questionable, as only a miracle could do this. The tone of the poet is thus highly mocking and ironic.

5. Love Poem for a Wife, 1:

The narrator of the poem, a husband, tells his wife that what keeps them apart is their 'unshared childhood'. His father is dead. So she can't meet him. He cannot meet her father as he is old and moody. The absence of grandparents, makes his wife, all the more nostalgic. His childhood can be partly reconstructed from the family albums. The picture of a father, a mother, are all there in the album. An unapproved friend and a sister-in-law are all remembered for a variety of reasons. If relationships have to be continued from the cradle to the grave, from childhood to death, only marriages like those of cousins in Egypt can be of

help, although such affinities would be considered incestuous in other religions. Ramanujan speaks with tongue in cheek about child marriages and the dogmatic adherence to promises of arranged marriages that are made among kith and kin even before children are born to them. Such consanguine weddings we know, are not considered healthy as per medical opinion.

6. Chicago Zen

‘Chicago Zen’, as A.K. Mehrotra rightly observes, ‘treats of the multilingual poet’s twofold condition, his interior spaces divided on the one hand and conjoined on the other..’

The narrator asks some people to make their house clean and not to forget to name their children. The traffic of Chicago is tricky and lights can strike someone blind, if one is not watchful. People sitting or standing in the skyscrapers, watch the riverscape from their windows in huge places like Michigan. There are several unreachable places in United States. They can be approached neither by flight nor by boat. They can be more easily contacted with the help of telecommunications,- by means of a phone.

The poet concludes by asking us to watch out our steps, as one might stumble in trying to negotiate a step which is not there (one is reminded here of Eliot’s The Cocktail Party where a character observes that when someone is dressed for a party, and coming down the stairs, there is one step more than his feet expected, and one many come down with a jolt).

3.5.5. A Brief Critical Evaluation: Ezekiel’s poetry is a personal quest for identity, commitment and harmony in life. Michael Garman says that Ezekiel is a poet of whom it is not trivial to say that his poetry and his life are inextricable and whose purpose in writing is to make a harmony (life, poetry) out of a purely biological existence”. Speaking of Ezekiel’s pursuit of self-discovery through poetry, H.M. Williams says that he “uses poems as experiments, he seeks to dive deep into the psyche, into his own psyche”. For example, in “Enterprise”, we have seen how an idealistic pilgrimage undertaken with all its hopes and dreams has its struggles, drop-outs, differences and when the goal is reached, “we hardly knew why we were there.” This kind of metaphysical question is arrived at after passing through considerable probings into the psyche. The pilgrimage for self-identity has turned into a weary trek. The last line “Home is where we have to gather grace” is almost Biblical in its reference to grace and in the general note of submission. It indicates Ezekiel’s decision to look for cultural, social, literary, political and linguistic roots in India.

“Night of the Scorpion” reveals a complex pattern of ideas and images. It is a poem where synthesis and analysis both work alongside each other. The poet’s response to the

simple yet complex thought patterns of the culturally backward neighbours is one of the irony. The chaotic incantations of the friendly neighbours fail to impress both the father and son, who represent scientific, rational thinking. The poem is an ironic presentation of contrast between popular superstition and sceptic rationalism. At the same time, Ezekiel acknowledges the unifying factor of a mother's love, which falls beyond the range of his irony: "Thank God the Scorpion picked on me / and spared my children." Using a mixture of metaphysics, faith and superstition, Ezekiel seems to mock not only at the 'ancient magic' but also that science has not succeeded in throwing light on the mystery of evil and suffering anymore than ancient magic did.

A.K. Ramanujan is essentially a poet of memory who shows an intense preoccupation with the past, which makes his poetry not only a poetry of the self but also of family history and cultural history. His poetry becomes a vehicle of the criticism of the self and of the world around him. As in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, that criticism is articulated with remarkable precision and flair for detail and in an ironic mode which brings him closer to many modern poets.

Ramanujan has made use of clever structural and metrical strategies. He also makes use of his South Indian Brahmin background, especially of his experiences and impressions of the joint families and tightly-knit familial bonds and structures. A consciousness of the past colours his love-poetry also. In "Love Poem for a Wife: 1" he regrets that "Really what keeps us apart/ at the end of years is unshared / childhood." Perhaps his long sojourn in the U.S.A. explains his persistent obsession with his Indian past – both familial and racial. With the search for Hindu roots there is an accompaniment of the self-critical, ironic approach which brings out the inadequacies of the Hindu orthodox would to cope with the present day realities of modern life. We see this in the poem "A River" where Ramanujan ironically brings out the complacency of the old poets who sang of the river only when it was full and in floods. In contrast Ramanujan gives us a glimpse of the summer scene when the river dries to a trickle. By implication he is critical of the new Tamil poets who still echo old Tamil poets refusing to look at the reality. He reveals real concern for the suffering lot having an emotional content too, which is contrasted by the mechanical reportage of the havoc of the floods by a visitors to Madurai. It is Ramanujan's detached and ironic observation of life that enables him to make, in the words of Bruce King, " a realistic debunking of the romanticization of traditional Tamil Culture." Another excellent example of this can be found in the poem "Obituary".

3.5.6. Summary

Both Ezekiel and Ramanujan suffered from a sense of alienation, the feeling of being an outsider. Ezekiel was a Jew and hence he suffered the alienation of a non-Hindu in a cultural context which was typically Hindu. Ramanujan was born a Hindu, but being away from India, he felt uprooted from the soil of his original culture.

Ezekiel raised his voice against superstitions and maintained that one can seek God, within. God can be realized and no external efforts like pilgrimages are necessary, according to him. The Night of the Scorpion and The Enterprise bear a witness to this.

Ramanujan on the other hand, feels that he is sandwiched between two cultures- the East and the West. He is plain and frank in his condemnation of unquestioning acceptance of the prescriptions of conventional religion with regard to rituals.

3.5.7. Key Words

Striders	:	A water bug or insect of New England.
Sand ribs	:	The sand of the riverbed looks like the ribs of a human devoid of flesh and blood, after the river is completely dried up.
A tubercular Sparrow	:	a sparrow suffering from T.B. or tuberculosis And hence almost on its way out. The expression is an indirect reference or allusion to the statement in Shakespeare's <u>Hamlet</u> , 'There's divinity in the falling of a sparrow',-used by Ramanujan, ironically.
Antipodes	:	Places diametrically opposite to each other (on the globe).

3.5.8 Sample Questions:

- Write a note on Ezekiel's concern for human values and his satire against superstitions.
- Write a brief note on the sense of alienation in the poetry of Ramanujan and Ezekiel.
- Comment on the autobiographical element in Ramanujan's poetry.
- What are the important themes in the poetry of Ezekiel and Ramanujan?
- "Family is the central metaphor in the poetry of Ramanujan"-Discuss.

3.5.9 Suggested Reading:

- Ashrey Myles. (Ed.) Anthology of Indo Anglican Poetry, (Mittal publications, New Delhi -1991).
- Madhusudhan Prasad. (Ed.) Living Indian English Poets: An Anthology of critical Essays, (Sterling Publishers pvt., Ltd., New Delhi, 1989).
- Nissim Ezekiel, Collected Poems (1952-1988) (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989).
- The Oxford Indian Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets, Krishna Mehrotra (Ed.) (Oxford University Press, Bombay, second impression, 1993).
- A.K. Ramanujan, Collected Poems (Oxford India paper backs, Oxford university Press, New Delhi, 1995).
- Meenakshi Mukherjee (Ed) Considerations, (Allied publishers pvt.Ltd Bombay, 1977).
- Amar Kumar Singh, Enlightening Studies in Indian English poetry (Manak publications pvt ltd., New Delhi, 1993).
- Avadesh K. Srivastava (Ed) Alien Voice: Perspectives on common wealth Literature, (Prior House India, Luknow, 1981).
- M.K.Naik (Ed.) Aspects of Indian Writing in English; Essays in Honour of Professor K.R. Srinivas Iyenger, (Macmillan of India, Delhi, 1979).

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Lesson – 5

(Nissim Ezebiel)

ENTERPRISE

It started as a pilgrimage,
Exalting minds and making all
The burdens light. The second stage
Explored but did not test the call.
The sun beat down to match our rage.

We stood it very well, I thought,
Observed and put down copious notes
On things the peasants sold and bought,
The way of serpents and of goats,
Three cities where a sage had taught.

But when the differences arose
On how to cross a desert patch,
We lost a friend whose stylish prose
Was quite the best of all our batch.
A shadow falls on us and grows.

Another phase was reached when we
Were twice attacked, and lost our way.
A section claimed its liberty
To leave the group. I tried to pray.
Our leader said he smelt the sea.

We noticed nothing as we went,
A straggling crowd of little hope,
Ignoring what the thunder meant,
Deprived of common needs like soap.
Some were broken, some merely bent.

When, finally, we reached the place,
We hardly knew why we were there.
The trip had darkened every face,
Our deeds were neither great nor rare.
Home is where we have to gather grace.

A.K. Ramanujan

1. THE STRIDERS'

And search
for certain thin –
stemmed, bubble - eyed water bugs.
See them perch
on dry capillary legs
weightless
on the ripple skin
of a stream.

No, not only prophets
walk on water. This bug sits
on a landslide of lights
and drowns eye –
deep
into its tiny strip
of sky.

2. A RIVER

In Madurai,
city of temples and poets
who sang of cities and temples:

every summer
a river dries to a trickle
in the sand,
baring the sand- ribs,
straw and women's hair
clogging the Watergates
at the rusty bars
under the bridges with patches
of repair all over them,
the wet stones glistening like sleepy
crocodiles, the dry ones
shaven water - buffalos lounging in the sun.

The poets sang only of the floods.
He was there for a day
when they had the floods.
people everywhere talked
of the inches rising,
of the precise number of cobbled steps
run over by the water, rising
on the bathing places,
and the way it carried off three village houses,
one pregnant woman
and a couple of cows named Gopi and Brinda, as
usual.

The new poets still quoted
the old poets, but no one spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,
kicking at blank walls
even before birth.

He said;
the river has water enough
to be poetic
about only once a year
and then
it carries away
in the first half - hour
three village houses,
a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda
and one pregnant woman
expecting identical twins
with no moles on their bodies,
with different- coloured diapers

to tell them apart.

3. OBITUARY

Father, when he passed on,
left dust
on a table full of papers,
left debts and daughters,
a bedwetting grandson
named by the toss
of a coin after him,

a house that leaned
slowly through our growing
years on a bent coconut
tree in the yard.
Being the burning type,
he burned properly
at the cremation

as before, easily
And at both ends,
left his eye coins
in the ashes that didn't
look one bit different,
several spinal discs, rough,
some burned to coal, for sons

to pick gingerly
and throw as the priest
said, facing east
where three rivers met
near the railway station;
no longstanding headstone
with his full name and two dates

to hold in their parentheses
everything he didn't quite
manage to do himself,
like his caesarian birth
in a Brahmin ghetto
and his death by heart
failure in the fruit market.

But someone told me
He got two lines
In an inside column
of a Madras newspaper
sold by the kilo
exactly four weeks later
to street hawkers

who sell it in turn
to the small groceries
where I buy salt,
coriander,
and jiggery
in newspaper cones
that I usually read

for fun, and lately
in the hope of finding
these obituary lines.
And he left us
a changed mother
and more than
one annual ritual.

LOVE POEM FOR A WIFE 1

Really what keeps us apart
At the end of years is unshared
Childhood. You cannot, for instance,
meet my father. He is some years
dead. Neither can I meet yours:
he has lately lost his temper
and mellowed.

In the transverse midnight gossip
Of cousins' reunions among
Brandy fumes, cashews and the Absences
of grandparents, you suddenly grow
nostalgic for my past and I
envy you your village dog-ride
and the mythology

of the seven crazy aunts.
You begin to recognize me
As I pass from ghost to real
And back again in the albums
Of family rumours, in brothers'
anecdotes of how noisily
father bathed,

slapping soap on his back;
find sources for a familiar
sheep-mouth look in a sepia wedding
picture of father in a turban,
mother standing on her bare
splayed feet, silver rings
on her second toes;

and reduce the entire career
of my recent unique self
to the compulsion of some high
sentence in His Smilesian diary.
And your father, gone irrevocable
in age, after changing every day
your youth's evenings,

he will acknowledge the wickedness
of no reminiscence: no, not
the burning end of the cigarette
in the balcony, pacing
to and fro as you came to the gate,
late, after what you thought
was an innocent

date with a nice Muslim friend
who only hinted at touches.
Only two weeks ago, in Chicago,
you and brother James started
one of your old drag-out fights
about where the bathroom was
in the backyard,

north or south of the well
next to the jackfruit tree
in your father's father's house
in Alleppey. Sister-in-law
and I were blank cut-outs
fitted to our respective
slots in a room

really nowhere as the two of you
got down to the floor to draw
blueprints of a house from memory
of everything, from newspapers

to the backs of envelopes
and road-maps of the United States
that happened

to flap in the other room
in a midnight wind: you wagered heirlooms
and husband's earnings on what
the Uncle in Kuwait
would say about the Bathroom
and the Well, and the dying,
by now dead,

tree next to it. Probably
only the Egyptians had it right:
their kings had sisters for queens
to continue the incests
of childhood into marriage.
Or we should do as well-meaning
Hindus did,

Betroth us before birth,
forestalling separate horoscopes
and mothers' first periods,
and wed us in the oral cradle
and carry marriage back into
the namelessness of childhoods.

Lesson 6

Jayanta Mahapatra and Kamala Das

Structure

- 3.6.1. Objectives
- 3.6.2. Introduction
- 3.6.3. The Writers-Life and works
 - A. Jayanta Mahapatra
 - B. Kamala Das
- 3.6.4. Analysis of the texts: A. Jayanta Mahapatra
- 3.6.5. Key words:
- 3.6.6. Analysis of the texts: B. Kamala Das
- 3.6.7. Key words
- 3.6.8. A brief critical evaluation
- 3.6.9. Summary
- 3.6.10. Sample Questions
- 3.6.11. Suggested Reading

3.6.1. Objectives:

The lesson aims to

- a. give a brief account of the themes in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra and Kamala Das.
- b. throw light on the distinctive features of Mahapatra's poetry.
- c. discuss the poetry of Kamala Das as poetry born of a woman's personal experiences and the consequent protest.

3.6.2. Introduction:

Jayanta Mahapatra emerged as a major poet in the post-Independence scenario of Indian writing in English. The scenario was characterized as we have seen in Lesson (4), by a rejection of the conventions of the past and the writers being influenced by Western trends or alienated from the land of their birth, namely India, having had to live abroad. 'Modern Indian verse of the 1950's had, in rejecting an earlier, out-of-date provincial romanticism, consciously limited itself to qualities of precision, clarity, responsibility and intelligence' (Bruce King). But Mahapatra's poetry is rooted in the soil of his birth. The scenario and legends of Orissa constitute an important backdrop of Mahapatra's poetry. 'Orissa is the hub of Jayanta Mahapatra's iconoclastic perambulations' – (Parthasarathy).

'The major themes of the modern Indian poets are- protest, escape, affirmation (faith or love), self-expression (confessional), restlessness, loneliness, feminism, love, sex, religion, Marx, Freud, romance, pessimism, sensualism, symbolism, spiritualism etc... Daruwalla's poetry voices rootlessness, Kamala's poetry sex, primitiveness, sensualism and loneliness, Arun Koltakar's protest and religion, Ezekiel's poetry symbolism...' (Amar Kumar Singh)

Kamala Das is a rebel against conventions and restraints imposed by society. She hates the usual practice as it appears to her, of men looking upon woman merely as playthings:

... these men who call me
Beautiful, not seeing
Me with eyes but with hands.

The poetry of Kamala Das has also been described as confessional poetry. She has been compared to Sylvia Plath. The poetess has this to say about herself:

I also know that by confessing
by feeling off my layers
I reach closer to the soul...
I shall some day see
My world de-fleshed, de-veined, de-blooded...

Kamala Das spoke only on her behalf, for herself, and to give a shape and voice to her experiences, but she has been dubbed as the voice of a liberated woman.

3.6.3. The Writers - Life and Works:

A. Jayanta Mahapatra

Jayanta Mahapatra was born in 1928 at Cuttack, Orissa. He had his school education locally and his college education at Patna. He taught physics to students (in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack) for more than three decades and is now, retired. The poet writes:

My origins lie in the lower middle class, ...my upbringing was in a narrow rural community; and I learnt English in a missionary school from a British school master-but mostly from the exciting novels of Ballantyne, Burroughs and Haggard.

Mahapatra started late in his life as a poet. He is a late starter, but he did catch up with the others by composing a considerable amount of poetry in a short time. His was, in the words of John Oliver Perry, 'late-blooming and fast moving career.' 'I started writing poetry late... when I began, I suppose I was more carried away by what the English language could do; I was so much obsessed by the feel of words... It was a wrong thing

perhaps, this craze for language,...But as the years went by,...my notion of poetry kept changing...' Some of his works include Close the Sky, Ten by Ten (1971), Swayamvara and other poems (1971), A Father's Hours (1976), A Rain of Rites (1976), Waiting (1979), The False Start (1980), Relationship (1980), Life Signs (1983), Dispossessed Nests (1986), Selected Poems (1987), Burden of Waves and Fruit (1988), and The Temple (1989).

Of these Close the sky, Ten by Ten, A Rain of Rites, Waiting, The False Start, and Relationship, have attracted a lot of critical attention. Mahapatra's poetry can neither be understood nor enjoyed by a mere casual reading. As Alan Kennedy rightly points out, 'Jayanta Mahapatra is hard to read'. Writing about Mahapatra another critic Gary Corseri, observes: "Mahapatra's poetry is deep as the well springs of the human spirit. It cannot yield its riches to the casual reader. It must be mined and grappled with." As a poet, Mahapatra tells us, he is influenced by European and Latin American poets:

I am more fond of the European and Latin American poets today than the American poets, for example. But I admire Robert Penn Warren; especially his later books. I enjoy reading Neruda, and Seferis; the Spanish poets Alexandre, Alberti, Cernuda and Jiminez.

B. Kamala Das

Kamala Das was born on March 31st, 1934 in Punnayurkulam in South Malabar. She was educated at home and did not attend any college. Married at a young age, she was unhappy with the conventional institution of marriage. She has noticed marriage as a male-dominated institution, and was frustrated. Her emotional frustration is recorded in her poems and her autobiography, My Story, translated into fourteen languages.

Kamala Das writes both in English and Malayalam. She says:

I am an Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not our tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, friends, visiting cousins,
Everyone of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak is
All mine, mine alone.

Three volumes of her poetry are, - Summer in Calcutta (1965), The Descendants (1967) and The Old Play House (1974). Her collected poems were published in 1984.

Kamala Das was honoured with many awards. She won the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 1969, for her collection of Malayalam short stories, entitled Cold. She

was honoured with the National Sahitya Akademi Award in 1989, and the Asian P.E.N. Poetry prize. She has also won an award for journalism, –the Chimanlal Award. Kamala Das loves being an Indian and loves her Indian heritage. But she loves her children more. She loves her being a mother.

3.6.4. Analysis of the texts – Jayanta Mahapatra:

Mahapatra's first book of poems is Close the Sky, Ten by Ten (1968). There are forty-nine short lyrics in the collection. The themes prominently discussed therein are loneliness and love. The opening poem of this collection is 'Loneliness'. Loneliness is one of the major themes of Mahapatra's work. He defines loneliness as

Loneliness is when an act, a word
hangs undecided and unborn
in the eyes of longing...

The world of daily routine and the world of poetic imagination are contrasted in the poems in this volume. A Rain of Rites (1976) presents a serious improvement over Close the Sky, Ten by Ten. It is marked by a greater variety of themes and experiments with language than the latter. The poems in the collections are set against an Indian backdrop. The idiom is natural and appropriate-looking; the poet has also learnt to capture the tone of contemporary poetry.

Waiting (1979) is a far more realistic collection with a simpler idiom. In many of the poems here, the poet falls back upon India's cultural past rooted in Hindu ethos while in others he is preoccupied with the Christian concept of guilt and sin. Some of the poems seem to be modeled upon Dylan Thomas's work. On the whole however the work is dull, although it presents a thematic unity, attained through references to the Hindu ethos.

The False Start (1980) presents a thematic and artistic improvement over the earlier works of Mahapatra. What gives such strength to these poems in their reflections on serious themes like the meaning of life. 'Indian Summer', a poem prescribed for study, occurs in this collection of poems. The poem is open-ended and can be interpreted variously by the readers. 'Some of the small mood pieces, as far example 'Indian Summer', provide a do-it-yourself kit which can be willed into an assemblage approximating a vignette or a little story composed of understated scenes'.

Relationship (1980) is an important poem by Mahapatra, as for the first time in his poetic career; the poet has learnt to write a long poem, successfully. It is a long poem in twelve sections and has rightly earned him the Sahitya Academy Award. It is not out of place to note here that Mahapatra was the first to have earned such an award as an Indian

writing in English. The Sahitya Akademi citation says that Relationship has an 'awareness of Indian heritage, evocative description, significant reflection and linking of personal reminiscences with race memory'.

The poet has claimed and rightly too, that the poem is 'a simple, fused reading experience', something, that his earlier works have failed to provide. The poem is a kind of dream sequence full of the myths, symbols and history of Orissa. Although the poet claims to have integrated his experiences in the poem, M.L.Raina, a critic, expresses his dissatisfaction with the unresolved conflicts of life of which the poem is full, as it 'offers neither consolation, nor resolution, only a 'dream' in which the antinomies of life remain as sharp as ever'.

i) 'Indian Summer'

Over the souging of the sombre wind,
priests chant louder than ever:
the mouth of India opens.
Crocodiles move into deeper water.
Mornings of heated middens
smoke under the sun.
The good wife
lies in my bed
through the long afternoon;
dreaming still, unexhausted
by the deep roar of funeral pyres.

The poem 'Indian Summer' is published in The False Start, a collection of poems, in 1980. Even in the hot breeze blowing with its rustling noise in summer, the priests continue to indulge in religious chants, undaunted by and unmindful of the unhelpful weather conditions. If anything, they seem to have become even more vehement and determined than ever. The continued and determined resilience of Indian heritage amidst adverse conditions seems to be betokened by the voice of the chanting priests, figuratively described as the 'Indian mouth'.

The unbearable heat of the Indian summer which dries up the mouth of streams, forces the crocodiles to move further and deeper into the water sources like rivers of which there are many in India. A stench seems to assert from dunghills roasted by the hot sun, with the fumes that come out from them under the unbearable heat.

The narrator's wife is unperturbed by the heat of summer as she is drowned in a dream, a wish. The 'Funeral Pyres' may also refer to, as the poet himself points out in a note to 'Dawn at Puri', another poem, that 'It is the wish of every pious Hindu to be cremated

at Puri. Swargadwara (Gateway to Heaven) is the name of that part of the long sea-beach where the funeral pyres go on burning' (Poet's note as quoted by Vilas Sarang, Indian English Poetry since 1950 – An Anthology, p.153).

Probably we may look at it another way also and say that even the funeral pyres with their fire and smoke fail to wake her up from her sleep which continues till the midday. Life itself is like a dream and the human beings have to deceive themselves in the belief that they will live long, and pretend as though life on earth is a permanent phenomenon, knowing fully well that death is always around the corner,- death that is symbolized by the 'Funeral pyre'.

ii) 'The Moon Moments':

The poem opens with an allusion to the starlight reflected on the mat on which the poet probably reclines. The starlight is now here and now there on the mat, not because the stars roll, but because the moving or passing clouds give one such impression, when one sees the images on earth. Mahapatra however, poetically expresses the thought as 'the faint starlight rolls restlessly on the mat'. The women indulging in a casual conversation in the open have the reflections of clouds passing over their eyes. The poet seems to be transported by the thought of the moon. In his imagination, he is constantly on the move and moves from one place to the other. The poet wonders why one possibility or thought leads to another, 'why does one room invariably lead into other rooms?' he asks himself and seems to pose the same questions to the others, as well.

People open the doors of their minds to a flood of thoughts, - thoughts which are not fully formed and are at best, vague in their drift. The indistinctness or lack of clarity of these thoughts is transferred to the doors of the mind, and we have the poet describing these as 'Vague doors'. People fondly hope and seem to be almost convinced that our minds frequently and at regular intervals, may lead to something new, day by day. Like the wind blowing constantly against a tree, people constantly allow thoughts to disturb their minds.

Time however is no prophet, nor is it a visionary capable of looking into the future. No one can tell what is in store for one, as it is hidden in the womb of time. The mere passage of time is no guarantee for our transformation. Time does not seem to have the ability or the trick of making us forget the visions of childhood. Love and fellow feeling force us into an honourable course of human action.

The delicacies imposed by human civilization force him to be silent. He is tongue-tied even on matters with which he is conversant. He wonders as to what kind of humility

prevents him from being able to reveal the reality to others. Like the dark clouds enveloping the moon, his closely guarded secrets seem to lie lodged and hidden within his bosom, secretly for years.

But the time has at last arrived when the poet's sight of vision is no longer bedimmed by any inhibition of his requirements. He can no longer hide his feelings. He would rather give them a voice and a shape. It appears that doubts and questions which assailed him so long can no longer be hidden. Like the gods who wander freely, he also wants to free himself by ventilating the doubts, the emotions, and the grievances that troubled his mind, so long.

iii) 'Total Solar Eclipse':

'Total Solar Eclipse' is a poem based on such an eclipse which occurred on 16th February, 1980. The poet chooses the holy city of Puri as the setting of his poem, as the eclipse of the sun is a rarer event than the lunar eclipse and is observed with dogmatic sanctity. Tradition has it that those accustomed to chanting a 'mantra' or mantras daily in their regular prayer, ought to chant the same during the time of eclipse and if they do not do so, the deities associated with the mantras may not confer their benediction on their devotees.

The holy city of Puri had suddenly become silent, as after taking a holy dip just about the time of onset as prescribed by the almanacs, of eclipse, people sit down for meditation, to propitiate the deities whom they daily worship in the form of chanting a 'mantra' or mantras.

Not an echo was heard as people went into meditation, quietly like a tongue-tied and guild-ridden infant. Banners were fluttering as usual on the 'gopuram' or top of Lord Jagannadh's temple. Ordinary people, fairly accustomed to the observance of religious practices on such occasions, filled the alleys that lead to and from the giant temple street. Before going to the sea for bath and after coming out of their bath, and before sitting somewhere in quiet meditation, they were chanting mantras aloud and in harsh voices. Their bodies were full of sacred ash ('Vibhuti'). as the eclipse could be of limited duration during which they had to chant all the mantras they chant daily, by way of ritual revision, they were hurrying through the lanes, 'like hunted dogs'. Like the Pascal fast associated with Easter, their people were also on a fast, as it is customary for the religiously-minded Hindus to go on a fast during the period of eclipse. Mahapatra dismisses all kinds of such fasts as 'dire superstition'.

As we know that a solar eclipse occurs when the moon interferes between the sun and the earth (don't forget that Mahapatra is a physics teacher), the poet describes how the objects of nature are submerged in darkness as 'Quietly the moon's dark well moves on' during the time of the solar eclipse.

Keeping in view the well-known phenomenon of animals and other living creatures being frightened and perplexed as a result of unexpected darkness enveloping the earth during the day, the poet describes even frightening creatures like the cobra and the hyena, being for once, frightened in turn, as they never do it before. The harsh vultures and the mild sparrows alike, come under the spell of the eclipse.

The crocodile suspiciously raises its snout from the deep water, like the Brahmin priest who is dogmatic and who tries to feel secure in his belief of outdated and disintegrated human values which continues to dominate the diseased civilization of the contemporary times.

3.6.5. Key words:

Soughing	:	making a rushing, rustling, or murmuring sound
Middens	:	a dunghill
Paschal fast	:	a fast pertaining to Easter or the Jewish festival of Passover

3.6.6. Analysis of the texts – Kamala Das

Summer in Calcutta (1965): This is the first anthology of Kamala Das's poems. It is a collection of fifty poems. The poems deal with love and the frustrations in love besides a frank discussion of sex. They also present a contrast between dream and reality, as Iyenger points out. 'Summer in Calcutta', the title poem, presents a bleak picture of the typically hot Indian summer. Another poem, 'The Dance of Eunuchs' is a poem symbolic of emotional sterility. 'Luminol' is a poem about a woman who is unable to discover love in a world governed by lovelessness. 'An Apology to Gautama' and 'The Testing of the Sirens' deal with a woman in love with two men, one her husband and another, probably a lover. The poetic world of Kamala Das is highly personal and autobiographical.

The Descendants (1967): This is a thin volume. It has twenty-nine poems. 'Jai Surya', a poem prescribed for study, is one of the poems in this collection. The poems in this collection deal with loneliness and frustration. 'The Looking Glass' reflects the frustrations of women in a world dominated by men. They are denied emotional satisfaction in a male world characterized by mere physical gratification. 'Jai Surya' is a fine lyric which glorifies

maternal love. A mother forgets all her inconveniences in the birth of a child. The love of the child is now permanent and makes her forget her frustrations and emotional conflicts.

The Old Playhouse and Other Poems (1973): This collection contains thirty-three poems, of which only thirteen are new ones as the other twenty are taken from the earlier works. Love continues to be the chief concern of Kamala Das in these poems, also. She is also preoccupied by the notion of death. 'The Old Play House' is a poem directed against male domination, a theme which is common enough in her poems. 'The Stone Age' is yet another poem in the same vein. Kamala Das writes about extra-marital relations. She justifies such love by seeking refuge in the cult of Radha and the story of Mirabai. She feels that a woman asks for love, but is answered only by lust, instead:

I met a man, loved him. Call
him not by any name, he is every man
who wants a woman, just as I am every
woman who seeks love. In him...the hungry haste
of rivers, in me... the ocean's tireless
waiting.

i) 'An Introduction':

I don't know politics but I know the names
Of those in power, and can repeat them like
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with
Nehru. I am Indian, very brown, born in
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one. Don't write in English, they said,
English is not your mother tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you ? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like ? 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,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see ? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing
Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When
I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me

But my sad woman body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I
shrank
Pitifully. Then . . . I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl,
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep in through our lace draped windows.
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty, It is time to
Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when
Jilted in love. . . I met a man, loved him. Call
Him not by any name, he is every man
Who wants a woman, just as I am every
Woman who seeks love. In him . . . the hungry haste
Of rivers, in me . . . the oceans' tireless
Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,
The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
I; in this world, he is tightly packed like the
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying

With a rattle in my throat. 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.

This is one of the poems in Kamala Das's poetic collection Summer in Calcutta. The poem fulfils a dual role, namely expressing her desire to write in English and her wish to assert her identity as a woman.

The poetess introduces herself as typical, ordinary, average Indian woman, innocent and not conversant in the diplomatic ways of the world. She is bilingual in her literary creations. She can use Malayalam or English, equally well. She is bitter to her detractors. Addressing them sarcastically as 'critics, friends, visiting cousins', she asks them to leave

her alone so that she may write in the language of her choice, namely English. She argues that she may not be an adept in English, and yet she prefers to speak and write in English. It is her wish and she is ready to face the consequences of her decision, willingly. She is a human being and her speech is after all human, whether she speaks or writes in English or any other language. She has the freedom to choose and she does not allow any one to dictate the choice of the language she has to employ. It is a living speech and a living language, unlike the indistinct noise made by the non-living objects in nature.

After thus vehemently silencing her critics, Kamala Das goes on to describe how she grew into full womanhood. She describes how she was at first a child, then attained puberty and finally attained full womanhood. However she was disappointed when her desire for love and emotional fulfillment were answered wrongly by mere fulfilment of physical desires.

A disgusted Kamala Das put on the dress of a male for some time and then people told her to dress like a woman. She felt that almost every man wanted a woman only to fulfill his sensual desires. To her, any and every man looks ego-centric like a sword in its sheath. It is she who makes the advances but without proper reciprocation. She is really ashamed at such a state of affairs. She is painfully driven to that very self-centredness which she hated so much in the individuals of the opposite gender:

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.

ii) 'The Wild Bougainvillea:

The poet recalls a few sad days in Calcutta. It was a summer and a few days then seemed to pass rather slowly and moodily. The days were spent so moodily that she compares them to mourners who accompany a bier. She had no rest even in her bed. Her bed (standing for sleep) was like a disturbed or troubled sea. Like a ship tossed on its waves, she was also psychologically upset, and like a woman in passion, she groaned and moaned with desire for a man from another town.

The passion could not last long. She took long walks on roads she had never seen before, and came across many faces. The faces looked very charming. The world is a good world, she thought, full of distortions and temptations. She walked through streets besides the sea, saw floating boats, and smelt rotting fish. She also walked on streets where call girls waited for customers.

Finally she came to streets near old cemeteries where the memories of the dead seem to have died along with them. The tombstones on which their names have been

inscribed have been lashed by rain to such an extent that the names were no longer visible. No mourners seem to be bothered about them. No one offered a bouquet or even a tear.

But nature seemed to be more concerned and considerate and it was nature who offered a token in the form of some blooming marigold and some 'wild red bougan-villae/climbing their minarets'. These images of death seem to have made an impact on the mind of the poetess. The thought about the young man as a result, becomes reduced to a memory, and one day the poetess sends him some roses as a token of her affection. It is not clear whether the poetess is remembering a dead man or whether she is making an offer of roses to a relationship by reducing it to something like a memory, a thing of the past and as a result of the decision to discontinue this passionate longing, she feels free in her mind and has an untroubled sleep, to wake up afresh in the morning, with the slate of her memory of the 'man from/Another town', wiped clean.

iii) 'Jai Surya':

This is a poem about the joy of motherhood. It looks different from many other poems of Kamala Das in that it is not about frustration, bitterness or disappointment of an emotional life.

It was a rainy day in rainy season. All the trees which were thoroughly wetted and which showed water dripping from the trees, made them look like weeping trees. The moss which grew on the wet trees looked like Eczema. From beneath the earth, worms came on to the surface, during the rain. It rained on the day when a son was born to her. The labour pains of the poetess synchronized with the roaring rain. The rain gave company to the woman in labour. The sighing, wailing, and roaring of the woman in labour seemed to be echoed by the rain. The poetess says that she smiled and stopped to hear the sound of the rain.

Only those who desired something, those who had an interest of their own, those who had no love, in other words, only those who were not selfless and those who were opposed to sacrifice, felt pain and sorrow. For a moment, the poetess also felt like the earth or soil in which the seed was implanted. Only a child could fill the void or emptiness in her life. Lust, which is often mistaken by people for love, has to be discouraged. The foetus growing in her womb is capable of becoming a child. It is the birth of the child that matters and not what is responsible for it. The child is like a treasure that is washed ashore and can be collected and matters more to us than the tides that wash it in. The boy to whom she gave birth, looked like a streak of light amidst the encircling gloom of night. He was

Jaisurya, the son of the writer. Like a right born out of a wrong thing, and like the golden day born out of night, he was born out of the union in the dark, the union on a dark night. The word 'darkness' is mentioned again and again in the last ten lines of the poem.

3.6.7. Key Words:

hunger for a particular touch : a passionate longing for a physical union with someone.

Dreamless sleep : a sleep unperturbed or untroubled by desires that may not be fulfilled.

Sickly smiles : The women were grown sick of the routine of trading in flesh for their livelihood and their smiles were artificial, and 'sickly'.

Love is not important that

Makes the blood carouse : Mere physical passion makes one emotional, but that cannot be called love. The poet condemns such passions.

3.6.8. (A) A brief critical evaluation:

The poet Jayanta Mahapatra uses images from the Hindu ethos to project his private experiences. He oscillates between Hinduism and Christianity. To a certain extent his poetry presents this conflict. 'Mahapatra is unable to ignore Hindu culture and appears in many poems to accept its world view, including reincarnation, while in other poems he is troubled by Christian guilt and his divided inheritance. His preoccupation with his relationship to his past and Indian culture and the recurrence of specifically Indian scenes give it a unity' (Bruce King). It would be appropriate to quote here the words of Mahapatra, in a conversation with Norman Simms:

I don't think I am a religious person in the way most Indians are. Frankly, I am not. Physics did make me more analytical, helping me to break ties with my ancestral beliefs; and still, the basic quality of acceptance, of an unshakeable closeness with my destiny persists on.

Mahapatra's poetry is characterized by ambivalences and 'no critical consensus has been reached when it comes to describing' it. It has an autobiographical backdrop, but tends to be philosophical and subtle in its connotations. Even his use of language marks him as different from other writers of the period. 'His language', says Nirajan Mohanty 'ordains a metamorphosed style which helps give it a meditative, contemplative quality'.

What is remarkable about the poetry of Kamala Das is the clarity and spontaneity of her style in addition to her brutal frankness about issues about which many other women writers would not have spoken with the same ease and frankness. Her language, as she claims, is honest 'human speech' as she describes it:

The language I speak
 Becomes my mine, its distortions, its queerness
 All mine, mine alone. It is half English
 Half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
 It is human as I am human, don't
 You see... It
 Is human speech,...

Kamala Das has a remarkable verbal felicity. She knows that words can be a nuisance, but they come to her, spontaneously, and without being sought after. Her comparison of words to leaves, reminds us somewhat of Keats who says that poetry should come spontaneously like the leaves of a tree, or 'better it had not come at all.' Kamala Das writes:

All round me are words, and words and words,
 They grow on me like leaves, they never
 Seem to stop their slow growing
 From within...But I tell myself, words
 Are a nuisance...

 ... words are a nuisance, but
 they grow on me like leaves on a tree,
 They never seem to stop their coming,
 From a silence, somewhere deep within.

The charge of obscenity was leveled against the poetry of Kamala Das, as a result of her dealing with sex and matters relating to sex with an openness and frankness which are a rarity in Indian women writing in English. But she is not a pornographic writer, as some mistake her to be. She observes, 'A poet's raw material is not stone or clay; it is her personality. I would not escape from my predicament even for a moment'. The desire for emotional fulfillment is an important and obsessive theme of all her poetry. She wants to love, and be loved, but this is not to be and so she fulminates in anguish.

I want to be loved
 And
 If love is not to be had
 I want to be dead.

But such an emotional sterility is common to all modern poetry as being reflective of the situation of man in modern society. 'What is over powering about her poems', says Parthasarathy, 'is their sense of urgency. They literally boil over...' The writer has also recorded the memories of her childhood and his poems like 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' and 'My Grandmother's House'. 'From every city I have lived I have remembered the noons in Malabar with an ache growing inside me, a homesickness.'

3.6.9. Summary:

Mahapatra's poetry is rooted in the Indian soil. The poet uses images from Hindu culture to project his private experiences. He is influenced, according to his own confession,

by Latin American Spanish poets. He hails from a lower middle class. Although a late starter, he started composing publishing poetry, swiftly. He has won the Sahitya Academy award, as a result. The poems of Mahapatra are full of love and loneliness. They are also against dogmatic adherence to age-old superstitions. He condemns them in his poems like 'total solar eclipse'.

The poetry of Kamala Das is a poetry of protest against established conventions and restraints imposed by the society. Her poetry is rooted in personal experiences and is hence described as confessional poetry. Her style is clear and spontaneous, characterized at times by brutal frankness. Her discussion of sex led some to wrongly conclude that she is an obscure or pornographic writer. But she simply projects her personality with remarkable openness. Summer in Calcutta (1965), The Descendants (1967), and The Old Playhouse (1974) are three of her poetic collections. She has won many awards for her poetic achievement, including the National Sahitya Akademi award. 'An Introduction' is about the spontaneity of her poetry. 'The Wild Bouganvillae' is about her passionate memories and 'Jai Surya' about the happy memories of the birth of a son.

3.6.10. Sample Questions:

- 1 Write a note on the common themes of Mahapatra's poetry.
- 2 Trace the evolution of Mahapatra as a poet.
- 3 Write a note on the important themes in the poetry of Kamala Das and how she handles them.
- 4 Discuss the poetry of Kamala Das as essentially the poetry of protest.
- 5 Write a note on the feminine sensibility of Kamala Das.

3.6.11. Suggested Reading:

- R. Parthasarathy (ed.), Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets, (University Press, Oxford, 1976).
- Madhusudan Prasad (ed.), The Poetry of Mahapatra: A Critical Study, (Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 1986).
- Madhusudan Prasad (ed.), Living Indian English Poets: An Anthology of Critical Essays, (Sterling publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1989).

- Aravind Krishna Mehrotra (ed.), The Oxford Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets, (Oxford University Press, Delhi, Second Impression, 1993).
- Amar Kumar Singh, Enlightened Studies in Indian English Poetry (Manak Publications Pvt., Ltd., 1993).
- Vilas Sarang (ed.), Indian English Poetry Since in 1950: Anthology, (Disha books, A division of orient Longman, 1990).
- Ashley E. Myles (ed.), Anthology of Indo-Aglian Poetry, (Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1991).

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Lesson - 7

Rabindranath Tagore : *The King of the Dark Chamber*

Structure

- 3.7.1 Objectives
- 3.7.2 Introduction
- 3.7.3 Tagore, the dramatist
- 3.7.4 Analysis of the Play
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- 3.7.6 Symbolism
- 3.7.7 Critical Evaluation
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- 3.7.10 Suggested Reading

3.7.1. Objectives

This lesson enables the reader to

- understand the symbolic element in the play.
- trace the Vaishnava tradition of the interdependence of God and soul inherent in the play
- appreciate the effective use of song, music and poetry by Tagore.
- understand the greatness of Tagore's dramatic art.

3.7.2. Introduction

Of the different genres of Indian Writing in English, there is an abundance of poetry, fiction and prose of a non-fictional variety, but it is marked by a paucity of drama. Although the first drama in English (The Persecuted by Krishna Mohan Banerji) was written as early as 1831 in India, playwriting never really established itself. Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo were the two poets who also made significant contribution to drama before the rise of modern drama. To be precise, Tagore did not write plays originally in English but belongs primarily to the Bengali theatre. M.K. Naik thus questions his inclusion in Indian English literature. But Tagore's English versions are not mere mechanical translations of his original Bengali works. There is a certain creative effort which goes into his English translations that merits the label 'transcreation' or 'creative translation'. Tagore's poems, plays, novels and short stories which were originally written in Bengali were later translated by the poet himself and others into English. He took great delight in translating his plays for it gave him the opportunity of improving upon the original. He made dramatic changes in the

plays and also condensed them often. As a result of such alterations and modifications, the English versions of the originals were very compact.

Rabindranath Tagore was a great poet, dramatist, novelist, short story writer, musician, painter, actor, producer, critic, educationist, patriot reformer, prophet and humanist; in fact he was not one person but a multifaceted personality. He was reverently called Gurudev and Rishi. His artistic imagination reflected the soul of resurgent India. Though engaged in the national struggle for freedom, the artist in Tagore made him rise above the immediacy of circumstances. His aesthetic detachment enabled him to assess properly the more significant relationships between our past and our present, our predicament and our destiny, our own culture and that of the world. Thus he became a symbol of our national consciousness far more than our other great leaders. As D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu says, as a child of the Indian Renaissance, Tagore emphasized the values of intellectual and imaginative creation. As a product of the Indian Reformation, he stressed the need of relating the enlightenment of outward Nature with the illumination of the inner spirit. Tagore thus effected a fruitful synthesis in his career and achievement between our Renaissance and our Reformation.

3.7.3 Tagore, the dramatist

Rabindranath Tagore wrote nearly two dozen plays, not all of which have been translated into English. Tagore experimented freely with the dramatic form, until in his later mature drama he struck the most adequate imaginative equivalent of his genius. His drama may be classified into three groups based on chronological and organic considerations. Malini, Sacrifice and King and Queen form the first group of plays, in which Tagore tried to apply the elements of Western tragedy to Indian materials. These are primarily dramas of conflict. The Post Office, Chitra, The King of the Dark Chamber and Red Oleanders are plays of allegory. Mukta Dhara, Natir Puja and Chandalika bring the whole career of experimentation to a point of culmination by integrating the two levels of dramatic vision – intellect and experience. These last plays may be called the symbolic plays.

Tagore's dramatic method is close to the Indian tradition. His plays do not reveal the usual principles of dramatic structure found in the great western dramas. The tragic rhythm of conflict, passion and purpose which describes the tragic hero's self-consummation, is not found in his plays. His best drama, on the other hand, is the result of a transfusion of folk-elements into the texture of classical Indian drama. Tagore derived his philosophy of dramatic form from our classical tradition, he borrowed freely from the structural elements of Indian folk-drama. Most of his plays have the flavour of the Bengali folk-drama, the Jatra. They are slices from life set against a background of fairs, festivals, processions and carnivals. The Post Office, The King of the Dark Chamber, Red Oleanders and Mukta Dhara are among the best of his works. In them we have not the dramatic form of the

Western type, but the art of seeking in the Indian tradition. Tagore once observed about the Jatra plays that “There is not so much gulf separating the stage from the audience. The business of interpretation and enjoyment is carried out by both in hearty co-operation . . .” Tagore’s plays are full of lyric delight and supersensuous imagery, but are really very simple and never extravagant in their design and construction.

Tagore’s plays reflect his intimate knowledge of the Indian epics and cultural traditions. Most of his plays have been inspired by episodes and characters from the Mahabharata. Buddhism, humanism, Indian philosophy, (especially the Vaishnava philosophy which explores man’s search for God and the relation between the human and the divine).

3.7.4 Analysis of the Play

Published in 1914, The King of the Dark Chamber is a translation of Tagore’s play Raja written in 1910. As pointed out by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the theme of the play seems to exist in one of the Gitanjali poems (poem L1) describing the arrival of the king in the night:

In the depth of the night has come the king
Of our dark, dreary house. Bring out thy tattered mat and spread it in the courtyard.
With the storm has come of sudden our king
Of the fearful night.

Gitanjali celebrates simple devotion and unquestioning faith in God. But sometimes man is subjected to doubt, despair and suffering before final understanding comes to him. This philosophic theme is enacted in human terms in the play The King of the Dark Chamber. The play explores the relationship between God and man. In order to dramatise the human soul’s quest for God through Queen Sudarshana’s longing for the invisible king, Tagore adopted the non-realistic mode of symbolism. Like The Post Office, this play was designed to be performed “in the open air or on open air stages with the minimum of stage properties”.

The play is based on an old Jataka story called Kusha. The Jataka story revolves round the ugly king Kusha’s desire to marry a beautiful girl. His desire is fulfilled when he gets married to princess Prabhavati. The Queen Mother ensures that the princess does not see her husband but when she discovers his true identity, the princess is both shocked and revolted. Tagore modified and retold it to bring it closer to his intended theme – the play of the Infinite with the finite.

Tagore’s play is enacted in twenty scenes. Action takes place in and around the palaces of the King and his father-in-law Kanyakubja, during the festivities of spring. Thus there is minimal backdrop combined with fine music, dance etc, and the action proceeds on different levels. The symbolic nature of the action is revealed in the fairly long first two scenes. The mystery of the invisible king is conveyed through the conversation of three foreign visitors to the city and also a few

native citizens. The play opens on a street with three visitors Janardhan, Bhavadatta and Kaundilya enquiring about the way to the spring festivities. As all streets are said to lead to the spring event, they comment on the reason for having so many paths to the same destination. This is followed by some citizens complaining about 'one big gap', i.e., the King's hiding from public view. Grandfather who enters with a group of boys answers: "Ga, do you say! Why the whole country is all filled and crammed and packed with the king and you call him a 'gap' ! Why he has made every one of us a crowned king", and bursts into a song celebrating the kingly freedom and independence of every citizen. This crazy sounding response is an early indication of the metaphysical element in the play. One of the citizens further attributes the king's maintaining of invisibility to his ugliness, but Grandfather lets him believe in his theory. The visitors reappear expressing doubts about the existence of the King thus extending logically the questions of the citizens. Just then a band of men enters singing "My beloved is in my heart" as if in response to the doubts. A Herald appears announcing the king's arrival pointing to the red kinshuk flower on the banner. As they look in wonder at the passing king, Grandfather reenters to express suspicion as the King never had indulged in pomp and ceremony and that this flag had a thunderbolt painted within the lotus. He says, "He is not the king to make such a thundering over his progress through the country". From this scene we come to know that the king rules this country solely by moral codes rather than laws. He does not rule his people by sitting on a throne and is unseen by his people. Thus there is the possibility of somebody personating the King. Only simple people like Grandfather can distinguish him from pretenders.

The second scene gives us an idea of the relationship of the Queen to the King, through her conversation with the Maid of Honour, Surangama. Queen Sudarshana learns that the dark chamber was built deep down in the earth as a place exclusively set apart for meeting the King. Surangama persistently refuses to bring in a lamp. The Queen is surprised by the maid's implicit obedience to the King inspite of the latter's punishing her father. Surangama replies:

Oh, it made me furious . . . I raged and raved like a beast in a cage – how I wanted to tear everyone to pieces in my powerless anger! . . . A day came when all the rebel in me knew itself beaten, and then my whole nature bowed down in humble resignation on the dust of the earth.

The Queen is surprised at Surangama's description of the King 'as matchless in beauty as in terror'. Married while still a child, the Queen has no memories of the wedding and can only recall the praise of her husband as one "without a second on this earth". Unlike the Queen, Surangama feels the faint stir of breeze wafting a perfume, signifying the King's opening the outer door, and says, "I cannot say : I seem to hear his footsteps in my own heart. Being his servant of this dark chamber, I have developed a sense – I can know and feel without seeing." She assures the Queen that she would also learn to have such a fine perception regarding the King.

Tagore now shows Sudarshana's first meeting with the King. She is told that darkness should help her feel his presence exclusively, but she longs to see him in day light amid a thousand things. The King replies that "you will not be able to bear the sight of me – it will only give you pain, malignant and overpowering". But the Queen is sure that the King must be striking in appearance and questions him as to how he can see her. The King's poetic words describing her as an embodiment of the darkness of the heavens brought to life by the light of a myriad stars make her happy and proud, though she cannot find such wonderful qualities in herself. The king answers in this manner:

Your own mirror will not reflect them – it lessens you, limits you, makes you look small and insignificant. But could you see yourself mirrored in my own mind, how grand would you appear! In my own heart you are no longer the daily individual which you think you are – you are verily my second self.

But the Queen finds the darkness a barrier between the two of them making their union impossible: "This darkness which is to me real and strong as death – is this simply nothing to you? . . . I want to find you and see you where I see trees and animals, birds and stones and the earth — ". The King then promises to make an appearance during the spring festivities but that she has to recognize the King on her own as no one will show him to her.

Scenes 3 to 8 trace the Queen's efforts to identify the king and her mortification on mistaking Suvarna the pretender for the king. This is juxtaposed with the intrigue of the neighbouring kings to possess her. This phase of the action ends in Sudarshana's second meeting with the King in the dark room. Scene 3 has for its setting the pleasure gardens and presents the confrontation between the kings Avanti, Koshala, Kanchi and others, and the pretender, Suvarna. Suspecting that this 'King' is only an imposter, Kanchi threatens and bullies Suvarna into obtaining for them a sight of the beautiful Queen.

Scene 4 presents the Queen's view of the 'King's' progress from the vantage point of the turret of the Royal Palace. Queen Sudarshana tries to identify the king with the help of the maid Rohini, and not the faithful Surangama. Impressed by the glitter and physical charm of the false King, the Queen sends him flowers on a lotus leaf. The king of Kanchi grasps the situation and intervenes to make the message clear to Suvarna and makes him gift a necklace to Rohini. The Queen feels shame and humiliation at this indifference: "A great blow has shattered my pride to atoms today, and yet . . . I cannot efface from my mind that beautiful, fascinating figure! No pride is left in me – I am beaten, vanquished, utterly helpless". Still, out of jealousy, she feels compelled to offer her bracelet in exchange for the pretender's necklace. She says:

I should have thrown this necklace away, but I could not ! It is pricking me as if it were a garland of thorns but I cannot throw it away. This is what the God of the festival has brought me to-night – this necklace of ignominy and shame!

In Scene 5 the garden is set on fire at Kanchi's command as the king conspires to get a glimpse of the Queen. But the fire gets out of control upsetting Kanchi's plan. Rohini suspects foul play and starts searching for the King. The fire continues to rage in Scene 7 where Suvarna and Sudarshana also pray to the King to save them. Unable to continue the pretence of being the king, Suvarna leaves shouting: "No, I am a hypocrite, I am a scoundrel. Let my deception and hypocrisy be shattered into dust." Praying to the God of fire "to burn to ashes my shame, my longing, my desire," the Queen rushes into the burning inner chambers.

The first phase of the action ends with Scene 8 where Sudarshana's second meeting with the King in the dark chamber is described. Refusing to be comforted by the King's words that she will not be harmed by the fire, the Queen talks about the inner Fire of shame scorching her mind from which there is no escape. As she points to the garland she is wearing as an instance of this grace, the King, tries to reassure her that the garland is in reality his, only stolen by the pretender. But in the blaze of the fire, the Queen catches a glimpse of the King, 'terrible' and 'black like the everlasting night', "Black as the threatening storm-cloud, black as the shoreless sea". She thinks any union with him unthinkable now. The King assures her that it will be possible in time for her to get over this 'utter and bleak blackness' in his form because of his love for her. But the Queen says that the Beauty of the pretender has cast its spell on her and "has dazzled and fired my eyes" so that she cannot bear the King's presence. She feels that by staying with him she will be constantly reminded of her impurity and wishes to go away from him. The King tells her that she is free to leave him but refuses to punish her. She finds his compassion and composure unbearable and rushes out saying "I can resist no more – something in me is impelling me forward – I am breaking away from my anchor! Perhaps I shall sink, but I shall return no more".

The maid Surangama enters singing "What will of thine is this that sends me afar! Again shall I come back at thy feet from all my wanderings . . . O my King, what is this game that thou art playing throughout thy kingdom?" The Queen is relieved to learn from the maid that the prisoners were set free and that Kanchi had returned to his kingdom. Despite the Queen's protests, Surangama follows her in exile: "O my Queen, I have made all your good and all your evil my own as well; will you treat me as a stranger still? I must go with you."

Scene 9 shows Sudarshana in her father's palace but Kanyakubja allows her to stay only as a maid servant keeping her identity a secret. He says to his minister,

When woman swerves from the right path, then she appears fraught with the direst calamity. You do not know with what deadly fear this daughter of mine has inspired me – she is coming to my home laden with peril.

Sudarshana wails over her predicament and does not understand the indifference of the world to her plight: "Why do the torches of mourning not flare up for me all over the world? Why does not the

earth quake and tremble? Is my fall but the unobserved dropping of the puny bean flower? Is it not more like the fall of a glowing star, whose fiery blazon bursts the heavens asunder?” She confesses her attraction for the false king thinking he was the one who set the palace on fire. “What glorious prowess! It was this courage that made me strong and fire my own spirits. It was this terrible joy that enabled me to leave everything behind me in a moment’s time”. Surangama reveals that it was Kanchi who set the palace on fire making the Queen realize that the false king was a worthless creature and a “Coward! But is it possible? So handsome, so bewitching, and yet no manhood in him!” The Queen laments over her dishonorable condition as maid “I have thrown my queen’s honour and glory to the dust and winds but is there no being who will come out to meet my desolate soul here? Alone – oh, I am fearfully, terribly alone! She complains to Surangama about the “harsh, pililess, mean and brutal” nature of the King in not coming to rescue her from her servitude. The news of Suvarna, the false king’s arrival fills her with gladness in contrast to the cold indifference she attributes to the Dark King.

In Scene 11 set in an encampment we are informed of the conversation between Kanchi and Suvarna to invade Kanyakubja while a soldier reports the arrival of the kings Kosha, Avanti, Kalinga, Virat, Paanchal and Vidarbha with their armies. As Suvarna is frightened of the war, he interprets this as the King’s strategy to foil Kanchi’s plan. In Scene 12 we have the Queen and Surangama discussing the outcome of the fight. The Queen realises the truth of her father’s words before he went out to the fight: “You have come away from one king, but you have drawn seven kings after you, I have a mind to cut you up into seven pieces and distribute them among the princes.” In her mood of despondency she recalls having heard someone playing on a *vina* right beneath her window. This brings reminiscences of her earlier days where “out of the blank darkness of our lampless meeting place used to stream forth strains and songs and melodies, dancing and vibrating in endless succession and overflowing profusion, like the passionate exuberance of a ceaseless fountain!” When the Queen despairs of the fact that the King had left them for good, Surangama comforts her saying:

If he can leave us like that, then we have no need of him. Then he does not exist for us: then that dark chamber is totally empty and void – no *vina* ever breathed its music there – none called you or me in that chamber; then everything has been delusion and an idle dream.

The scene ends with the Queen fainting upon hearing the news that her father Kanya Kubja has been taken prisoner.

In the next two Scenes we come to know that Kanchi plans to use Suvarna as his umbrella – bearer, as he remembers the Queen’s admiration for Suvarna’s good looks. Suvarna brings the message that the Queen has to choose one of them in a ‘Swayamvara’ if she wants to save her father. Looking at Suvarna, the Queen ponders over the hollow lure of physical beauty, “How could that beauty fascinate me? Oh, what shall I do to purge my eyes of their pollution?” Sudarshana realises

that her true love has always been for the King and in utter despair attempts to end her life by the sword:

This body of mine has received a stain – I shall make a sacrifice of it to-day in the dust of the hall, before all these princes! But shall I never be able to tell you that I know of no stain of faithlessness within the hidden chambers of my heart? That dark chamber where you would come to meet me lies cold and empty within my bosom to-day – but, O my Lord! none has opened its doors, none has entered it but you, O King!

Into the assembly of princes in Scene 15 the Grandfather comes with music heard in the background and informs them about the King’s summons. Some of the kings leave the hall while Virat, Paanchala and Kalinga stay with Kanchi to fight the King. Suvarna slinks away leaving Kanchi’s umbrella in the dust. In the next scene, the Grandfather tells Sudarshana and Surangama that the fight has ended. Sudarshana is torn by joy and shame at the prospect of the King’s visit but realizes that the King has left and would not come to her. This wounds the Queen who thinks the King is cruel and hard as stone and in a flash of pride decides not to go to him herself till he comes. She wonders why the King bothered to fight with the princes: “ Was it for me at all? Did he want to show off his prowess and strength?”

The account of the course and outcome of the war is revealed from the conversation of a band of citizens in Scene 17. The defeat of the seven kings is attributed to the distrust and disagreement among themselves regarding the battle strategies. Kanchi is the only one who “fought like a real hero” till he was wounded. The kings who fled the battlefield have been taken prisoners and punished while Kanchi was set free after receiving a crown. The citizens cannot understand this sort of justice which strikes them as “fantastic and capricious” as they know that the greatest offender was the King of Kanchi.

In Scene 18, Grandfather finds himself in the company of Kanchi who says that he sincerely wants to pay homage to the King but cannot find him anywhere: “he came all of a sudden like a terrific tempest – God Knows from where – and scattered my men and horses and banners in one wild tumult: but now, when I am seeking the ends of the earth to pay him my humble homage, he is nowhere to be seen”. But afraid of being laughed at by people in his defeat, Kanchi has taken to the road in the dark while Grandfather is on the road to the “land of losing everything”. In Scene 19 Surangama and Sudarshana are also shown as wayfarers going in search of the King, feeling great relief and freedom and knowing that it was her defeat that has brought her freedom.

Oh, what an iron pride was mine! Nothing could move it or soften it. My darkened mind could not in any way be brought to see the plain truth that it was not the King who was to come, it was I who ought to have gone to him. All through yesternight I lay alone on the dusty floor before that window – lay there through the desolate hours and wept.

Though all night the “southern winds blew and shrieked and moaned” she seemed to hear “the soft strains of the *vina* floating through all that wild din and tumult.” The Queen wonders:

Could he play such sweet and tender tunes, he who is so cruel and terrible? The world knows only my indignity and ignominy – but none but my own heart could hear those strains that called me through the lone and wailing night.

Sudarshana wants to tell him on meeting him first that she has come of her own will without waiting for his coming. But Surangama corrects her with the words, “He came before you did – Who else could have sent you on the road?” Sudarshana perceives the truth of her words now that “I flung my dignity and pride to the winds and came out on the common streets, then it seemed to me that he too had come out: I have been finding him since the moment I was on the road.” She can now feel the King’s presence, can see that he has come, in silence and in secret.

At this point they encounter a third traveller on the dark road who is none other than the King of Kanchi. Addressing her as Queen Mother, he is distressed that she is walking on foot and asks permission to get a chariot for her. Sudarshana replies that she will never be happy “if I could not on my way back home tread on the dust of the road that led me away from my King.” Desirous of atoning for the evil fortune of her birth by walking over dust and bare earth, she is happy to meet her “King of common earth and dust at every step of mine to-day.” Soon they see the golden turrets of the King’s palace as dawn comes. They are now joined by Grandfather who is pained by the Queen going to the King’s palace in a wretched attire. But the Queen replies that she has no more use for regal robes for she is now his servant and no longer his Queen. Even if dust is thrown at her in the streets, she welcomes the dust as the powder with which she shall deck herself before meeting her lord. Grandfather then suggests they play the last game their Spring Festival – “instead of the pollen of flowers let the south breeze blow and scatter dust of lowliness in every direction! We shall go to the lord clad in the common grey of the dust. And we shall find him too covered with dust all over”. The Queen’s beauty devoid of its “veil and cloak of pride and varity” yet shines forth in tenfold radiance.

The last Scene set in the Dark Chamber has the Queen declaring herself a servant at the King’s feet. The King gently asks her whether she can bear the sight of him and she says yes unhesitatingly:

Your sight repelled me because I had sought to find you in the pleasure garden, in my Queen’s chambers: there even your meanest servant looks handsomer than you. That fever of longing has left my eyes for ever. You are not beautiful, my lord – you stand beyond all comparison!

As evidence of her total surrender, the Queen says “ your love lives in me – you are mirrored in that love and you see your face reflected in me: nothing of this mine, it is all yours, O lord! The play ends

with the King opening the doors of the dark room and leading her outside – *into the light*, thus fulfilling the Queen’s most cherished desire.

3.7.5. Characterisation

The true King symbolising God never appears in person but conducts the governance of the country in an orderly and harmonious manner. He never reveals himself in flesh and blood but his presence is felt everywhere and is a puzzle to his subjects. Significantly those who trust in him remain free from doubt and misery. Those who doubt, question and defy his existence bring shame and misery upon themselves. They are redeemed of their guilt when they begin to understand and believe in the King. The queen represents the yearning soul. She is quietly proud of her beauty. She is guilty of doubt and of falling a prey to temptations of physical beauty and charm. Queen Sudarshana’s character is drawn with great delicacy and understanding and her fitful moods and shifting moral choices are delineated with psychological insight and spiritual clarity, as D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu says.

Surangama, the queen’s maid follows her lord with unquestioning faith and learns to value God’s omnipotence, not because it is amenable to prayer and solicitation, but because it endures pitiless and hard like the rock. She is a symbol of total devotion. Surangama stands in total contrast to Sudarshana, an erring human soul full of weaknesses. Sudarshana finally learns humility and unquestioning faith from Surangama who acts as her conscience – keeper.

The King of Kanchi, whose stratagems provide the mainstay of the action of the play is a full-blooded character like Sudarshana. He represents the male ego, even as Sudarshana represents the female ego. It is significant that they meet for the first time just at the close of the play having learnt the woeful wisdom of humility. They tread the common path of diligently working out their salvation. “They arrive after a good deal of straying”, as D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu says, and “in surrender they conquer themselves, and in the stark nothingness of impersonality they achieve their final identity”. The false king, Suvarna, is a coward and a weakling, a man with a poor intellect and high ambition. From pretending as a King he becomes an umbrella - bearer to the king of Kanchi. Grandfather, who has lost his five children, is a man of steady wisdom and who has mastered his senses. He is a common man and a firm believer in his king and God. He seems to have no difficulty in distinguishing the King from imposters.

Tagore achieves dramatic unity primarily through the simplicity and directness of his vision – “his characters have been stripped of their superficial adult sophistication to reveal instead a charming childlike naivete. It is this ceremony of innocence that Yeats tried to restore to the western theatre, as an antidote to the cliches of an exhausted realism” (Robert Brustein).

3.7.6. Symbolism

Tagore's plays reveal that he did not follow the realistic trend that dominated the Bengali stage of his days. His idea of drama is essentially poetic and the theatre for him was a place where poetry ruled supreme to reveal a higher reality of things. Tagore did not share the view that The King of the Dark Chamber was a philosophic allegory. He wrote that "Critics and detectives are naturally suspicious, they scent allegories and bombs where there are not such abominations. It is difficult to convince them of our innocence". But the play is undoubtedly symbolic in its very spiritual theme – the mutual yearning of God and the human soul for union with one another.

The symbolic framework of the play is obvious. As KRS Iyengar says, "the King symbolises God. He is everywhere, he is everything hence nowhere, and nobody in particular. Each in his littleness or half-knowledge makes out what he can of him. Some deny his very existence. Some try to assume his name and usurp his functions. And some implicitly accept him, and are content". There is no physical description of the King though his attributes are subtly highlighted. The invisible but invincible strength of the King is suggested in his emblem – the lotus with a heart of thunderbolt. 'Lotus' being the traditional symbol of Buddhism indicates the kindness and compassion of the King while the 'thunderbolt' indicates his unbreakable strength. In the drama the Queen is the protagonist for she is the seeker and the play portrays her striving and her suffering. Compulsion has no place in the spiritual path. The freedom the King allows the Queen in letting her leave him is not because he does not care but to give her time to realise that she has to embrace truth of her own free will. Sudarshana's realizing the false glitter of Suvarna and the shedding of her pride and vanity is the necessary condition for her union with the King. The Grandfather exemplifies the devotional path. His songs embody great philosophic wisdom. The enlightened soul has a natural inclination to follow the path of God even when it has complete freedom. This simple truth is conveyed in one of his songs:

We are all Kings in the Kingdom of our King
We do what we like, yet we do what he likes.

Light differentiates objects and emphasizes their separateness and multiplicity of form, while all multiplicity is merged into one in enveloping darkness. In this sense, Darkness appears as a dynamic positive force that can awaken the human consciousness to the perception of oneness in creation. The word 'black' is often used to describe the king – black as the storm cloud or the shoreless sea. This terrible blackness first scares the Queen. But her inner eye helps her overcome her fright. The 'ugliness' that originally repelled her is later understood by Sudarshana as her own mental projection: "Your sight repelled me because I had sought to find you in the pleasure garden, in my Queen's chambers. That fever of longing has left my eyes forever. You are not beautiful my Lord – you stand

above all comparison.” To the enlightened soul everything is beautiful because everything comes from the same divinity. Sensory perception may be necessary for gaining knowledge of the external world whereas to gain knowledge of the self senses have to be withdrawn. In this state perception is by intuition and not physical vision. Surangama the maid symbolises intuitive grasp of Divinity while the Queen’s worrying about the King’s invisibility is an indication that her intuition is clouded by the physical allure of the senses. The Queen at the end of the play is prepared to meet the King face to face. She says, “Your love lives in me – you are mirrored in that love, and you see your face reflected in me”. If the ending is not understood like this, it would suggest that the Queen’s surrender was compelled and that she was brought round to obedience. The Queen is a seeker, not a sinner; so the conclusion does not have punishing overtones. The King is kind and forgiving which is how even Kanchi is won over to voluntary devotion.

3.7.7 Critical Evaluation

The play The King of the Dark Chamber gives expression to ‘a mystical, metaphysical approach to life and human experience’. It was acclaimed as a play “fantastic and sensual but astir with spiritual overtones”. According to Thompson it is unparalleled in the world of drama for its “magnificent attempt to dramatise the secret dealings of God with the human heart.” Robert Brustein describes this as a 20th century Indian masterpiece: “With its allegorical, fairy tale atmosphere and its highly charged poetic intensity it is a stunning theatrical work.” The dramatic action takes place at many levels making it a fairy tale, metaphor and philosophy at once. Tagore achieves dramatic unity primarily through the simplicity and directness of his vision.

There is disagreement among some critics about the success of the play. Another critic Sujit Mukherjee thinks “inadequate dramatic presentation” and “the chaos of symbols” concealing the “simple allegory” as responsible for the failure of the play. S.K. Desai considers Chandalika, Chitra and The Post Office as the more successful plays because of their spontaneous symbolism, whereas he finds a self-conscious symbolism in The King of the Dark Chamber, Red Oleanders and Mukta – Dhara. Tagore was successful when he lodged his symbols in traditional or mythological contexts, and when he allowed them to grow out of a naturalistic context. According to S.K. Desai, The King of the Dark Chamber shows that Tagore first starts with ideas, and then tries to embody them in an allegorical situation and that while working out the situation in terms of drama, he lends himself to the naturalistic possibilities in the situation, arousing emotions which go far beyond the thought-bound allegory. In this play Tagore has not succeeded in harmonising the emotional - human level and the allegorical - intellectual level. Nirmal Mukherjee makes a similar comment, that “the two planes of meaning instead of completing each other create only confusion”. As an example he argues that the Queen’s feeling guilty about her attachment to the pretender makes sense on the human level but

sounds absurd on the allegorical level. This criticism is not valid because the starting point of all spiritual quest is the agony about one's inability to extricate oneself from the grip of desires. Thus there is only reiteration here on the spiritual plane of an experienced anguish that it is not God but human weaknesses that cause suffering.

Taking S.K. Desai's view and dismissing The King of the Dark Chamber as a failure would be unjust because its appeal is more to the heart and to the undefinable presence of the soul. According to KRS Iyengar, in Tagore's plays "plot, character, dialogue, sentiment, all become symbolic". What is important is not "the apparent meaning but its echoing cadence of suggestion, 'dhvani' as the Sanskrit rhetoricians call it". He also adds that the meaning of a poetic play is no rocky substance and that we have to grope towards meaning. The fluidity of the action and Tagore's use of the total resources of theatre have made the play memorable.

3.7.7. Summary

The King of the Dark Chamber has a philosophic theme enacted in human terms. It explores the relationship between God and man and the quest for God by man. The play is enacted in twenty scenes. Various characters from kings to common men are used to convey the truth about a king who is awe-inspiring and benevolent. The King symbolises God while the Queen represents the yearning soul. Among his subjects, the Grandfather and Surangama show implicit trust and obedience and are free from doubt. Queen Sudarshan's mistake and the realization of her mistake are central to the play. She is proud of her beauty and falling prey to the temptations of physical charm leaves the king. Shame and humiliation lead her to understanding and acceptance of faith. She realizes that she ought to go to the King taking the dusty road not like a queen but as a humble person. With the King finally throwing open the doors of the dark chamber to let in light, Sudarshana's desire to see the King is at last fulfilled. The King of Kanchi also has erred and like the queen finally becomes a seeker of truth, a devotee and accompanies the queen on the dusty road to the kingdom of the unseen king.

3.7.9. Sample Questions

1. Bring out the significance of the title of Tagore's play The King of the Dark Chamber.
2. Trace of philosophic theme of the play.
3. Discuss Tagore's symbolism in The King of the Dark Chamber.
4. Comment on Tagore's portrayal of Queen Sudarshana as the seeker in the play.

3.7.10. Suggested Reading

1. M.K. Naik, G.S. Amur & S.K. Desai. Ed., Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English.
2. D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu, “The Plays of Rabindranath Tagore.” The Unpunctual Pen, Guntur: Maruti Book Depot, 1968.
3. K.R.S.Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, Bombay, 1962.
4. David Mc Cutchion, Indian Writing in English, Calcutta, 1968.

Dr. K. Ratna Shiela Mani

Lesson - 8

Girish Karnad : *Hayavadana*

Structure

3.8.1 Objectives

3.8.2 Introduction

3.8.3 The Writer-Karnad's Life and Works.

3.8.4 Analysis of the Text *Hayavadana*.

3.8.5 Critical Evaluation

3.8.6 Summary

3.8.7 Sample Questions

3.8.8 Suggested Reading

3.8.1. Objectives:

From this lesson the reader will learn about

- i) Girish Karnad as a modern Indian Dramatist.
- ii) the complexity of themes and dramatic techniques in *Hayavadana*.
- iii) the skilful blending of traditional and folk elements with western dramatic conventions.
- iv) how Karnad interrogates traditional assumptions about human values and identities while using traditional materials in his dramas.

3.8.2. Introduction:

A review of the genres of Indo-Anglian literature reveals that there is an abundance of poetry, fiction and prose produced but there is a paucity of drama. It is only recently that Indian English drama has shot into prominence, with younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan infusing new life into this branch of writing. The theatre in India is still amateurish. Generally speaking, there are two types of theatre in India. The first type is performed in the villages, the various *jatras*, *mandalis* etc. which have evolved through the centuries. But the second type of plays which are performed in cities, need to develop more. Modern Indian theatre emerged under British influence in three cities – Calcutta, Bombay and Madras – that were

founded by the British and had no previous Indian history. It was but natural that theatre in these cities followed the British legacy in the entire system of stage and performance.

It is thus mainly Indian drama in Indian languages and the drama in English translation which has registered a remarkable growth in the recent decades. During the last few years, several plays originally written in the regional languages have been translated into English. Such translations have forged a link between the east and west, north and south, and contributed to the growing richness of contemporary creative consciousness. Thus regional drama in India is slowly paving the way for a 'national theatre' into which all streams of theatrical art seem to converge. The major language theatres active during the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties that have rejuvenated and consolidated are those of Hindi, Marathi, Bengali and Kannada. Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar and Girish Karnad are the symbols of the new resurgence in their own areas and who have made bold innovations, fruitful experiments and given new directions to Indian drama.

3.8.3. The Writer-Karnad's Life and Works:

Girish Karnad is the foremost playwright of the contemporary Indian stage. His contribution goes beyond theatre: he has directed feature films, documentaries and television serials in Kannada, Hindi and English, and has played leading roles as an actor in Hindi and Kannada art films, commercial movies and television serials. He has represented India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture.

Karnad was born on May 19, 1938 in Matheran, a town near Bombay. His childhood was spent growing up in a small village in Karnataka where he had first-hand experience of the indigenous folk theatre. His encounter with the Natak companies at the early stage of his life made a lasting impression on Karnad's mind. But by the early 1950s, films had more or less finished off this kind of theatre.

During his formative years, Karnad went through diverse influences. He was exposed to a literary scene where there was a direct clash between western and native tradition. In the India of the Fifties and Sixties, there surfaced two streams of thought in all walks of life – adoption of new modernistic techniques, a legacy of the colonial rule and adherence to the rich cultural past of the country. Karnad was fascinated by the traditional plays, nonetheless the Western playwrights that he read during his college days opened up for him "a new world of magical possibilities". After graduating from Karnatak University, Dharwad, in 1958, Karnad moved to Bombay for further studies. Having received the prestigious Rhodes scholarship,

he went to England to do his Master's degree, where he became interested in art and culture. On his return to India in 1963, he joined Oxford University Press, Madras. He was also appointed Director of the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune. In 1987, he went to the U.S.A. as Fulbright Scholar, University of Chicago. From 1988 to 1993, he served as Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi.

According to Karnad, he found himself writing a play in Kannada as he was preparing to go to England, amidst intense emotional turmoil. As he was reading the *Mahabharata* for fun, the story of Yayati clicked in his mind, and he started writing. The theme of his first play *Yayati* (1961) was thus taken from ancient Indian mythology. But while the subject matter was purely native and traditional, the form and structure were essentially western. Until he wrote this play, Karnad has fancied himself as a poet in English, "the greatest ambition of my life was to be a poet". He was destined to write plays and the source of his inspiration was native stuff, history, mythology and folklore. *Yayati* retells the story of the mythological king who in his longing for eternal youth sought to borrow the vitality of his own son. Puru agrees to exchange his youth for the age of his father, but the consequences are terrible for father and son.

Next to come was the historical play *Tughlaq* (1964) dealing with the life of Muhammad Tughlaq, a fourteenth century sultan of Delhi. He was the most brilliant individual ever to ascend the throne of Delhi and also one of the biggest failures. After a reign distinguished for policies that today seem far-sighted to the point of genius, but which in their day earned him the title 'Muhammad the Mad,' the sultan ended his career in bloodshed and political chaos. In Karnad's words, "the play reflected the slow disillusionment my generation felt with the new politics of independent India . . .".

The third play *Hayavadana* (1971) is based on *Kathasaritsagara*, but Karnad has borrowed it through Thomas Mann's retelling of the story in "The Transposed Heads". It has for its theme, human beings aspiring for the unattainable. The fourth play *Naga-Mandala* (1988) is based on two folk tales from Karnataka. It is the story of Rani, narrated to a playwright by Story. Story is a woman character in the play. Karnad's main concern here is human and non-human beings in combination, interacting, entering into one another's lives, becoming part of one another. The next play *Tale-Danda* (1990) exposes the deformity of the Hindu society by depicting the twelfth century communal struggle in the city of Kalyan in North Kanara. Yet another play *The Fire and the Rain* (1995) has been received well. In all his plays – be the theme mythical, historical or legendary – Karnad's approach is modern.

On the whole Karnad wrote eight plays in Kannada which have been translated into major Indian languages. Five of these plays – *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Naga-Mandala*, *Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the*

Rain – have been translated into English. Karnad is a skilful translator. He writes his plays in Kannada and often translates his work himself. This gives him a lot of freedom that another translator will not have. “My translation,” says Karnad, “must therefore, be seen as approximation to the original.” His plays have received an international recognition and have been widely performed in Europe and America. Karnad is a multi-faceted personality with a “multi-pronged career” – actor, publisher, film-maker and writer of film scripts. But he is at his best as a playwright. Today Girish Karnad is considered one of the significant Indian dramatists who has enriched the Indian literary scene by his contribution to art, culture, theatre and drama. He is the recipient of a host of awards at state and national levels, the most outstanding being Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan and Sahitya Akademi and Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards.

3.8.4. Analysis of the Play *Hayavadana*:

The play *Hayavadana* is based on a story from a collection of tales called the *Kathasaritsagara* and the further development of this story by Thomas Mann in “The Transposed Heads”. The following is the brief summary. A young woman is travelling with her insecure and jealous husband and his rather attractive friend. The husband, suspecting his wife’s loyalties, goes to a temple of Goddess Kali and beheads himself. The friend finds the body and, terrified that he will be accused of having murdered the man for the sake of his wife, in turn beheads himself. When the woman, afraid of the scandal that is bound to follow, prepares to kill herself too, the Goddess takes pity and comes to her aid. The woman has only to rejoin the heads to the bodies and the Goddess will bring them back to life. The woman follows the instructions, and the men come back to life except that in her confusion she has mixed up the heads. The story ends with the question: who is now the real husband, the one with the husband’s head or the one with his body?

The answer given in the *Kathasaritsagar* is: since the head represents the man, the person with the husband’s head is the husband. Mann brings his relentless logic to bear upon this solution. If the head is the determining limb, then the body should change to fit the head. At the end of Mann’s version, the bodies have changed again and adjusted themselves to the heads so perfectly that the men are physically exactly as they were at the beginning. The problem remains unsolved.

Karnad’s play in a characteristic way begins where the *Vetal* story ends. “How would the woman take it if it really happened and would it ultimately solve the problem for her?” are the fascinating problems the artist in him faces. In all his plays Karnad takes this kind of leap ;from the original story and develops it further, challenging the easy solutions offered in the original stories. In *Hayavadana* what Karnad wants

to suggest is that for us king Vikram's solution does not solve the problem. In fact the real problem begins when it appears to be solved. At the same time he makes significant departures from Thomas Mann's story too. The sub-plot of *Hayavadana* is entirely Karnad's invention. In the play the stories of the sub-plot throughout support the main plot.

The original story poses a moral problem, whereas Mann uses the story to ridicule the philosophy which holds the head superior to the body. For Mann, the human body is a fit instrument for the fulfilment of human destiny and even the transposition of heads will not liberate the protagonists from their natural psychological demands. For Karnad, the confusion of the identities reveals the ambiguous nature of the human personality.

The play opens with Ganesh Puja—with the offering of worship accompanied by singing to the God Ganesha. The choice of the elephant-headed God is significant because Lord Ganesha with human body and animal head aptly suggests the central theme of incompleteness of being. As the Bhagavata says:

An elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly—whichever way you look at him he seems the embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness. How indeed can one fathom the mystery that this very Vakratunda-Mahakaya, with his crooked face and distorted body is the Lord and Master of Success and Perfection? Could it be that his image of Purity and Holiness, this Mangalamoorthy, intends to signify by his very appearance that the completeness of God is something no poor mortal can comprehend?

The perfect combination of the spirit and the flesh in human life is next to impossible. The sub-plot of *Hayavadana*, the horse-man, is Karnad's own invention. It deepens the significance of the main theme of incompleteness by treating it on a different plane. It provides the framework of the play both as a prologue and as an epilogue.

Hayavadana is a man with the head of a horse: "haya" means horse and "vadana" means face. He is the son of the Princess of Karnataka, a very beautiful girl, who fell in love with a white stallion. She was married off to the horse and lived with him for fifteen years. One fine morning, the horse turned into a beautiful celestial being and revealed that he was a *gandhara* cursed by the God Kubera to be born a horse for some act of misbehaviour. After fifteen years of human love, he had become his original self again. Released from his curse, he asked the Princess to accompany him to his Heavenly Abode. But she wanted him to become a horse again. So he cursed her to be a horse herself. She became a mare and galloped away without thinking in the least of Hayavadana, the product of her marriage with the white stallion.

Hayavadana now wants to get rid of his horse's head and become a complete man. Later he goes to the Kali temple and threatens to chop off his head. The goddess grants him his boon "make me complete"

but in her hurry to fulfil it, she makes him a complete horse instead of a complete man. However, Hayavadana still retains his human voice. His liberation is complete only when the five-year old son of Padmini asks him to laugh and soon the laughter turns into a neigh. In the "Introduction" to the play, Kirtinath Kurtkoti comments on Hayavadan's transformation into a horse: "The horse-man's search for completeness ends comically, with his becoming a complete horse. The animal body triumphs over what is considered the best in man, the *Uttamanga*, the human head." (vi).

The main plot of the play comes from *Kathasaritasagara*, an ancient collection of Sanskrit stories, and is as simple as that of a folk tale. Devadatta (literally the God-given) is endowed with all the accomplishments expected of a brahmin youth. The only son of a learned brahmin Vidyasagara (ocean of learning), he is comely in appearance, fair in colour and unrivalled in intelligence. Having defeated the mightiest pundits of the kingdom in debates on logic and love and having blinded the greatest poets of the world with his poetry and wit, Devadatta is as it were the apple of every eye in Dharampura. He falls in love with an extremely agile and quick-witted girl, Padmini, the daughter of a rich merchant.

Kapila, the only son of the ironsmith Lohita, with a lithe and handsome body, good in the wrestling pit, and extremely devoted to his friend Devadatta for his poetry and wisdom, mediates and arranges the marriage of Padmini with his friend Devadatta. Devadatta and Kapila are the closest of friends. The Bhagavata describes them as "one mind, one heart." But right at the moment when the match is fixed, Kapila realizes that Padmini is not meant for Devadatta:

Devadatta, my friend, I confess to you I'm feeling uneasy. You are a gentle soul. But his one is fast as lightning—and as sharp. She is not for the likes of you. What she needs is a man of steel. (19)

And soon enough, Padmini (the lotus plant) who seems to possess something of the Kali, the female deity, in her is attracted to the virility of Kapila. The Female Chorus has already given us an idea of the feeling of Padmini when it sang: "Why should love stick to the sap of a single body? When the stem is drunk with the thick yearning of the many petalled, man-flowered lantana, why should it be tied down to the relation of a single flower?" (11) and "A head for each breast. A pupil for each eye. A side for each arm. I have neither regret nor shame. The blood pours into the earth and song branches out in the sky." (11) Both Kapila and Padmini start drifting towards each other. He worships her beauty instinctively so much so that she enjoys his company whenever he comes to see her husband, Devadatta becomes jealous of this. He also shows it in his behaviour. He tries to postpone the proposed journey on the cart of Ujjain which disappoints Kapila.

Seeing Kapila's disappointment, Padmini insists on continuing with the plan of going to Ujjain.

Devadatta is a man of intellect while Kapila is a man of the body. Kapila is more attractive than Devadatta because as representative of the animal energy in the human, he has greater vitality and potential than Devadatta. On way to Ujjain, Padmini describes the charm of Kapila's body when the latter climbs a tree to bring her the fortunate lady's flower:

How he climbs—like an ape. Before I could even say 'yes,' he had taken off his shirt, pulled his dhoti up and swung up the branch. And what an ethereal shape! Such a broad back—like an ocean with muscles rippling across it—and then that small, feminine waist which looks so helpless. (25)

A little later, she remarks: "He is like a Celestial Being reborn as a hunter . . . How his body sways, his limbs curve—it's a dance almost." (26) She reaches the conclusion that "No woman could resist him." (26) Ironically, Devadatta also reaches the same conclusion: "No woman could resist him—and what does it matter that she's married." (26)

As Padmini and Kapila go to see the temple of Rudra, Devadatta excuses himself for a moment to go to the temple alone. Then in a sudden outburst of emotion, he decides to sacrifice his head to Kali. That he is doing so because he is unable to bear the pangs of jealousy becomes evident when he says: "Good-bye, Kapila, Good-bye, Padmini. May the Lord Rudra bless you. You are two pieces of my heart—live happily together. I shall find my happiness in that." (28) However, he professes that he is doing so in deference to his earlier vow:

Bhavani, Bhairavi, Kali, Durga, Mahamaya, Mother of all Nature—I had forgotten my promise to you. Forgive me, mother. You fulfilled the deepest craving of my life—you gave me Padmini—and I forgot my word. Forgive me, for I'm here now to carry out my promise. (28)

His generosity and selflessness are a mere sham because the real reason of the sacrifice is his refusal to share Padmini with Kapila.

The sight of the dead body of his friend shocks Kapila and he follows suit: "No, Devadatta, I can't live without you. I can't breathe without you. Devadatta, my brother, my father, my friend." (30) Kapila says that he is sacrificing himself out of his love for his friend but actually he wants to avert the scandal due to Devadatta's death. That both Devadatta and Kapila were telling lies is made clear by Kali in the temple. As she points out:

The rascals! They were lying to their last breaths. That fellow Devadatta—he had once promised his head to Rudra and his arms to me! Think of it—head to him and arms to me! Then because you insisted on going to the Rudra temple, he comes here and offers his head. Nobly too—wants to keep his word, he says—no other reason! Then this Kapila.

Died right in front of me—but ‘for his friend.’ Mind you! Didn’t even have the courtesy to refer to me. And what lies! Says he is dying for friendship. He must have known perfectly well he would be accused of killing Devadatta for you. Do you think he wouldn’t have grabbed you if it hadn’t been for that fear? But till his last breath—“Oh my dear friend! My dear brother!” (33)

Only Padmini is true in what Kali says is her selfishness. She is bold and frank in demanding what will fulfil her. When Kali favours her with the blessing of life for the two friends, Padmini happens to transpose the heads with the result that there are two men now—one with Devadatta’s head and Kapila’s body and the other with Kapila’s head and Devadatta’s body.

Padmini stumbles on the opportunity of having the best of the two men—Devadatta’s head and Kapila’s body. As to who should have Padmini, Devadatta scores a point over Kapila because “According to the Shastras, the head is the sign of a man . . . Of all the limbs the topmost—in position as well as in importance—is the head.” (36-37) Kapila is the loser in this ludicrous bargain of mixing up of heads. He has lost not only his body but also his peace on account of the vasanas lodged in Devadatta’s body. His mundane logic that body being the real person Padmini should belong to him is rejected by both Padmini and Devadatta.

The extraordinary situation helps Padmini to break out of the moral codes inflicted by society. She wants her companion in life to be an ideal man—both in brain and brawn. She wants Devadatta’s mind and Kapila’s body while the society forces her to seek these qualities in one man. But since such a perfect man does not exist, she creates such a man by transposing the heads. Thus for a short while, she succeeds in having both brain and brawn, the spirit and the flesh: “Fabulous body—fabulous brain—fabulous Devadatta.” (43)

At the beginning of Act II, the Bhagavata poses the question directly to the audience: “What? What indeed is the solution to this problem, which holds the entire future of these three unfortunate beings in a balance?” (40) He connects the situation to the one way back in the ages, when King Vikrama was ruling the world and was asked the same question by the demon Vetala: “which of the people, thus mixed together, was her rightful husband?” The king had offered a solution to the riddle even without batting an eyelid: “That one of the two, on whom her husband’s head was fixed, was her husband, for the head is the chief of limbs and personal identity depends upon it.” But the solution King Vikrama gave to the problem is inadequate in the present situation. The Bhagavata raises this question: “Will his rational logical answer backed by the sacred texts appeal to our audience?” (40) It is here that Karnad invests the old legend with a new meaning, making it relevant for the present-day world.

Devadatta, Padmini and Kapila go to a great rishi in search of a solution to their problem who, remembering what King Vikrama had said, gave the solution: “As the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs. Therefore, the man with Devadatta’s head is indeed Devadatta and he is the rightful husband of Padmini.” (40) Devadatta and Padmini go back to the city where Devadatta enjoys the benefits of Kapila’s well-trained body for about a year. He succeeds in exploiting Kapila’s body to his and Padmini’s satisfaction. But mankind cannot live with perfection for a long time. Padmini’s query “Must the head always win” becomes relevant when after about a year Devadatta’s head fails to enjoy the liveliness of Kapila’s body. Its liveness begins to wear off owing to the lack of physical labour. The mind that controls the body starts transforming the body, making it lose all its virility.

The changes in Devadatta’s physical features are conveyed through the dolls. When Devadatta touches Doll I, the latter feels the change and comments: “His palms! They were so rough, when he first brought us here. Like a labourer’s. But now they are soft—sickly soft—like a young girl’s.” (47) The second doll notices the change in stomach: “It was so tight and muscular. Now ...” The first doll has noted it too and completes the sentence: “It’s loose.” Slowly Devadatta’s head with Kapila’s body regains its former self—a delicate body. Padmini who had felt that she had the best of both the men gets disillusioned. She has known Kapila’s body with Devadatta’s head. But that physicality in Devadatta is gone. Once again, she starts missing Kapila, his impulsiveness and his physicality. She has enjoyed it for a year but cannot do so any more. Consequently, Devadatta loses Padmini to Kapila once again.

Kapila meanwhile has remained in the forest to train the Brahmin’s body hanging by his head like a corpse and shape it into form. Kapila cannot live by his head but by labour. He trains the brahmin’s body by hard physical labour. Conferring superiority on head entails negation of body and this starts a conflict between the two. Both Devadatta and Kapila realize that sensuous pleasures of the body cannot be escaped. Padmini confirms this when she once again abandons Devadatta to stay with the real Kapila who has trained Devadatta’s body. Practising deceit on her husband, Padmini sends Devadatta to the Ujjain fair to fetch new dolls for the child and herself walks into the embrace of Kapila. She takes the child with her and claims it to be the child of both Devadatta and Kapila. Padmini’s visit disturbs Kapila. He had buried all those faceless memories but Padmini has dug them up. He finds himself in a tough situation and asks Padmini: “Why should one tolerate this mad dance of incompleteness?” (57)

The focus of the play however is on Padmini, the woman who is faced with this impossible situation: How would a woman take it if it really happened and would it really solve the problem. Here

Karnad takes a leap from the original story and develops it further. Padmini's predicament is the predicament of a modern, emancipated woman in our society who is born between two polarities, a woman who loves her husband as well as someone else for two different aspects of their personalities. Padmini is fascinated by both Devadatta and Kapila and this creates the problem. The two men cannot accept each other when it comes to sharing a woman and all the three destroy themselves in the process. When Devadatta reaches the forest, he asks Kapila:

- Devadatta : Tell me one thing. Do you really love Padmini?
 Kapila : Yes
 Devadatta : So do I.
 Kapila : I know, [*Silence*] Devadatta, couldn't we all three live together—like the Pandavas and Draupadi?
 Devadatta : What do you think?
 [*Silence, Padmini looks at them but doesn't say anything*]
 Kapila [*laughs*] : No, it can't be done.
 Devadatta : That's why I brought this. [*Shows the sword.*] What won't end has to be cut.
 Kapila : I got your body—but not your wisdom. (60-61)

The two have to die and reduce their beloved Padmini to ashes. Devadatta makes it clear that there are “No grounds for friendship now, No question of mercy. We must fight like lions and kill like cobras.” (61)

The play ends with Devadatta and Kapila fighting a duel in which the heads roll again. When both the friends are dead, Padmini decides to perform sati. She asks the Bhagavata to make a large funeral pyre because they are three. Before sacrificing herself, Padmini makes it clear that she cannot hope to get perfection even in her next life. As she prays to “Kali, Mother of all nature,” she says: “You must have your joke even now. Other women can die praying that they should get the same husband in all the lives to come. You haven't left me even that little consolation.” (63)

It is the child who combines the thematic strands of the main plot and the sub-plot. He grows up as Kapila's child in the forest and at the age of five is given over to a traveller going to the city to be delivered into the hands of his grandparents. This is in accordance with what Padmini had told the Bhagavata:

My son is sleeping in the hut. Take him under your care. Give him to the hunters who live in the forest and tell them it's Kapila's son. They loved Kapila and will bring the child up. Let the child grow up in the forest with the rivers and the trees. When he's five take him to the Reverend Brahmin Vidyasagara. Tell him it's Devadatta's son. (62)

At the age of five, the child lives in a world of make-believe. He plays with dolls and refuses to talk with any person. What is striking is that the child is found not to be able to laugh like a human child. As Actor I says: "Children of his age should be out-talking a dictionary, but this one doesn't speak a word. Doesn't laugh, doesn't cry, doesn't even smile. The same long face all twenty-four hours. There's obviously something wrong with him." (66) The child is hopelessly incomplete because he has lost the child's natural privilege to laugh and enjoy. The child becomes complete when he laughs in response to Hayavadana's laughter. This abnormal child has never laughed by itself. Hayavadana's laughter restores the boy to normalcy and makes possible his return to humanity. As M.K. Naik suggests, "Modern man must recover his sense of childlike curiosity, wonder and amusement at the sheer incongruity of life in order to achieve integration."

3.8.5. Critical Evaluation:

Hayavadana is a complex play with several central concerns and themes lending itself to various meanings and levels of interpretation. One theme which is obvious is that of incompleteness. According to Krishna Gandhi, "the theme of the play is an old one . . . man's yearning for completeness, for perfection. It is this yearning which makes people restless in their ordinary existence, and makes them reach out for extraordinary things - - - . But the ideal of perfection itself is ambiguous. The character of Hayavadana is invented as an example of this ambiguity".

The foregoing discussion supports U.R. Anantha Murthy's opinion that "the play exposes the audience to a significant theme like 'incompleteness' in a comic mode". According R.S. Sharma, "that completeness is a humanly impossible ideal is suggested first in the story of Hayavadana and later in the transposition of heads. By showing the absurdity of the ideal of completeness the play finally achieves its aesthetic goal. It implicitly asserts the value and significance of human imperfection which makes any upward movement possible." Seen from another angle, the theme of the play is the conflict between two polarities, the rational and the physical, as the vital truth of human existence. At the metaphysical level, if perfection or completion means fusion of the two polarities, the play suggests that such fusion is not possible. At the socio-cultural level, the play suggests that the rational always asserts itself and thus human society is made possible only in this manner. Thus the co-existence of the two is ruled out physically as well as morally. Society will bring about the destruction of the individuals who defy order in society. Padmini's predicament is the predicament of a modern, emancipated woman in our society who is torn between two polarities, a woman who loves her husband as well as some one else for two different aspects of their personalities. A civilized society and its moral code will not accept such a woman. The two men

will not accept each other when it comes to sharing a woman and all the three will destroy themselves in the process.

Devadatta and Kapila's friendship obviously evolves out of their fascination for the aspect which each one of them lacks. Devadatta represents the Apollonian aspect (order) while Kapila the Dionysian aspect (passion). They are thus complementary to each other. But the woman whom both of them love is fascinated by both of them and this creates the problem. It is clear that Padmini is not at all willing to play docilely the role that society imposes on her. Devadatta and Kapila accept the restrictions and make a virtue of these restrictions, resorting to platitudes such as friendship etc. to make reality bearable. Padmini, 'the female principle', more bold, more frank in demanding what will fulfil her, tries to get the best of both in a daring endeavour. Her uninhibited nature is revealed again and again in the conversation between Padmini and Devadatta and in the conversation between the goddess and Padmini. Padmini says to the goddess: "If you'd saved either of them I would have been spared all this terror, this agony. Why did you wait so long?" The goddess appreciates her frankness and says to her, "Only you spoke the truth – you spoke the truth – because you are selfish." Padmini knows exactly what she wants from the men – Devadatta's mind and Kapila's physicality – while society forces her to seek these qualities, if she can, in one man. In her quest for 'a perfect man' who possesses both these aspects of human personality, in a way, she creates such a man by transposing the heads of Devadatta and Kapila. The goddess once again discerns her motives and says in a resigned tone, 'My dear daughter, there should be a limit even to honesty' and adds "anyway so be it!" If this is understood as a deliberately chosen one, Padmini's act is ultimately a consequence of the social norms imposed on her. Since she cannot have both Devadatta and Kapila she tries to get past the norms by having what she most wants from each of them. But this does not at all solve the problem. For if the head controls the body it logically follows that it will transform the body. That is what happens and so far as Padmini is concerned she again remains with Devadatta, her husband. Worse still, she is forced to watch the transformation taking place and thus lose Kapila bit by bit. Now there is an urge in her to know Kapila – the person as she knew only Kapila's body, and she goes in search of Kapila into the forest.

The two friends kill each other in a duel and Padmini decides to perform 'sati'. This allows her to assert her will through death. She could not assert it when she was alive partly because of the social norms and partly due to the realization that her accepting two husbands namely Kapila and Devadatta, would not solve the problem so long as they themselves could not reconcile themselves to the idea. Padmini solves her problem in an existential fashion. The fusion of the Apollonian and Dionysian is Padmini's dream

which she wants to be fulfilled through her son. She ensures that her son is brought up first in the forest and then in the city.

3.8.6. Dramatic Devices:

The stories of the main plot and the sub-plot lead to the same conclusion, depicting that perfection is a humanly unfeasible ideal. The play borrows freely from the Yakshagana and many other folk forms. Perhaps Karnad felt that in the 'naturalistic form' the play would never achieve the 'universalization' of the theme the way it achieves it in its present form. The "non-naturalistic" form employed by Karnad is close to Brecht's Epic theatre. The similar features are: (a) the use of a narrator, (b) extensive use of songs and music (c) a linear and loose plot construction avoiding climax and revelation (d) actors wearing masks (e) action presented largely through 'miming'. All this makes the 'universal framework' easier. It also succeeds in making the audience think about the problem in a more detached manner.

Karnad has managed to present his characters as 'representatives' in spite of having made them highly individuated in some sections of the play and the names given to the characters are generic and suggestive. The character of the Bhagavata contributes a lot to the formal aspect of the play. Karnad does not merely borrow the character from a typical Yakshagana play. He increases the scope of the role by making the Bhagavata not a mere commentator-narrator but also by making him one of the characters. The scene between the Bhagavata and Kapila before Padmini reaches Kapila's hut and the scene between the Bhagavata and Padmini when she prepares to perform "Sati" are good examples of it.

The supernatural, i.e. the goddess, is also used as a device. She is 'terrible' in appearance but is given all the characteristics of a human being. She is angry at the thought that Devadatta should promise his 'head' to Rudra and only his 'arms' to her. She is vexed when aroused from her sleep. The Goddess also serves to spell out to the audience the hidden motives behind the actions of the characters. By employing this strategy, the playwright also stresses the fact that there are no smooth and practical solutions to human problems. She grants boons to human beings when they pray sincerely but ultimately the problem remains unsolved as revealed in the case of Padmini and Hayavadana.

The use of the dolls possessing a special insight enables Karnad to reveal very effectively to the audience the thought processes and inner psyche of Padmini as she visualizes the gradual metamorphosis of Devadatta's body into its original form and dreams of Kapila's strong body. They report that in her reveries she perceives a man, not her husband, who looks rougher and darker, climbs a tree and dives into a river. Devadatta's transfiguration and the passage of time is also communicated through the dolls. They

are also used to develop the plot further. Padmini asks her husband to go to Ujjain and get new dolls, as the old ones have been worn out and Padmini gets an opportunity to meet Kapila. Thus one of the striking features of *Hayavadana* is the introduction of the device of making inanimate objects animate.

Karnad also makes use of the Female Chorus which is absent in the Yakshagana play. The very idea of 'Sati' by Padmini is ridiculed by Karnad through the song of the female chorus, which is full of grotesque beauty: "The fortunate lady's procession goes to the street of laburnums, while the makarandas tie the pennants and jacarandas hold lights. Good-bye, dear sister. Go without fear. The Lord of death will be pleased with the offering of three coconuts." It keeps the audience detached from any kind of emotional involvement with the 'sad-scene'. The audience, as a result, thinks dispassionately about Padmini's death.

Karnad employs the folk device of masks which is a typical feature of 'Yakshagana' to project the personalities of different characters. Another remarkable feature of the play is that the action of the play is 'mimed' thereby achieving universalization. For example, "Kapila followed by Padmini and Devadatta, enter miming a cart ride. Kapila is driving the cart" (25). Karnad's choice of a folktale for his play is apt because it lifts the play above the limitations of time and place.

3.8.7. Summary:

In almost all his plays, Karnad makes use of ancient myths, legends, stories, and traditions to interpret the age old human situation with reference to contemporary experience. In this drama, Karnada explores the theme of incompleteness and human quest for perfection and completion. Curiously the title of the play takes after Hayavadana, a minor character in the sub-plot. This is because the horse-man becomes a symbol of conscious or unconscious striving after the elusive ideal of perfection illustrated in other characters. Hence, this seemingly marginal, grotesque, and absurd being becomes the key figure for the unravelling of the central idea of the play. Karnad's genius lies in the fact that he makes the play very provocative. Though the plot of the play is mainly derived from mythology, Karnad rejects traditional solutions as being facile. In fact, he raises more questions as to the nature of perfection and its possibility or otherwise than solutions.

The lesson further shows how Karnad draws upon the resources of the folk theatre adding to the thematic and technical richness of the play. Masks, curtains, mime, songs, the commentator narrator, dolls, horse-man, the story, within-a story facilitating a mixture of the human and the non-human, are used to create a queer magical world. It is a world of incomplete individuals, magnanimous gods, of vocal dolls and mute children, a world indifferent to the longings, ecstasies and miseries of human beings.

3.8.8. Sample Questions:

1. Comment on the theme of the quest for perfection in Hayavadana.
2. Write an essay on the use of folk theatre devices by Karnad in Hayavadana.
3. Trace the structure of the plot in Hayavadana.
4. Examine the significance of the title of the play Hayavadana.
5. Give an estimate of the dramatic art of Girish Karnad.

3.8.9. Suggested Reading:

1. Girish, Karnad. Introduction to Three Plays Naga-Mandala, Hayavadana, Tughlaq. (Delhi: OUP, 1994).
2. Subhangi S. Raykar, "The Development of Girish Karnad as a Dramatist: Hayavadana." The Plays of Girish Karnad: Critical Perspectives. Ed. Jayadipsinh Dodiya. (New Delhi: Prestige, 1998).
3. R.K. Dhawan, "Girish Karnad: The Man and the Writer." The Plays of Girish Karnad: Critical Perspectives. Ed. Jayadipsinh Dodiya. (New Delhi: Prestige, 1998).
4. M.K. Naik, "From the Horse's Mouth: A Study of Hayavadana." Dimensions of Indian English Literature. (New Delhi: Sterling, 1984).

Dr. K. Ratna Shiela Mani

Lesson - 9

INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION – BACKGROUND

Structure

- 3.9.1 Objectives
- 3.9.2 Introduction
- 3.9.3 The Indian Novel
- 3.9.4 The Indo-Anglian Novel
- 3.9.5 First Generation Novelists
- 3.9.6 Second Generation Novelists
- 3.9.7 Third Generation Novelists
- 3.9.8 Women Novelists
- 3.9.9 Summary
- 3.9.10 Sample Questions
- 3.9.11 Suggested Reading

3.9.1 Objectives of the Lesson:

- (i) To make a brief review of Indian English fiction from 1864 to 1984
- (ii) To examine the origin of Indian English novel and its different patterns, themes, and its development.
- (iii) To provide the readers the background knowledge to Indian English fiction.

3.9.2. Introduction:

A student of Indian English Literature may be baffled/confused with so many terms such as Indian Literature, Anglo-Indian Literature, Indo-Anglian Literature and Indian English Literature. So let us try to discuss these terms in brief.

A. **Indian Literature:** India has a rich literary heritage from times immemorial starting from Vedas till today. Many versatile writers enriched Indian literature through different languages pertaining to India. Indian literature means different literatures produced in different languages of India such as Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam, etc. Indian English literature is also one among them. The impact of the British rule in India has caused the rise of Indian English Literature.

- B. Anglo-Indian Literature:** Anglo-Indian Literature means the works contributed by English men, on Indian themes. For example, the works of Sir William Jones, Sir Edwin Arnold, F.W. Bain, E.M. Forster, Rudyard, Kipling, Pearl S. Buck and so on.
- C. Indi-Anglian Literature:** This refers to literature originally written by Indians who use English as a natural medium of expression. This term excludes the writings of Edwin Arnold, Forster, Kipling and others, though written on Indian themes. It was Prof. Iyengar who gave currency and respectability to the term.
- D. Indo-English Literature:** This term is used by V.K. Gokak to refer to English translations from Indian languages.

For a long time referred to as Indo-Anglian Literature or less often Indian English Literature, now Indian Writing in English is the preferred term for the creative writing in English by Indians. Dr. C.R. Reddy feels that Indo-Anglian Literature is not essentially different from Indian Literature. After this brief explanation of these terms, let us examine the growth of Indian English novel.

3.9.3. Indian Novel:

The novel is a new literary phenomenon added to the world of literary works such as dramas, short stories, poems and fables. The novel is the agreeable form for embodying ideas and experiences of the novelist. It is the most popular form of literature. Political anxiety was the main ingredient of Indian writing in English published between 1930-1940's. Post independence literature is mainly based on the problems of mankind, traditions, problems of individuals and families, conflict between haves and have-nots, spiritual faith, and materialistic realities.

Bengali Novel: Translation:

Rajmohan's Wife (1864) was the first novel in English, written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. The English versions of Durgeshnandini, Kapalakundala, Vishavruksha. (The poison tree; A Tale of Hindu life in Bengal) and Anandmath, novels appeared between 1864 and 1866. They are novels of historical importance. These novels are written in "Bengali" and later translated into English language.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, a novelist of historical and romantic fiction, has been hailed as a Rishi, and path-maker. Prophecy was his best gift as a novelist. His song 'Bandemataram' inspired all Indians and converted them into a religion of patriotism. His purpose was to restore the self-respect of

the people of India. Another famous Bengali novelist Rabindranath Tagore, the celebrated novelist aimed at bridging the gap between the East and the West. Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes that the flowering of Bengali literature is the result of their exposure to the western thought and culture.

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1935) has outgrown both Bankim and Tagore in portraying characters in his novels like *Srikanta*, *Devadas*, *Pather Dabi*, *Bipradas* and *Seshprasna*. Closely trailing behind these celebrated novelists are Tarasankar Bandyopadhyaya, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandyopadhyaya, Manik Bandyopadhyaya, Naini Bhaumik, Gajandrakumar Mitra and Manoj Basu who made their literary pursuits both in English and Bengali.

The vicissitudes of the Bengali novel foreshadow more or less the vicissitudes of the Novel in India. The Western breeze blows, sometimes directly and sometimes – and more significantly-indirectly, its velocity chastened in the ample spaces of Bengal.

Dr. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar - Indian Writing in English- p.319

Tagore: It is with Tagore's works that the political novel gained popularity in the context of the revolutionary movements of the twentieth century, Raibindranath Tagore is the one who created literary history. The Nobel Prize for literature to Tagore marks the beginning of recognition on a global scale for the literary talents of Indians. As a poet, dramatist, actor, producer, reformer and philosopher, he achieved a great reputation. The novels and the short stories of Tagore are unquestionably distinctive and distinguished in nature. His full length novels which are appeared in English are The Wreck, The Home and the World and Gora. Gora is undoubtedly the best of his fiction. Krishna Kripalani described it as "the epic of India in transition at the most crucially intellectual period of modern history".

3.9.4. Indian-English Novel:

Indian English novel has followed the foot-steps of the Bengali Novel. The development of the Indian English novel seems to follow certain definite patterns and consists of well defined stages. Ever since the appearance of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel, Rajmohan's Wife in 1864 Indian English fiction has grown considerably in bulk, variety and maturity. Its development can be traced from imitative to realistic; sociological to psychological stage.

After the First World War, the Indian English novel became determinedly more realistic and less idealised. The novelists made deliberate efforts to depict the distress of the downtrodden classes, portraying India as she really was. The novels written between the two World Wars were primarily concerned with the contemporary social milieu and were greatly influenced by the Gandhian ethos. It was during this period that the Indian English fiction discovered some of its most significant themes such

as the ordeal of the freedom-struggle, East-West relationship, the communal problem and the plight of the untouchables and the poor. The nationalists effectively utilised the form of novel as a convenient means of popularizing and disseminating their cause and ideas.

After the Independence of India, we can observe a shift in the themes of the Indian English novelists. Their interest moved from the nationalistic zeal to the private sphere. They began to delineate in their works, "The individual's quest for the self" in all its varied and complex forms along with his problems and crisis. Most of the second-generation novelists in their eagerness to find new themes, have renounced the larger world in favour of the inner man. For example the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, and Arun Joshi. Their main intention is "Man but not Society".

In the earlier generation Indian English Novelists, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand (The famous Trio) played an important role in the development of Indian English novel. They got name fame and international recognition to the form of Indian English novel. Though they belong to the same period and began their career as writers in the 1930's, their paths of writing are different. Mulk Raj Anand is a champion of down-trodden people. He portrays the problems of the lower classes of the society. R.K. Narayan is a detached observer of life. He never meddles with the troubles and problems of the society. He presents the realistic middle class man and his problems and feelings. Raja Rao represents the traditional everlasting values of spiritual India in his writings. Let us know more about them.

3.9.5. First Generation Novelists:

The famous three names are Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayana and Raja Rao. Mulk Raj Anand, who inherited the army man's dare devilry, adventure from his father has also imbibed humanism. He is the first humanist and realistic novelist. Before Anand, according to Iyengar, "None of them cared to produce realistic or naturalistic fiction after the manner of Balzac or Zola".

He always chose outcastes, peasants, sepoys, common people and their sufferings. His novels Untouchable, Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud are some of the dynamic packed novels. The characters in these novels are of no significance to the rich and sophisticated but Anand makes the readers feel their presence and share their failures and sorrows. Anand is Dickensian in his sensitivity to the existence of social evils in the society. He tries to create in the readers an awareness of the dehumanising social evils and to stir their feelings and activate them for the removal of these evils. Anand rejects all institutions in favour of man. He is a core humanist. That is why he repeats in his novels: "I believe in Man".

The protagonists in Anand's novels belong to the class of suffering. Anand takes care to look into the emotional and psychological problems of these human beings. Religion has no sacred place in his novels. He explored the exploitative nature of religion in his novels. His aim is to reject exploitation of any kind in all its facets. His object is not merely to shock his readers by a representation of reality but to stimulate their consciousness. He has evocatively presented different layers of human experience in his fiction. He has exposed social evils in their myriad manifestations.

Among his works, Coolie and Untouchable are regarded as his master pieces. In Coolie, the protagonist Munoo, an orphan boy from Kangra hills, sets out in search of a livelihood. Munoo works as a labourer in different places where he is exposed to the hard realities of the world. The sufferings of the hero, Munoo through life and death indirectly universalises the social evils like class conflict and communal riots etc. In Untouchable, the protagonist Bakha gets the full impact of caste cruelty on his adolescent mind. Anand writes in his preface to Two Leaves and a Bud that "He had ventured into the territory that had been largely ignored till then by Indian writers". The boyhood, youth and early manhood of Lalu Singh, a Sikh farmer's son formed the themes of his three novels The Village, Across the Black Waters and The Sword and the Sickle. The vitality of his characters, the richness of his total comprehension, and his well planned narrations project Anand as a naturalistic novelist. The facet of his humanism can be observed in all his novels. His close association with the down-trodden and his passionate record of their woes proved him as a champion of the under-dog.

R.K. Narayan

R.K. Narayan, another celebrated novelist from South India, was portrayed as "The Man of Malgudi". His sense of humour mixed with his ability to discuss precisely the social constraints existing in south India makes him the most popular novelist among the first generation novelists of Pre-Independent India. Chaman Nahal another novelist analyses like this:

Narayan's charm lies elsewhere. It is in his deep sense of humour, the ability of his characters to laugh at themselves, his grip of the mundane and comic side of life that he rises to the best of his abilities.

R.K. Narayan is fundamentally a good story teller with an eye for the ludicrous aspect of life. His portrayal of characters has a touch of realism. In his novels, R.K. Narayan deals in trivial things, day-to-day occurrences and little themes. The eminence of R.K. Narayan as an artist resides in his sound management of the narrative.

R.K. Narayan's first publication was Swami and His Friends; Bachelor of Arts and The Dark Room appeared in succession. His other novels published at the end of the war are The English Teacher,

the Financial Expert and Waiting for The Mahatma. During his American tour organized by the Rockefeller Foundation, he could add The Guide and My Dateless Dairy.

Swami and His Friends is the most enjoyable novel, which deals with the actual happenings of everyday in the lives of many boys whom Swami represents. In Bachelor of Arts one can see the hurdles caused to lovers by rigid caste controls and difficult astrological hurdles. Dark Room is a novel depicting a study of domestic incompatibility. Waiting for the Mahatma is a novel, which keeps Mahatma Gandhi in the background and makes his presence felt. The Guide, The Man-Eater of Malgudi, Mr. Sampath, The Financial Expert and The Sweet Vendor - all these novels take the readers into an exotic world of half-hearted dreamers, artists, financiers, speculators, eccentrics, film stars and sanyasis.

R.K. Narayan is a detached observer of life. There are no moral preachings in his novels. Among his many works, The Guide occupies an important place. In this novel R.K. Narayan's maturity gets mellowed to its zenith. The ending of the novel The Guide is beautiful and artistic. In his other novel, The English Teacher we feel the touch of autobiographical details of his life, but the ending of the novel is a sort of anti-climax.

In Narayan's latest novels one could conceive the idea of a galloping hero of the sickened modern life.

Raja Rao

Raja Rao is another contemporary of Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan. Mahatma Gandhi's influence engulfed him also during his childhood. As a novelist he revealed in his works a sensitive awareness to the forces let loose by the Gandhian Revolution. The pulls and pushes of the past traditions were also visibly evident in his literary works. His first novel Kanthapura (1938) is a versatile description of Gandhian myth, a poetic translation of the realities of life. The central character, a Brahmin widow symbolizes women of limited range of intelligence agreeable to change and adopt new ideas. Raja Rao in his characteristic style created characters who are instruments of karma, Jnana and Bhakti. His characterisation is excellent. His second novel, The Serpent and the Rope (1960) is another classic novel. His third novel The Cat and Shakespeare appeared in 1965 followed by The Chessmaster and his Moues (1988). His total output amounts to a little over 1000 pages, but he has placed the Indian-English novel on the world map and achieved international fame.

The Serpent and the Rope is his finest evocation, which continues to fascinate many novelists, from all over the world. The novel recounts the life of a person brought up in the traditional Brahminical

milieu. The novel is written in the autobiographical mode. It explains the spiritual journey of a South Indian Brahmin, Rama Swamy, the principal protagonist. In his evolution as a novelist he has moved from simple narration Kanthapura to Metaphysical speculations in his later novels (The Serpent and the Rope). His later novels are philosophical and show his intellectual and artistic maturity. He is the pioneer of the metaphysical novel. The Serpent and the Rope has to be read and re-read and every fresh reading reveals new beauties and philosophical truths.

3.9.6. Second Generation Novelists:

Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Shagal, Balachandra Rajan, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi and Anita Desai are considered to be the prominent novelists of the second generation who appeared on the scene in the 50's and 60's. Bhabani Bhattacharya, a free lance writer, wrote five novels namely So Many Hungers, Music for Mohini, He Who Rides a Tiger, A Goddess Named Gold and Shadow from Ladakh. Most of his writings are vivid descriptions of the sufferings of the poor, an impeachment of man's inhuman behaviour towards fellow human beings. Shadow from Ladakh, a novel written during China's invasion of India, can be considered as a shadow play cast by the China's invasion. The whole novel is a grandeur in conflict – conflict between marching forward for a change and looking back to respect the old traditions.

Manohar Malgonkar published four novels in the course of five years. His first novel Distant Drums is an attempt to present the life of army during the transitional period between the last part of the British regime and the first years of Congress rule. Combat of Shadows published in 1962, is based on the love affairs of Henry Winton, Ruby and Jean. Like Mulk Raj Anand, Malgonkar also chose Assam Tea Gardens and many conflicting forces like Tea pythons, love, passion and sportsmanship. A Bend in the Ganges published in 1964 gives an account of the sequential events starting with the ceremonial burning of foreign cloth and ends with the burning of the Indian cities due to the clash between the Hindus and Muslims.

Khushwant Singh's two novels bring into light the Partition of India. His Train to Pakistan projects with the pitiless precision, a picture of the bestial horrors enacted on the Indo-Pakistan border region during the terror-haunted days of August, 1947. I Shall not Hear the Nightingale concentrates on the inner tensions and external movements of a well-to-do-sikh family in Punjab during the period of 'Quit India' movement.

Arun Joshi came into limelight with the publication of his very first novel, *The Foreigner* (1968). Joshi's primary concern in his five novels is the predicament of modern man and his attempt to

understand the labyrinths of life. His protagonists do not end their journey in futile efforts. They arrive at some meaning of life. His fourth novel, *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) was selected for the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award. The source of most of Joshi's novels is actual experience of individuals. He experiments with the medium of literature for studying man's predicament, particularly in the light of motives responsible for his actions and reactions on his psyche. Joshi delves into the inner recesses of human psyche where he finds instincts and impulses at work. Arun Joshi and Anita Desai, two modern novelists of India, examined the theme of the individual's quest for the self in all its varied and complex forms in their novels.

Balachandra Ranjan's *The Dark Dancer* is about analysing the factors leading to the Partition and its subsequent tragedy. The protagonist blames the British rulers for the Partition and says to Cynthia with contempt: "You made this awful thing grow for a whole generation. You British have started up the trouble. It is you that made the religious divisions take priority over our common political interests."

Azadi is another novel published in 1976 by Chaman Nahal. This novel depicts political, religious, social, cultural and historical events that took place during the Partition.

3.9.7. Third Generation Novelists:

The 1980's witnessed a new path and vigour of the Indian English fiction. The leader of this movement is Salman Rushdie. The appearance of *Midnight's Children* (1981) brought about a renaissance in Indian English fiction. The book has also won the prestigious "Booker Prize". After the great success of *Midnight's Children*, a group of young novelists eagerly, following in Rushdie's footsteps called as 'Rushdie's Children' appeared in the 1980's. Among these, the most talented ones are Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Rohinton Mistry and Boman Desai. They are highly educated and actively involved in the public life as bureaucrats. They turned to life and experience as they knew them first hand. They are not romantic dreamers. They felt and experienced the pain of the living and portrayed it in their works.

3.9.8. Women Novelists

Many women novelists both in quantity as well as quality substantially contributed to the Indian Writing in English literature. Indian Women novelists like Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Attia Husain, Shashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukherjee, and Kamala Das made significant contribution to Indian novel in English.

Mrs. Choshal (Swarna Kumari Dabi) was the first Bengali woman novelist whose works were translated into English. Among the Indian Women novelists, Kamala Markandaya is the most popular novelist of the first generation novelists. Kamala Markandaya in her novel Some Inner Fury brought out clearly the tragedies associated with politics. Markandaya in a novel titled Nectar in a Sieve brought out certain facts of life such as fear, despair and hunger as constant companions of peasants. She postulated that the heart tempered in flames of love and faith, suffering and sacrifice will not accept defeat. Kamala Markandaya through her novel A Silence of Desire entered into the realms of spiritual realities. Her novel Possession does not really convince the readers about the spiritual convictions on which the novel is based upon. In The Coffer Dams confrontation between technological advancement and human traditions has been vividly picturised. Her deep agony for those who undergo onslaught on Muslims is clearly visible in the novel. The theme of her fifth novel A Handful of Rice is urban economics. It is purely an Indian tale realistically linked to the present Indian economic situation.

Next to Kamala Markandaya, we can consider the name of Ruth Pravar Jhabvala. In the words of K.R.S. Iyengar:

Mrs. Ruth Pravar Jhabvala's novels have a clear perception while describing the domestic scene and in projection the foreignness in India. In her fiction some people and situations appear more intrinsically funny than others. Mrs. Jhabvala makes us laugh or at least smile by delicately exposing human follies and foibles. There is a touch of compassion.

Mrs. Attia Hossain's novel Sunlight on a Broken Columan is in four parts. The narrator heroine, Laila, is a spectator for 20 years during which India moved from colonization to independence. She writes with a feeling for places, events and words.

Anita Desai is the most renowned woman novelist among psychological novelists. Anita Desai's novels Cry, the Peacock and Voices in the City are revelations of the inner climate, grappling with thoughts, emotions and feelings. Her novels brought in the "psychological turn" to Indian fiction. She has touched the nuances and subtleties of fiction hitherto unknown in Indian fiction in English. All her women are conscious of their existence and their needs.

Shashi Deshpande is one novelist who is rising like a star among women novelists of India. Her women are educated, self-conscious, and sensitive. Their revolt against the rigid social and family set up comes out of necessity. For example Saru, in The Dark Holds No Terror, goes through traumatic experiences simply because she is highly skilled, intelligent and competent than her husband. In her novels like That Long Silence and A Matter of Time Deshpande has subtly and accurately described the silence which has been thrust on Indian women for centuries.

Nayantara Sahgal published both fiction and nonfiction. Her novel This Time of Morning contained the details of the power politics that were going on within the corridors of the parliament and the drawing rooms of the powerful politicians. Her latest novel Storm in Chandigarh deals with the problems of partition in Punjab. Women in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal are liberal and crave to establish their individuality. Saro, the female protagonist's longing for love and understanding is beautifully depicted in this novel.

Love, lust, war, politics, economic, social tensions, aspirations, disappointments, prejudices, riches and rags, life's intricate and inner feelings, sensualities and spiritualities have all been delineated clearly in the novels of the women novelists who contributed very much to the Indian Writings in English literature. An analysis of the novels by Indian women novelists reveals that these novelists have written with immense concern and understanding for their female characters. The hidden and suppressed world of Indian women comes to full light in their novels.

3.9.9. Summary:

Indian English fiction began with a variety of historical fiction in the novels of Bannkin Chandra Chatterjee's *Raj Mohan's Wife*, S.K. Ghosh's *The Prince of Destiny* and S.K. Mitia's *Hindupur*. In the nineteen twenties and thirties, social and political awareness and the writer's zeal for social reform gave way to the birth of "Social Novel". The desire to improve the state of the people particularly, the downtrodden and outclassed people became the subject matter of the Indian novel in this period. It can be observed from the novel *Murugan, the Tiller* (1927) to *The Untouchable*. The struggle for independence became one unifying force in the two decades preceding the actual achievement of political freedom. Many of the novelists of the period could not escape from this unifying force and they dealt with it at great length in their works. The experience shared by the people has turned out to be the core of their writings. In 1950's and 1960's the shift of interest from *the public to the private*; from *the Society to the Individual* can be observed. "The individual's quest for the self" has become the predominant theme in this period. Their main intention is "Man" but not "Society". The appearance of Midnight's Children (1981) brought another change in the direction of the Indian Novel. It has brought about a renaissance in Indian English fiction. It has explained the need of the writer's response towards the society and its changes. They are playing "the role of writer as a teacher". "The future of Indian fiction is indeed full of promise. Recent fiction has given ample evidence of vitality, variety, humanity and artistic integrity" as said by K.R. Srinivas Iyenger. (p.518)

The success of Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh and other popular world class Indian English novelists has turned the words of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar into a reality. The future of Indian fiction is indeed full of promise.

3.9.10 Sample Questions:

1. Explain the role played by the famous trio (R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand) in the development of the Indian English Novel.
2. Explain the influence of Bengal Renaissance in the development of the form of novel in India.
3. Explain the prominent themes of the Indian English novel in the 1930's and 40's.
4. "The hidden and suppressed world of Indian women came into light in the writings of Indian Women Novelists" – Elucidate.
5. Explain the "Quest for Identify" as the main theme of Modern Indian English Fiction.

3.9.11. Suggested Reading:

1. Meenakshi Mukerjee. *The Twice Born Fiction*, Arnold Heinemann: New Delhi, 1984.
2. Naik. M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*, Sahitya Akadami: New Delhi, 1982.
3. Naik. M.K. *The Achievement of Indian English Fiction*, Sterling: New Delhi, 1984.
4. Srinivas Iyengar, K.R.S. *Contemporary Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi: New Delhi, 1981.
5. Srinivas Iyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling: New Delhi, 1985.

Mr. M. SURESH KUMAR

Lesson – 10

Raja Rao : *On The Ganga Ghat*

Structure:

- 3.10.1 Objectives**
- 3.10.2 Background – the Writer and the Period**
- 3.10.3 The Writer – his life and works**
- 3.10.4 Analysis of the Text**
- 3.10.5 Brief critical evaluation of the Literary text and the writer’s work**
- 3.10.6 Glossary**
- 3.10.7 Summary**
- 3.10.8 Sample Questions**
- 3.10.9 Suggested Reading**

3.10.1 Objectives :

A reading of the lesson enables us to understand that

- Raja Rao, voicing like a strong traditionalist, tries to justify that caste discipline preserves integrity in an age which had begun to evaluate the individuals from their actions but not from their birth.
- the approach of “On the Ganga Ghat” is traditional and orthodox, giving credence to Hindu religion and its holy laws and creeds and customs, no matter, whether they are ancient or antiquated.
- the tone of the work is overwhelmingly spiritual and devotional, underpinned by the stout expression of faith in the infinite nature of Ganga.
- it can be called religious literature.

3.10.2 Background – the writer and the period:

Raja Rao is one of the greatest Indian novelists writing in the English language. Though a close contemporary of Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, he is entirely different from them in his art as a novelist, and in his amazing prose style.

Raja Rao, the second of this brilliant trio, hails from South India. After his education in Indian schools and colleges he went to France to study at the Universities of Montpellier and Sorbonne. In these universities he saw and experienced for himself what the western culture, which was based on materialistic acquisitions, really implied. When he returned to India, he felt deep

religious and spiritual crisis in his life. He sought the company of Atmanand, the great vedantist philosopher, and accepted him as his guru.

3.10.3. The Writer – his life and works

Raja Rao was born in 1909 in the village of Hassanna, in Mysore. He comes of a very old south Indian Brahmin family. His father was a professor of Canarese in Hyderabad. He took his B.A. degree from Nizam College, Hyderabad. Then he went over to Aligarh for higher education. There he was lucky enough to come into contact with Prof. Dickinson. He inspired him to study French language. He was awarded Government scholarship by the Hyderabad University and on this scholarship, he went to France to continue his study of French Literature. First, he studied at the University of Montpellier and then worked for the Doctorate degree at the University of Sorbonne.

Raja Rao lived in France from 1928 to 1939, returned to India on the outbreak of world war II in 1940 and again went to France in 1946 and lived there till 1956. There he married an American actress Katherine, now called Katherine Rao, and he has a son by her.

Raja Rao is a great son of Mother India and his greatness has received national and international recognition. He won the “Sahitya Akademi” Award for his The Serpent and the Rope, which has been called the best Indo-Anglian novel ever written. He was also awarded the “Padma Bhushan” by the Government of India. Raja Rao’s works won universal recognition. He writes his novels and short stories with a sense of dedication and direct involvement in the national movement of India. As a novelist and short story writer, he threw himself headlong into the vortex of the movement.

Raja Rao’s work divides itself into two categories. First, there are the works of the early period consisting of the short stories written in France and published in 1947 as The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories and Kanthapura also written in France and published in 1938. To the second period belong The Serpent and the Rope, 1960, published after a long silence of twenty two years, The Cat and Shakespeare, 1965 and Comrade Kirillov in 1976. Some of his short stories, which he contributed to the magazines and journals have been published under the title, The Policeman and the Rose and other Stories

Raja Rao is a consummate literary artist. With the skill of a true artist he has exercised judicious care in picking and choosing such aspects of Indian life as suited his point of view, which he wanted to convey to his readers. His point of view in each novel is circumscribed by the subject matter of the particular novel. For this purpose Raja Rao has selected one particular person in each of his novels to narrate the incidents.

The political-cum-social-cum-religious aspect of the general run of people, has been selected by the novelist in his famous novel Kanthapura which deals with the political events of the thirties in Indian villages. Kanthapura in a veritable Grammar of the Gandhian Myth - the myth that is but a poetic translation of the reality. It will always have a central place in Gandhian literature. In the metaphysical novel The Serpent and the Rope it is the re-discovery of India and the reinterpretation of Indian religious philosophy (Hinduism) that has been selected for full treatment by the hero, Ramaswamy.

In the third novel, The Cat and Shakespeare, it is once again the religious and philosophic principle of complete surrender to the Almighty (the Mother Cat) which is shown to be at work in the lives of two clerks who believe in this kitten principle. Comrade Kirillor is a slim novelette, shorter than The Cat and Shakespeare. It is an ironical sketch of an Indian communist, whose real name is Padmanabha Iyer. It is a significant exploration of Indianness in the modern context. The Chessmaster and His Moves which appeared in 1988 is the longest of Rao's novels containing 708 pages. Raja Rao's achievement in this digressive novel is that he creates a hero who integrates the preoccupations of Ramaswamy of The Serpent and the Rope with those of a mathematical scholar, Sivarama Sastri.

On the Ganga Ghat in an anthology of short stories woven with a thread of novel celebrating the glories of the river Ganges. His hatred for the social evils like unequal marriage and consequent widowhood, orthodoxy, extreme greediness, poverty of the backward people caused by the existing economic and social order is clearly visible in the few short stories that Raja Rao wrote during his early literary phase.

3.10.4. Analysis of the Text:

"On the Ganga Ghat" is Raja Rao's second collection of short stories. It came out in 1989. It includes eleven stories none of which is longer than eleven pages. The short stories in the present collection, "On the Ganga Ghat", are so structured that, according to the author, the whole book should be read as one single novel. The author says, all persons and places are not true but real. The writer explores the hallowed city of Benares and its surroundings.

Benares is the holiest of holy places to Indians and it is their ultimate destination. People desire to die in Benares and travel to immortality and therefore, all kinds of people, Princes and Zamindars, merchants and beggars, concubines and criminals, simpletons and charlatans gather there, in search of the meaning of uplift and seeking liberation in death.

The Way to God - 1

In the very beginning of the first story, Raja Rao along with his American friend Paul, have come to Benares, for doing graduation. On their way to the Raj Ghat College Guest House, they come across different types of people and see the diversity of their lives. It is significant to note that whatever rubbish was thrown in the waters, Ganga is not agitated but it has the capacity to dissolve in its grandeur. At the same time, it is interesting to note that Ganges has natural mineral or medical values. During their conversation Raja Rao expresses his dissatisfaction over some of the people living around Ganga, because their prayers are said in vain. But Moti Ram, who is a driver of the Palanquin in which the author and his friend were travelling offered in true spirit all the existential questions like “Why was Paul here from Chapel Hill? And who, I am?” The metaphysical answer one can get is, in the universe, created by the Brahman. So, prayer in solitude, tranquillity, simplicity brings the grace of God.

Rebirth - 2

In the second narrative Raja Rao speaks through Bhim the sage parrot, who is the reincarnation of Prabhavathi, the queen. Rupavathi is her companion. They are born again in the form of a parrot couple called Bhim and his wife, Rupavathi. In the earlier life, Prabhavathi and Rupavathi – who were virtuous, wanted a pure life. Hence they drowned in the Ganges, without any hesitation, and were born again as parrots. They are considered sacred and amiable and are gifted with human sounds when they are in sleep.

There was a big neem tree, at the Dashshwamedh Ghat of the Ganges, in Benares. Bhim and Rupavathi lived on it for the last fifteen years. They enjoyed freedom. They were respected by other birds and people. Sometimes they were disturbed by vultures and a mischievous boy. In due course, Siddha, an invisible Yogi, was believed to come to live on the tree. As a result nobody could reach their nest. Due to various reasons, their little parrots used to die. But they are happy to die in the Ganges. They believe that death in the Ganges guarantees rebirth. “Krodha” the vulture turned into a devout Hindu, when he watched Bhim praying on solitary leg. Benares had two circuits – inner and outer. On a fateful day Bhim took the last holiest immersion in response to the call of Swami Sidheswari. Bhim fasted for two days before his death. Rupavathi followed suit.

Obsequies – 3

In the third narrative, Raja Rao gives a clear picture of the way the funeral services and rites are conducted on the bank of Ganges. Madhobha is the protagonist of this chapter. His real name in Chota Munnal. He works in Himalayan Firewood shop. He serves the people, especially

customers, who bring the dead to the crematorium. His owner is Jamunalal Mothichand Jhabra. Madhobha obeys his owner's instructions, who fixes the price of the wood used for the dead, according to the face of the customer. Madhobha was always haunted by one question – "Why do the young die?" The death of the young is absolutely irritating. He prays to Mohini, his dream girl who is a spirit (whom he considers the daughter of Ganga) to help the souls of the dead. Madhobha remains a celibate and devotee of Hanuman.

Knowledge of Brahman - 4

Muthradas of Brindavan worked in the house of Kanakmali's family. Kanakmal carried trade with Kathiawar and west Rajasthan, selling beads. Kanakmali family adopted Muthradas in return to his faithful service. He had a child marriage with Lakshmi, a girl of six years of age. They could not meet until they are grown up. Unfortunately, Lakshmi dies in a road accident. Filled with sorrow, he left for Benares to die a sacred death. Before he leaves his body, he wants to get knowledge of himself and certain philosophical ideas of Vedanta. Finally, he realises the spiritual transformation which initiates the ceremonial exit and paves the way for the advent in the next life.

The Cow Ganga – 5

According to Hindu religion, the cow is the holiest animal. In the fifth story we see the drowning of the cow, Jhaveri Bai in the holy waters of Ganga. Ganga symbolises Christ, who died for the salvation of sinners. In this narrative, Bhedia, Shalwar Khan and his son Peti and others are introduced. Bhedia is a faithful servant to his master. He also acts as a guide to the visitors to Benares. He lives on the art of imagination. Bhedia and Jhaveri Bai are good friends. They share their sorrows and happiness. Jhaveri Bai, the pure, gentle and civilized cow, bought by some South Indian chattier and left in Benares, had lived for eight or nine years. One day Jhaveri prays to Sita and Rama and merges with Ganga, which flows on her fierce and fresh, assimilating her into its universe.

Padma – 6

Shanker, the student of Mathematics and private tutor is the figure in this story. And it continues to portray the character Madhobha, as an integrated one. Shanker is the son of Sastri, who belongs to a Tamil speaking Brahmin family, settled in Benares. He makes his living by the art of astrology. But Sankar accuses them that their father speaks nothing but "Coloured lies". With the help of Madhobha, Shankar pursues his studies. After his marriage with Padma, Shankar realises that

something auspicious entered his house and she is meant to regulate his behaviour. Through his intensive study, he compares Mathematics with the natural world. He thinks that Zero is Ganga: Ganga is Zero, the symbol of Brahmananda.

Bhakti Marga – 7

In the seventh chapter, Raja Rao teaches the way to Moksha. Through the story of Bholanath, it is revealed to us that one must still remain loyal to God or Ganga, although one suffers disaster; even if it is the complete loss of one's family.

Bholanath is one of the eleven children of Charaknath, who lives with family in Ghazipur district. Sati is Ghanaknath's only daughter. She is married to Rajnath. Unfortunately, she dies giving birth to Bhim. In course of time, Bhim becomes a wrestler and attracts rich people, who engage him in their service.

Bholanath and Bhim go to many places. One day they were taken to Europe and were made to participate in war. By accident Bhim dies. Bholanath becomes an expert in fixing the car wheels and moves with the soldiers. After the war is over, Bholanath returns to his place. He found that his father and two brothers have died of war fevers. Meanwhile, his wife Rati gives birth to a baby boy and he was named after his guru, Viswanath. Suddenly an epidemic breaks out in his area and it causes the death of his mother and wife. Three days later his son dies. He brings the child in his arms, to give back the baby to Ganga, who gave him. But the guru prevents him saying that the correct way to honour the dead is to burn it to asher. Thus in spite of the personal loss, he takes happiness in serving his Guru on the Ganga Ghat.

Cloistered Life – 8

Rani Rasomani, the old widow is portrayed in this chapter. It is the story of a royal family in the British India. Rani Rasomani, the chief character, marries Raja Pratapchandra of Bankipur, on the banks of Maha Ganga. Her husband frequently goes to London to meet Edward VII. Though he is habituated to European manners, Rasomani remains a devotee of Hindu gods. She visits temples, sadhus and holy places. As her husband dies, she stays in Benares. Her grandfather, Raja Sahib, a great man of ideas and a Brahman is so generous that he gives her a part of his wealth. Rasomani being alone, spends her time, living in God and helping others. She regularly visits Ma Ananda Mayee, the symbol of Ganga, who teaches her the way to Brahmananda and Moksha.

Ganga is Breath and Brio – 9

In this narrative we are introduced to Shivlal from Vallabhapur of Madhya Pradesh and Nanna, a virtuous prostitute. Shivlal comes to settle in Benares along with a Sadhu, who is bad-tempered and evil-natured. But Shivlal followed and worshipped him badly. Once Shivlal found shelter in a concubines den, with full of merciful concubines. There he served as a pimp and earned money, which he preserved in a steel trunk box. He never touches a concubine because of the power of the Mantra, taught by the Sadhu. Nanna, a virtuous prostitute was attracted by the Mantra. She wanted to learn that Mantra, and was taken to the Sadhu. She again continued to visit the Sadhu and kept the Steel trunk under a tree. He wanted to take back the house from his uncle by giving him the money he saved. But later when he tore the money into pieces, which was an act of destroying evil, he was liked by the Sadhu. Thereafter Nanna was given the Mantra. And Shivlal realised the truth that it is divine to worship God in Poverty, by the Ganga Ghat.

What is Brahman – 10

In the tenth chapter, Ranchodass Sunderdass and his daughter Sudha are introduced. Ranchodass is an honest jeweller in Bombay. He becomes very prosperous after the birth of his daughter Sudha. At the age of fourteen, she started disliking men and marriage. She wants to devote her life to the service of Lord Rama. Her vision comes to reality, when a Sadhu comes to their house and takes her to the Himalayas. She informs them about her previous birth. She was the wife of a Rajput Prince and she vowed to see God but died without the realization. Now she is born to Ranchodass. So in this birth, she wanted to initiate her life in the service of Lord Rama. She takes leave of her parents and follows the Sadhu to Himalayas. After sometime, she returns to Benares, and teaches ultimate reality to the people visiting Ganga Ghat. She expounds the distinction between wakeful state and dreaming state, with the help of the story of king Utpala. She quotes from Vasista Ramayana – “That Reality, Sri Rama is ‘I.’” Here Lord Rama is the embodiment of Brahman.

Alpha and Omega - II

The last chapter is a final summing up. Raja Rao says that the human being is made for prayer. Prayer is life and breath, which sustains man, to live in truth. Every object in the Nature and the world sounds sacred, in devotion. Raja Rao says that Ganga is carrying the truth of God in its surge. He humbly prays God to let the waters of Ganga flow without any hindrance, into every nook and corner of the Earth. The waters of Ganga makes the Earth divine and returns to the Himalayas.

He strongly believes that there is no death., though the body dies and burns. In its symbolic sense, Ganga is the beginning and the end of human life. To conclude, Ganga appears as a destination, a sanctum -sanctorum.

3.10.5. Critical Evaluation:

The stories of “On the Ganga Ghat” present the quintessence of Indian experience and distilled wisdom. They reflect the multiple facets of India way of life. The Ganga accepts all, the sane or insane, prostitutes or princesses, charlatans or enlightened, birds, beasts or beings and absorbs them of all their Karma.

In the vision of the writer, Benares is not just a geographical entity, but a metaphysic that unfolds the divine within, following the course of Advaita. The Ganges at Benares is for the less realised souls who cannot scale the heights of Advaita, but wish to be cleansed of their past Karma. They came to Benares with a view to worship Lord Shiva, Viswanath, the Lord of the Universe. They surrender whole – heatedly to his benign presence and take a dip in the Ganga, to get rid of their sins. It is a regeneration of life through Bhakti and Karma-Yogas.

All the human characters except Matiram, Madhobha and Shanker came from different parts of the country. They establish a pilgrim link between man and man. In due course they realise, they have to work out their salvation to get out of the cycle of death and re-birth. Water itself does not work miracles and it is by flowing with the Ganga that they acquire harmony with the spirit of the Universe. Through meditation, study of holy books and appropriate companionship a slow but steady change is brought into the lives of various characters and all past samskaras are gradually eliminated thus resulting in the progress of the pilgrims. The characterisation of Shankar, the mathematician and Bholanath, the wheelwright offers us interesting study. Both the names Shanker and Bholanath are synonymous of Shiva, the Lord of Benares.

The idea that everyone irrespective of their vocation or avocation is eligible for spiritual fulfilment is reiterated by the author in the depiction of three women characters: Rani Rasomani, the royal lady; Nanna, the Concubine and Sudha, the wealthy woman. These three have followed the ways most suitable to them like those of Nishkarma Yoga, Karma Yoga and Gnana Yoga.

The sketches indicate a trend of Pilgrim’s Progress from the concrete to the abstract. The reader is led from stage to stage into the refined perception of life. Raja Rao’s efforts are to realise that one principle which is beyond time and space and his journey is thus from here to eternity.

3.10.6. Glossary:

Brahman	:	The Universal Soul
Scum	:	impurities that rise to the surface of water.
piscivorous	:	turning to the habit of eating fish
Charlatans	:	false pretender to knowledge or skill
Mendicants	:	beggars
Thugs	:	vicious or brutal ruffians
Diurnal	:	active in day time
Nocturnal	:	done by, active in, the night
Shrew	:	Scolding woman
Shrine	:	altar or place warship

3.10.7. Summary:

Benares is the holiest of holy places to Indians and their ultimate destination. People desire to die there and travel to immortality and therefore all kinds of people gather there in search of the meaning of uplift and seeking liberation in death. The gentle bachelor Madhobha and his Mahine, Bhim, the sage parrot, Jhaveri Bai the Brahmin cow, Nanna the benevolent Courtesan, and Mantra-chanting Sadhus are the inhabitants of Benares.

In the first story we are introduced to Moti Ram, the driver, who is the narrator of the first story. He expresses the doubt that when everyone is destined to die, why should we bother about death. In the second story the author tells us about Bhim, who is a sage parrot. In its previous birth it was a queen by name Prabhavathi. Prabhavathi was rich and splendid in beauty. She comes to Benares along with her maid companion as Rupavati and drowns herself.

The third story deals with Chota Munna Lal or Madhobha. He works with a fire-wood dealer and sells firewood for cremation. He has a lovely friend in the form of spirit, whom he sees on moonlit nights. Next we see Manthradar of Vrindavan, who comes to Benares to die. In the fifth story we are taken to the presence of Jhaveri Bai, the cow. The cow thanks God for making her as the first child of God and drowns asking for the gift of truth. In the next story we see Shanker a student of Mathematics and his wife. Bholanath, the wheelwright is the character in the eleventh story. The story of Rani Rasomani is depicted interestingly in the eighth story. The relation between Shivilal, the short-tempered Sadhu and Nanna the concubine are introduced in the ninth story. Ranchodass Sunderdass, an honest Jeweller in Bombay and his daughter Sudha lead the story in the tenth chapter. She teaches the ultimate truth and reality to the people visiting Ganga Ghat. She talks about

renunciation. The eleventh story is a profound summing up. That man is mortal is the grandest fib man ever invented; foolish is man in trying to believe in such a lie. There is no space, no movement therefore, Ganga the flowing flows not. It any one questions “Where ends the flow”? The answer is “Nowhere”. Where there is no end there is no beginning. The Ganga never flows. It is nothing but truth, when we listen to ourselves. One cannot go to the ‘I’, if you dare have a deep look on the Ganges evenings, and see the Ganga unflowing. Then you know there is no Ganga. Water is just water. “O Mother Ganga, please be gracious and flow”.

The stories are thought provoking and make a very interesting reading. The way the characters are presented and portrayed in the stories builds a picture of the ageless idea and the holy spiritual heritage which is what one comes across in the holiest of the holy cities – Benares.

3.10.8 Sample questions:

1. Examine the significance of the title – “On the Ganga Ghat”.
2. Attempt a critical appreciation of Raja Rao’s “On the Ganga Ghat”.
3. Give a brief sketch of the women characters in Raja Rao’s “On the Ganga Ghat”.
4. Write an essay on the narrative technique of Raja Rao’s “On the Ganga Ghat”.

3.10.9. Suggested Reading:

1. S. Archeta Raman and N. Rama Krishna. “On the Ganga Ghat – A Pilgrim’s Progress” (Raja Rao’s Short Fiction) *Poetcrit*, Vol. XVII, Jan. 204.
2. Hema, M.S. “Care of the Self: Raja Rao’s The Chessmaster and His Moves and On the Ganga Ghat”. Kirpal V. (ed). The Post Modern Indian English Novel: Interrogating the 1980s and 1990s.
3. Rao, Raja. On the Ganga Ghat. Delhi: Visia Books, 1989.
4. Sharma Roshan Lal. “The Enlightenment Theme: A Study of the Motifs in Raja Rao’s On the Ganga Ghat”. Revaluations, Bhubaneswar: Creative Offset, Winter 1995.

Mrs. Elim Jeevanjyothi

Lesson 11

R.K. Narayan: *A Tiger for Malgudi*

Structure:

- 3.11.1. Objectives
- 3.11.2. Introduction
- 3.11.3. R.K. Narayan: His Life and Works
- 3.11.4. Analysis of the Novel
- 3.11.5. Plot
- 3.11.6. Characterisation
- 3.11.7. Critical Evaluation
- 3.11.8. To Sum up
- 3.11.9. Sample Questions
- 3.11.10 Suggested Reading

3.11.1. Objectives:

The objectives of this lesson are

- to study R.K. Narayan's fictional art.
- to briefly outline his fictional canon.
- to study A Tiger for Malgudi, for its theme and narrative technique.

3.11.2 Introduction:

R.K. Narayan, one of the prominent Indian novelists of the last generation, is a humourist. For him, irony is a way of looking at life. Detached in his attitude to life, he realizes the apparent disjunction of man's hopes and aspirations and the force of circumstances in realizing them. Though it is not in any case a tragic irony of Man and his Fate, in Narayan, there is nevertheless always an element of the mysterious – in modes of our average existence that define the destinies of the protagonists. In The Guide, if Rosie's entrance into Raju's life has a cumulative effect on the destinies of three people (including Marco Polo) in the Vendor of Sweets, and the Financial Expert there are many unforeseen, yet decisive interventions of the "outside" forces in the lives of his men. As in any great writer of vision, Narayan also interprets life for its 'meaning' and 'value'. Ultimately, perhaps, for him life is mysterious – Raju's or the Raja's (here in this novel) or Margayya's temporary transformation – are all acts of an ironic destiny.

Unlike Anand, for Narayan, his commitment is to art. Like Jane Austen, (though in a totally different context and situation and purpose), he views life at a particular angle from a detached, observing position. What Narayan aims at is an uninvolved, detached, classical view of life. The qualities of ironic restraint with a sense of proportion and care for balance and economy of art define his narrative art. A valuable story – teller (the main-stay of his art), all his novels and short – stories originate in some actual moment of life. A “realist”, in his own way, his narrative images are imprints of average life. As he never “romanticizes” either places or situation, his Malgudi – a typical conservative South Indian town anywhere in Tamil Nadu – is an evolving scenario; it grows along with India’s progress from the 1930’s in the British days to contemporary scene. To say that ‘Malgudi is India’s microcosm may sound a cliché – but that is the truth. If Anand is interested in the downtrodden and hapless, Raja Rao narrativises India’s metaphysical dilemmas, Narayan describes the average Indian’s (or typically, South Indian’s) life’s compassions. Perhaps, ironic restraint and deriving thoughtful insights from the average man’s life, from his social life in particular (as Narayan is typically apolitical), are his main qualities as a writer. With an apparent similarity between R. K. Lakshman’s “Common Man”, Narayan worked in tandem with his brother in evoking prose images of our ordinary life in many novels and short – stories. The crux of his novels is that element of mystery, suddenly destabilizing what were till then quiet lives of average intelligence and common sensical and practical attitude to life. As their life’s rhythm is broken, their ability of common sense and practical understanding is questioned; by a curious force of life, they somehow pull on in life. To this extent, there is no such a tragic “fall” from the magnificent heights; as it is only an ordinary, though serious and sad enough, disorientation of life. If Hampshire provided Jane Austen’s “Three inches of irony”, Southern Wessex is the battle ground for Man and Fate in Hardy’s imagination, Bombay is Rushdie’s real/imaginary tangential reality, Malgudi, a symbolic South Indian mufusil town, is the place of action for his men, where they live and grow and suffer and finally wonder what went wrong even with their ordinary plans. As in any great writer, for Narayan, too, life is a mystery – as a writer he keeps portraying life’s concerns.

3.11.3 R.K. Narayan: His Life and Works:

According to K.R.S. Iyengar, Narayan (like Jane Austen in a different milieu) is an artist, “pure and simple”. Born in the erstwhile Madras State in 1907 (he passed away recently), R.K. Narayan’s milieu is South India. He being a South Indian is part of his consciousness, as it is part of his idiom, though, like Jane Austen or Hardy, he is universal. His concerns may be regional but his treatment of men and matters is universal. Henchard or Gabriel Oaks or Tess are Wessex individuals; Emma or Elizabeth or Fanny Price are from Hampshire; yet all of them, as Narayan’s men, are meant for representation of the universality of human life.

Narayan's fictional canon started in 1935 with Swami and Friends. This novel is a curious mixture of sentiment and seriousness of a small boy, Swami. This narrative typifies with sensitive detail, bordering on maudlin sentiment, Swami, the middle-class school boy in the British India, with his incoherent thoughts, fears, apprehensions and joys and lonely moments. His infant world, pure and simple anywhere, is in collision and contrast with the complexities (and even hypocrisies) of the Indian. Swami's life is criss – crossed by the life at school, at home and the society of friends. Gifted with moving innocence, yet intelligent and thoughtful he has a keen awareness of life. Like Bakha, he is intelligent and very quick in his reflexes. He acts as Narayan's focal lens for narrativising the British moves through the childhood memory. Swami's world eventually symbolizes an endless conflict between a static, traditional milieu and the need for accepting some sort of dynamism in recording social, domestic and professional priorities.

In The Bachelor of Arts (1936) we discover the terminal ideas of his succeeding novels. Chandan, the protagonist of the narrative is the prospective, typical Narayan hero, "average" – in all aspects – in his mind and intelligence, aspirations and effort, and disillusionment. His life largely is decided by the fast changing world of Malgudi. The first part is a panorama of the collegiate life of any young man in India, while the second part is mainly concerned with Chandan's romance; the temporary phase of his life as ascetic; his return to Madras; and marriage.

In The Dark Room (1938) Narayan dramatizes the psychological tragedy of a conventional wife, who achieves redemption through the affirmation of her own motherhood. In this novel, Ramani's utter insensibility and Savitri's fine sensitivity clash frequently, disturbing the growing consciousness of their children, Sumati, Kamala and Babu. The English Teacher (1938) in a way details the theme of Eternity. Said to be autobiographical in nature, this narrative describes (in two parts) the chastity of marriage and the physical love of Krishnan and Susila and the story of Krishnan's conquest of death. Krishnan and Susila symbolize the spiritual significance of the Indian system of marriage. Krishnan becomes for some time after his wife's death interested in spiritual and occult matters. This obsession with the occult mars an otherwise fine novel.

Mr. Sampath(1956) is a novel of education as also a novel of a scoundrel. It also renders the complete urbanisation of an essentially rural town. Malgudi now grows from a semi – agricultural town to a semi - industrial town. The protagonist of this novel, Srinivas, is a journalist, seeking self-knowledge through his weekly, The Banner. His involvement in the worldly affairs reveals to him that man has no value except as an economic unit. His casual encounter with Mr. Sampath results in the fulfilment of his quest. Mr. Sampath, a typical product of the amoral civilization of the modern age, is a printer and later as the unreliable film producer, reflects moral dubiousness of the modern civilization.

In The Financial Expert we have the redoubtable Margayya, another Narayan character. Operating with uncanny wisdom and coupled with practical common sense and his own level of naivete and honesty combined, he shows a graphic rise and fall in his life. His love for Balu passes through the anxious moments of the involvement of Dr. Pal, a quack Sociologist. The novel finally triumphs in its humanistic message. It is a triumph of man's capacity for optimism and never say die defiance. Ultimately, Margayya becomes our irrepressible path - finder in life, with his qualities of resourcefulness, common sense and optimism.

His next novel, Waiting for Mahatma (1958), focuses on the Gandhian myth. The purpose of Narayan in this novel is to individualize the values of Gandhism. Sriram, the hero of the novel, is brought up by his grandmother. He feels gradually drawn towards the national movement and towards Bharati, as she stands gracefully near the Mahatma on the platform. Dissemination of the Gandhian message is the allotted duty of Sriram. In this novel, thus, Narayan projects Gandhian consciousness, which is portrayed historically and objectively.

Raju in Narayan's next venture, The Guide, is certainly the most complex narrative in English by an Indian. Employing the retrospective narrative, as a means of purification of self, this is yet another story of an average individual assuming the role of a swamiji, even if by force. Raju's life is simple and uncomplicated at the beginning of the novel but becomes irretrievably complex. Thus Raju the guide in daily life becomes the guide of spiritual destiny. The narrative texture is full of irony. Raju's transformation from a veritable do – gooder at the sleepy Malgudi railway station's book shop to that of a scoundrel who interfered in the lives of Rosie and Marco Polo to that of a "swamiji" of sorts and his final act of imposed self – renunciation is graphically portrayed by Narayan.

The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962) is bizarre and fantastic. It dramatizes the problem of evil. Vasu the man – eater comes from the jungles of Junagadh in Northern India and attacks the Faith and Tradition of the people of Malgudi in the name of Science and Reason. Nataraj the hero of the novel is a traditionalist. Vasu is fearless and dangerous. He is a soulless giant. Despite his participation in the civil disobedience moment, he has no faith in non-violence.

Besides these novels, in many of his other novels, such as The Vendor of Sweets, The Painter of Signs and A Tiger for Malgudi, An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories and a number of collections of short stories, and his autobiographical, My Dateless Diary, Narayan describes the mind of the Indian society, in its many phases of transition, from tradition to modernity. His men, gifted with common sense and a practical point of view, dramatize this changing Indian mind. His protagonists'

lives symbolize the transitional patterns of modern India. As there is enough sociological importance in the altering social scenario, his men symbolize such complexities of life in our modern India.

3.11.4 Analysis of the Novel :

A Tiger for Malgudi like The Guide deals with the same theme of a sort of mystical intervention in man's destiny. If Raju is the mystical deliverer, here it is the Master (for Raja, the tiger) who performs a similar role of a self-renouncing ascetic. Unlike Raju, he in any case refuses to play the role of a Swami. He is a benevolent human being seeking empathy with all God's creations, in the manner of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner who said, "He prayeth well, who loveth well/Both man and bird and beast". The narrative begins in a retrospective manner with the tiger in the cage narrating its past life to the Master from the Malgudi forests, to the Captain (whom she killed), to the abortive episode of making a film, with a mixture of "human" sentiment, ferocity, helplessness and amusement at the human nature. Though the narrative focus is mainly on Raja, the narrator, telling its own story and the final moments of the mystic function of its Master, the narration is partly omniscient and partly and at its most important part, through Jayaraj, who "framed pictures sitting in a cubicle at the Market Ach".

Thematically, Narayan with his well-known quizzical delight, portrays a serious idea of the story of the relationship of men and nature (that is the beast, incidentally, the Master never likes the tiger to be called a beast, he always wants to call it "a creature"). The tale of man taming the cruel beast – in a metaphoric sense, the beast in himself – is amply brought out in the last part of the novel, when the Master proclaims the following: "it's often said that God made man in his own image, it's also true that man makes in his own image. Both may be right, and you are perfectly right in thinking of your God as a super tiger ... (God) may be everything we imagine and more". It is this symbolic mutual self-realization of man's bestiality and the animal's divinity that is the main thematic purpose of this narrative.

This is one more typical Narayan narrative: the ordinary and mundane leading to a contemplation of the deeper issues of man's moral, spiritual concern. As the novel begins rather colourlessly, it gradually gains in its ironic purpose, with the tiger's increasing "humanity" and man's increasing cruelty to it. For all the men, the Captain, the general public (like the head master Alphonso, and the Forest Officials) – it is a beast of cruelty and meant to be killed then and there, even while the tiger in its animated, yet detached observation of human nature, is both pained and amused at human nature. The narrative, rendered through the double – vision of the tiger and the writer's omniscient narration, provides a contrasting attitude to the value of life: if for the tiger, transformation from the jungle law of cruelty towards the meek to the law of kindness and sympathy

towards the fellow creatures of God is real; in the case of the captain, it is his changeless inhuman self towards the tiger for mundane responses that is real. In any case, the captain becomes inconsequential, as the tiger and its Master realize empathy, as finally the man and the beast acquire “Sattwa” guna – which is the higher form of divine wisdom. Thus, this narrative has a value for us: that is, for man or beast, tolerance, forgiveness and peace are life’s eternal values. God is in peace. That is what the tiger tells us: Its Master is the means for such a transformation himself achieving such empathy with all God’s creations by his experiences of life. Finally, as the man and the beast unite, we have “a tiger” for Malgudi, a universal symbol of the triumph of divinity over cruelty.

3.11.5 Plot:

Structurally the narrative plot is cyclical and progresses in a retrospective manner. Raja the tiger at first lived in the forest with his cubs. In its early days, it was a cave – dweller and jungle beast “with a mixture and shame”, living at the far end of Mempi range. It lived in its cave on the edge of a rivulet “which swelled and roared along when it rained in the hills”. Raja reminisces about his “cubhood” and his capacity as the supreme Lord of the Jungle, fearing none, striking terror in others. He lived with majesty and great powers i.e., he was only afraid of the monkeys. There was a forest fable of how the tiger acquired stripes. It was that the first tiger in creation was very much like a lion, “endowed with a tawny, shining coat of pure gold”. As it offended some forest spirit it branded his back with hot coal. The tiger disliked the leopard.

His entrance into the arena of the circus is itself a fascinating narration by Narayan, combining gentle irony of human nature with the practical concerns of life. It is as much against man’s foolishness as against the hollowness of bureaucracy. A typical Narayan caricaturing (like R.K. Lakshman’s “Common man” presenting himself before us) appears in every aspect. It is quite convincing for us to believe that, as human beings, we lack ‘common sense’. Raja comments thus: “human beings have their own theories, and it is always amusing to hear them talk about us. Such ignorance and self-assurance!”.

The narrative design has three parts: in the first part the tiger narrates its own story of its life in the cave, without “restraint”, as it is “indispensable and unshakeable”, though the tiger at the end of the novel, moved a long way from it. It shows a movement from bestiality to a sort of tolerance and compassion towards the smaller and meek creatures, even as it was worried about the leopard, its adversary. The tiger’s life is replete with dignity and majesty. It was all a life of unbridled joy without the cares and concerns of the human self.

In the second part of the tiger's narration, the life of the circus intervenes in its life. Here the narration, both by the tiger and the writer in an omniscient manner, is in a way methodical, bordering on mere description without much colour and human drama. Here, the main participant, beside the tiger, the novel's "protagonist", is the Captain's wife: Preceding the entry of Raja as the Captain routinely calls it, Narayan, caricatures the typical response of the villagers in getting rid of Raja (the mysterious man-eater for them) and the indifferent Government machinery. The Captain's entry into the field of circus from his failure elsewhere in Pune and his devotion to Dadhaji, the original owner of the circus and the Captain's shifting it to Malgudi and renaming it Grand Malgudi Circus is done by Narayan with his typical economy of effort. Everything is in its place. Narayan explains concrete particulars with a felicity by using adverbs of situation, of time and place. Here, till the death of the Captain by the tiger and the intervening short phase of the abortive film-making efforts of Madan, all the narration of Narayan is done in a near matter of fact manner. There may not be anything special or intriguing. It is a typical and all too familiar circus scene. Here if any, the "human" element is provided by, the Captain's professionalism and his nagging wife. Raja's "mind" is portrayed with his own "feelings" and "understanding" of human life. In him, there is supposedly "The combination of man and the metal (that is beast)". For Raja, the case was a symbol of his sins of an earlier birth. He was particularly friendly with the ape, who advised him to obey the Captain. Obeying the Captain was the sure way of surviving. Training the tiger for the circus implied starving it. Gradually, the tiger, learns the art of performing many feats.

The narrative design acquires the qualities of caricaturing in the efforts of Madan. Madan the ambitious yet disoriented Film Producer; Jaggu the man with his unhelpful physique and cowardly nature; and the Captain, on the advice of his ambitious wife, demanding more and more money from Madan for sparing the tiger - all fill the scene. As this part of the narration done in an omniscient manner, lacks depth and profundity of thought, it appears to be a successful attempt at caricaturing. It is a typical celluloid world, in its dizziness and is humdrum. However, the tiger's killing of the Captain takes the narrative to its intended purpose, that is, the beast's "humanization".

Next we have the entrance of the Master, a typical Narayan character — casual, low profile, average and apparently lacking any professionalism or grandeur — on the scene. Raja, as he calls the animal, has already caused panic in the school by his magnificent arrival in the "civilized world". Narayan's evocation of the school in its topsy-turvy state, the arrival of the whole lot of officialdom and the mindless curiosities and endless fears of the general public — in its ridiculous particularity — creates a typical human scene. The Master's entry into this scene is indeed, dramatic. He enters the scene and "humanises" the beast. This is the climactic moment, when the man and the beast achieve empathy and where God's will of the unity of all His creatures is achieved. As is typical of

Narayan's endings, the novel ends ambivalently, with the Master keeping aloof and not at all interested in becoming a swami (unlike Raju), and who allows the "humanized" beast, Raja, to go to the zoo. The narrative ends, with Raja ruminating over his Master and the Master, once again, receding into the background.

Within these four stages of the tiger's "growth", in its mind and spirit, from the cave to the circus to the film world and finally to the world of humanity, it is the Master who holds the key to the meaning of the novel.

3.11.6 Characterization:

Though the narrative is rendered by dramatizing the mind of the Captain, the tiger, the Master as the main "persona" of action, other minor characters like the Captain's wife, Jayaraj, the photoframe-maker (the "biographer" of the Master) the headmaster and Alphonso, the licenced hunter of the man – eaters, the Forest Officer and others provide the human ambience of the novel. In essence, it is the tiger, who connects the venomous Captain and the benevolent Master who provide the main contrast in their attitude and purpose of life.

The Tiger: In the introduction, Narayan describes a rather unbelievable event. A hermit visits Kumbh Mela with his tiger! This is stunning! This sets Narayan thinking of getting the tiger into a good book. This is the germ of this novel, in which the Master, who is the "Tiger Hermit" here "employs his powers to save and transform the tiger inwardly, as he believed that "deep within, the core of personality is the same" in all of God's creations and with the right approach we can "live" with a tiger as we do with human beings. This is the theme of the novel, as Raja the humanized tiger, gains in its emotional refinement and spiritual qualities. Symbolically, this novel may also be read as man's movement from "rajaguna" – (that is brutal power and cruelty) to 'sattwaguna' (that is, the divine wisdom of tolerance and genuine compassion). As the Master is first transformed from this worldly obligations to a state of self-denial for serving the world, Raja himself is humanized by his Master's influence.

If thus this is the story of Raja the tiger's transformation – real or imaginary – as the novel itself is triggered by a real life event at Kumbh Mela, this tiger for Malgudi is very central to the narrative experience. As the narrative action is rendered by the double – vision of Raja in his own "subjective" way, and by the writer in an omniscient manner, it is Raja's description of himself in the cage, in the circus, the abortive film and in the school and finally with his Master that is central to the novel.

There is supposedly an increasing “growth” and breadth of “vision” in him, from cruelty to thoughtfulness, and keen observation to a condition of compassion, in all the four stages. Thus the narrative plot graphically records his “growth”. It retraces, narratively, its past life. Thus, as the narration by Raja, is by retrospective manner, certainly, there is a degree of objectivity and quiet “introspection” in the narration of Raja, now, the tiger, with divine wisdom, his transformation, of the triumph of nature’s law, of the indivisible unity of all God’s creations. Only our external manifestations may differ; all of us carry the same spirit and workings and will of God. God creates all nature’s objects as He wills their destiny. This is, perhaps, the import of this novel. First, the tiger was as usual cruel, revelling in its own superiority in the forest. It was mercilessly cruel and enjoyed its prowess and majesty. The tiger describes its attitude towards other criminals such as the crow, which was “particularly treacherous” towards him and always followed its movements; he equally disliked the vultures, eagles and kites and other such creatures “which circled loftily in the heaven”. It disliked the leopard also and all the members of that “Odious Family”. It disliked the leopard’s cleverness and its mysterious nature, as the leopard made audible remarks, which were insulting to a tiger and talked about the superiority of spots over stripes. The tiger considered the leopard to be inferior to it. Its relationship with the tigress and their cubs is warm and affectionate. There was also the intervention of the Jackal, which advised the tiger to make friendship with the tigress. There was also the concern for the tiger to save their cubs from the pythons or bisons. With the separation of the tigress and their cubs from the tiger, the tiger’s transformation begins.

In the narration of circus life of the tiger, rendered through the tiger’s mind, Narayan combines the fears and confusion in the tiger and the Captain’s limitless cruelty. The duality of attitude in the Captain’s mind towards the tiger and the Captain’s wife is interesting. Here, the tiger shows great comprehension and adaptability. First, it felt aghast at the Captain’s cruelty. As the Captain’s method of “training” the tiger is through starving it, the tiger feels increasingly helpless. Its transition from “the grand silence of the jungle” to “the noisy nature of humanity is distressing” for the tiger. However, in due course, it gets used to it. All along, the tiger shows its “inner” progress. Gradually, it “realized that deep within he was not different from human beings”. As it gradually adapted to its work in the circus, it becomes increasingly thoughtful and observant of human nature. For it, the cage in the circus was hell, “an endless state of torment with no promise of relief or escape”; they were “the stages of knowing attained through suffering”. It fails to describe “the kind of suffering, an emptiness, a helplessness and a hopelessness behind the bars”. It felt oppressed by “the combination of man and metal” which subdued it. It desperately tries to smash the bars, traps and weapons. As the tiger feels depressed, it reminisces about his Master’s address afterwards in the narration. The Master told Raja, the tiger, that probably in its previous life, it might have enjoyed putting some fellow beings behind the bars. According to the Master, we must face the

consequences of one's actions, either in the same life or in the next life. Nobody can escape the consequences of one's activities.

Even while Narayan describes the insecure mind of the tiger, he also describes its curious mind. It could identify the parrot, but not some of "the long-legged ones". For it, the camel was grotesque and the horse was majestic. The donkey was meaner than the horse. The hippopotamus was breath – taking: It was like "a piece of ill-shaped mountain". The ape was "awkward, swinging arms, as it was well-integrated in human society able to move with humans on equal terms". The tiger accepted that the cruel animals must accept their fate as Karma. The tiger felt that it also should learn to live peacefully without violence and cruelty like other smaller animals. For it, the ape provided a sort of consolation and advice. It was the most light-hearted and the happiest animal in the circus walking about freely in human company.

However, in course of time, the tiger's innate bestiality comes to the fore, as it cannot bear the Captain's cruelty any longer. The Captain makes it perform the popular feats. It cannot bear with the suffering as it involves a lot of pain and hard work. In any cage, there are moments of relief, happiness and comfort, alternating with helplessness, pain and hunger. Gradually, it gets adjusted to the routine, even while it could not accept the loss of its freedom and the majesty of the jungle. It felt that it was "a defeated king and the Captain was the unquestioned suzerain". It gradually realized that "running round the enclosure was quite beneficial for one cooped up in a cage all day". As the training and exercises get increasingly difficult, the tiger feels depressed and lonely. The logic of the Captain's mind became clear to it. Its only aim was to please the Captain and when it did that it got the reward, that is, pieces of meat and water and undisturbed sleep in the cage. There were many hurdles; they were labyrinth – like. It had to crawl into some of the hurdles. As the tiger learnt to perform these feats with class and prowess, the Captain praised its capability. It was "uncanny in timing". The tiger also describes the domestic crisis in the immature behaviour of the Captain's wife. In any case, the tiger's original loneliness of the jungle has never returned. Its biggest fear came when it was asked to perform the trick involving fire. The tiger was afraid of fire. "The uproar and pandemonium" Raja created was heard all over the town. His companionship with the ape was of some solace.

Raja's role in the film-making is well caricatured by Narayan. Though Raja appears to be an outsider, he is able to understand the fallacious nature of the whole venture. Madan, the caricatured film director, Jaggu, the man with no imagination and a typical coward, though with a muscular body and the Captain's tricks to fleece Madan – all come home. Raja is merely an instrument and means of the Captain's greed, fuelled by his wife. For brief moments, during the film shooting, Raja is left in the forest, making him remember his earlier quiet, yet majestic jungle life. Clearly, Jaggu is a

mismatch for Raja's genuine, natural ferocity. Due to increasing dissonance between Raja and the Captain, Raja finally becomes desperate. He feels humiliated and insulted in the film shooting. His "mind" was in a state of disarray. He began to realize his capacity. He thought for the first time that he need not any longer fear the Captain. He decides that he must win his freedom back in a moment of dramatic action. As he kills the Captain, he realizes how flimsy the captain was. He was no better than "a membrane stretched over some thin frame work, with so little stuff inside".

After winning his freedom, Raja's true "growth" begins with the arrival of the Master. The life of the Master and Raja is a fascinating tale of the union of the man and the beast; union is the main purpose of the novel.

The Master: It is the Master, who gradually "humanizes" the image of the beast in the public mind. Quite contrastingly, as Raja was becoming more and more "humane" and "human", too, the indifferent public was becoming more "brutal". How Raja the beast becomes a highly evolved human self, with the qualities of "sattwa", that is, tolerance, and compassion, is rendered through some sort of a mystical intervention of the Master. He "intuitively" perceives the genuine humanness of the Master. In a moment of Freedom, both from the bonds of this world and himself, Raja is truly "liberated". As the Master describes God's virtues, the beast in Raja also realizes the qualities of divinity. The Master describes God in his own terms as the creator, "the Great Spirit pervading every creature, every rock and tree and the stars, a source of power and strength". As the Master tells Raja of the divinity in every speck of Nature, the Man and the beast, Raja's process of purification of self is complete. He tries "to attain some kind of purification by reducing the frequency of seeking food". He felt that he had "attained merit through penance", making himself worthy of his Master's grace. As he found the life of renunciation in some form, "elevating", he found "the change churning internally" occurring in his mind. He believes that "we cannot understand God's intentions. All growth takes place in its own time. If you brood over your improvements rather than your shortcomings one will be happier". In a moment of renunciation, both Raja and the Master become timeless. For them, there is no present or future. It is a timeless world of God's sanctions.

Gradually, as the empathy between Raja and his Master becomes complete, they spend together moments of silence. As Raja believes, "at such moments of their union, profound silence prevailed", and his mind was raised to "a sublime state". At such moments, Raja felt "lightened at heart" as his "physical self also became secondary". His sight became clearer as "he lifted his gaze to the horizon" and "the sun shining on the land filled" him with Joy! Raja, the tiger, thus achieved much "poetic joy". He also realizes that "whatever one has thought or felt is never lost, but buried in one's personality and carried from birth to birth". Thus, Raja, the tiger is first humanized, then in a way acquires the timeless qualities of providence. The narrative purpose is fully realized; Raja now

looks at the past jungle life and circus life with a quiet serenity. He lived without the compulsions of time. Finally, he realized that the time for attaining Samadhi had come. He also realized that “no relationship human or other or association of any kind” lasts for ever. As separation is “the law of life right from the mother’s womb, one has to accept it if one has to live in God’s plans. This mood of renunciation is complete, when the Master (that is the Master) and Raja (the humanised beast) seek unity in God’s plans and will and when Raja proclaims their prophetic union in some form, in some manner, elsewhere: “Both of us will shed our forms soon and perhaps we could meet again, who knows”? For him, Raja is a tiger only in appearance. He is “a sensitive soul who understands life and its problems exactly like us, the human beings. It is God’s gift to this world. He is magnificent, though he is, at present, without its original shine.

Thus the Master, another of God’s creations, in empathetic relationship with Raja shows a gradual transformation. As usual in Narayan’s imagination, it is the ordinary men, like Margayya in The Financial Expert, Velan in The Vendor of Sweets, Raju in The Guide and here the Master, who are transformed from the mundane to the spiritual. What spurs such men to renounce this world, in some fashion, to take up the path of service to humanity through renunciation is the mystery of Narayan’s world view. May be, for him, the extraordinary blooms from the ordinary individuals. In the case of the Master, he rose from one anonymous Govind Gopal or Guna. He lived in Ellamman Street. He was arrested in the Independence Movement for climbing the Collector’s office roof and tearing down the Union Jack, and again during the Quit India Movement. He did not pass B.A. as he actively participated in the Freedom movement. As he was leading a quiet life after India’s Independence, one day he suddenly disappeared from his house. Everybody thought that he was washed away in the Sarayu river. His sudden transformation to that of a disinterested ascetic is a mystery. What triggers his renunciatory mood is known to none, though he explains, in some fashion, how he got that “awareness” of divine presence in all God’s creatures. For him, neither the past nor the future exists. He lives only in the present. He went through much hardship to reach this level of “awareness”. His character in the novel is complex, as it shows growth from the mundane human self to some level of inner perfection. He is a typical Narayan character, who combines real life truth with the mystery of the unknown. For all Narayan characters, the myth of renunciation is very central. Narayan’s fictional world has a message in this novel: all of God’s creatures are one and the same. We are all indivisible. Though he is called the hermit from the Himalayas, he never demonstrates the bearings of a self – styled swamiji. For him, self – renunciation is a means of serving and enlightening the humanity. Essentially, his empathy with Raja is a triumph of “Sattwa” guna in man. He is not divine, but a man who realized the godliness in every human self. He becomes a living example of the idea that God created Man in his own image. Thus, Narayan, taking a clue from a newspaper report of Kumbhmela created the story of the Master, the human self with an

elevated consciousness of divinity in himself and Raja, the “humanized” tiger as both of them empathise with each other, culminating in the idea that all God’s creatures are indivisible.

The Captain: Among the other characters, the Captain holds some space in the narrative. He is a typical business man, who rose from poverty through hard work and loyalty and commitment to his duties and to his mentor Dhadhaji. Unlike the Master, he is without any empathetic interest with Raja, his own creation for his purpose. As he lacks any moral or spiritual interest there is not much “growth” in his character. Raja’s attitude towards him hardly changes from thinking that he is a cruel man, for whom his profits only matter. Alphonso, Madan, the Forest Officer, the beleaguered head master, Jaggu and the Captain’s wife are all caricatured persona, as they only act as ligaments to the structure of the narrative.

3.11.7 Critical Evaluation:

Malgudi, the typical Narayan locale comes home, with its well known landmarks of the Sarayu river, Mempi forest, the market place, the school and the temples. The description is graphic and done with economy of detail and concrete particularity. Narayan’s style is simple without being ornate in any sense, operating with economy of expression. He creates dramatic scenes, with the effective use of proper adverb and adverbial phrases of time and place. Accuracy and adequacy of expression are the qualities of his prose style. Narayan’s ironic mode, which is the mainstay of his imagination, is mostly situational. Sobriety of wit with reticence of emotion and sentiment characterize his narrative mode. Perhaps, the irony in this novel is that a beast like the tiger is capable of greater humanity, while human beings like the Captain and his wife show cruelty. As they lack introspection, they are without “inner growth”. There are many levels of dramatic irony in this novel. In particular, “the school scene” with all its on the spot commentary rendered through the tiger’s eyes and through Narayan’s omniscient narration, is full of well – meant and suave good humour. All in all, in this novel, Narayan is able to create a pious theme in secular detail, without much ado.

According to Prof. K.R.S. Iyengar, in Narayan’s novels, there is generally a flight, an uprooting, a disturbance of order followed by a return, a renewal, a restoration of normalcy". For A.V. Krishna Rao, Narayan’s novels project “a complete picture of the reality and the psychology of national tradition both in its permanent and transitional aspects”. In his novels, the protagonists grow and mature in time, as the society remains “constantly melodramatic, or tragicomic telescoped into a regional sectarian dimensions”. For Iyengar, “the main purpose of his novels is “the miracle of transcendence and the renewal of life, love, beauty and peace”.

According to P. S. Sundaram, Narayan’s capacity as a writer is “to see the funny side of even the most tragic situations and his essential sanity and moderation”. For David McCutcheon, the real difficulty for an Indian writer in English is not in his use of English, but the lack of Indian consciousness. However, in the case of Narayan, what makes his narratives successful is his zest for life, simplicity and purity of interest in portraying human existence. According to Prof. Kantak, Narayan’s artistic effect comes from his unhurried pace and even tone of narration. For M.M. Mahood, even the supposedly ordinary events of Narayan’s fiction carry (at times) “a political and even metaphysical significance”. For K. Chellappan, Narayan’s novels are “mythical comedies or modern fables” as they dramatize the modern Indian society. Roy Shepherd discovers “an architectural duality in which modernity superimposes on tradition” and “irony as inverted allegory”. According to N.N. Sharan, in A Tiger for Malgudi, basing his tale in the tradition of the Panchatantra, Narayan has taken his ironic mode to a more serious and even philosophical level, by spiritualizing (in some way) Raja, the tiger.

3.11.8 To Sum Up:

We have so far studied Narayan’s ironic mode, as for him society and his men mutually interact. There is a typical pattern in the growth and fall and in a limited sense, a quest for transcendence, through self-proclaimed asceticism, in this novel. Quite significantly, it is Raja, the tiger of Malgudi, which appears to be showing such “humanistic” qualities, while his Master is the path – finder. Narayan’s theme, the narrative design and portrayal of characters have also been discussed. We also had a brief assessment of Narayan’s fictional world and craft.

3.11.9 Sample Questions

1. Write a critical note the Theme of A Tiger for Malgudi.
2. Trace the “Character” and “growth” of the mind of Raja.
3. Discuss Narayan’s characterization in A Tiger for Malgudi.

3.11.10 Suggested Reading:

P. S. Sundaram -	<u>R.K. Narayan.</u>
K.R.S. Iyengar	- <u>Indian Writing in English.</u>
A.V. Krishna Rao	- <u>The Indo – Anglian Novel and the Changing Tradition.</u>
C.D. Narasimhaiah	- <u>The Swan and the Eagle.</u>
M.K. Naik	- <u>Indian English Literature.</u>
William Walsh	- “Sweet mangoes and Malt Vinegar”, <u>Listner</u> , March’, 1962.

- M. K. Naik - The Ironic Vision.
A.C. McLeod - R.K. Narayan: Critical Perspectives.

- Prof. M. Madhusudhana Rao

Lesson No:12

Mulk Raj Anand : Untouchable

Structure:

3:12:1	Objectives
3:12:2	Introduction
3:12:3	M.R. Anand : His Life and works
3:12:4	Analysis of the Text
	i) Untouchable – Characterization
	ii) Plot and Structure
	iii) Use of Language and Imagery
	iv) Narrative Technique
3:12:5	Critical Evaluation
3:12:6	To Sum Up
3:12:7	Sample Questions
3:12:8	Suggested Reading

3:12:1 Objectives

- to study the theme and narrative technique of Mulk Raj Anand's **Untouchable**
- to study the various influences that shaped Anand's imagination as a man and thinker.

3.12.2. Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao are well – known as the pioneers and pace-setters in Indian Fiction in English representing its central tradition. R.K. Narayan with his comic ironic vision, Raja Rao with his metaphysical probing of the self and Anand with his preoccupation with the social setting indicate the main lines of development in the Indo-Anglian novel. Of the three, Anand is the most prolific writer with more than three dozens of books to his credit, ranging from Indian recipes to the Hindu view of art. All his major novels reveal his basic concern for the downtrodden, and his relentless zeal for social justice. To him goes the credit of introducing a whole new set of characters as protagonists – untouchables, sweepers, coolies – who have seldom figured in the realms of literature.

Anand's first novel Untouchable was turned down by as many as a dozen publishers when he was in England, causing him great despair. Once published it was hailed as a masterpiece and since then, was translated into many world languages. Anand received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his literary work. He was also the founder – editor of an art magazine Marg.

3.12.3. Mulk Raj Anand : His Life and Works:

Mulk Raj Anand is a major novelist in **Indo – Anglian** fiction. He is endowed with a rare versatility consisting of art and literature, philosophy and a persistent interest in public participation. For Prof. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, of the Indo Anglian novelists, only Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan have shown anything like stamina and stern consistency of purpose. Born at Peshawar in 1905, Mulk Raj Anand had his education at Lahore, London and Cambridge, and took a Doctorate in Philosophy. His father was a traditional coppersmith. His mother was a Hindu orthodox woman. With the advance of modern science and technology and the invasion of mass produced articles, the traditional village craftsmen had to lose their profession. They were also obliged to migrate in search of their livelihood as well as daily employment. Some people were prepared to join even in the military for a lucrative life. Craftsman's industry and meticulous attention to detail and the army man's dare – devilry and feeling for adventure are among the major constituents of Mulk Raj Anand's heritage from his father. He doubtlessly derived his commonsense, his sense of "ache at the heart" of the Indian humanity, and his understanding compassion for the waits, the disinherited, the lowly and the lost from his mother.

Humanism forms the core of his imagination and thinking, as his vision is drawn from the East and West. Compassion defines humanist vision, as it is the love of humanity for its own sake and in all its unfailing faith in its nobility. As man is essentially perfect, his imperfect nature, if any, is due to environment, and other factors. Human creativity is always and unquestioningly towards realizing positive and fruitful levels of existence. His vision is not Marxist in its complete sense. His vision shows a three stage development from his childhood to his mature years.

Progress defines his idealism. A continuous struggle for justice and humanity is the main thematic preoccupation of his fiction. All his novels fundamentally interrogate injustice in any system. His fiction is a study of the anarchy in the system as they are not mere tales of human woe, but inquiring studies of imperfections and injustices in the system. To this extent, his novels chronicle the fundamental inhumanity in any system – East or West. It is the helpless angst of a human self in the tyranny of a system, entrenched and encoded in historical and social ethos of vested interest that is Anand's main purpose of his thought and imagination. Since his childhood there has been an active revolt against any form of irrationality or inhumanity. His early inspiration from his mother to practice the art of questioning and "knowing" things only by logic and convincing facts is the basis of his creative and intellectual vision. A quest "to know" in its materialistic and metaphysical manifestation defines his vision. For him, this world is very real as the metaphysical

is a dialectical manifestation of our struggles here and now. Man is at the heart of Anand's feeling. In his fictional world, there is always a growing human self, remorseless by battered by the historical and social forces. It is this human drama between an essentially perfectible human mind in an unrewarding collision and conflict with the forces of history and society. Thus, there are two levels of action in his fiction. His characters and their agony is due to the domineering impact of the milieu, from outside, as ultimately, his men and women become tragic victims of an unutterable sociological reality. His concept of 'noble savage' drawn from Rousseau renders his vision and compulsion, as man and writer. As there is a studied growth in the portrayal of his men and women, they are drawn from the diverse social, economic, political and cultural reality of an evolving modern India.

Of all his novels **Untouchable** (1935) is the most compact and artistically satisfying. Though it is the shortest novel of all his novels, it is the most revealing and rewarding of the lot. As the unities are admirably preserved as in a classical play, it evokes the events of a single day's experience of Bakha in the town of Bulashah. The eighteen year old boy is one of the sons of Lakha, the Jamadar of the sweepers of the town and cantonment. Bakha is a child of the twentieth century and the impact of new influences causes a stirring within him. He secures a pair of breeches from a Tommy and from a Sepoy a pair of boots. He is a victim of three incidents. In all these instances, Anand has drawn him with a great passion and purpose, with all the cruelty of system, he has enough heroic grandeur.

Coolie is a further dramatization of the saga of victimization. Here, Munoo is the victim. The novel, using the wide canvas of North India as also Bombay vividly portrays, in a picaresque manner, the suffering and agony of Munoo. Here, it is a dynamic interaction between the world of cruelty and exploitation, and the world of innocence. For M.K. NaiK : the central theme of the novel is the tragic denial to a simple landless peasant of the fundamental right to happiness. The terrible destiny of being a victim of exploitation is indeed Munoo's dubious birthright.

Anand's other novels are the admirable Lalu Trilogy, **The Big Heart**, **The Road**, **The Death of a Hero** and **Gauri** or **The Old Woman and the Cow**. In all these novels, **Anand** variously dramatizes the agony of individuals due to the forces of history and society. Lalu, Ananta and Maqbool Sherwani are all conscious victims of a cruelly vibrant system. His **Private Life of an Indian Prince** is notable for its uniqueness. It dramatizes, with a particular intensity the mind of its protagonist called Victor. It is a unique fusion of the poetic ardour and prosaic medium. It is the clash of child like innocence and the scheming and subtlety of the palace life. In **The Barber's Trade Union**. **Anand** immortalizes Chandu, the barber as he has immortalized Bakha, the untouchable and Munoo the Coolie. "A **Rumour**" is the

story of Dhandu, the carpenter, who goes in search of job and is run over on the way by a lorry. Here the sting of irony is in the title itself. There are stories of the ineffectual, terrorist Singh, and the wretched informer, Gopal. There are three prose poems that explore the consciousness of children. There is “**A Kashmir Idyll**” in which a Nawab dies of a fit of laughter, and there is the crime in “**The Maharaja and Tortoise**” which ultimately ushers in Ramarajya. Anand’s sympathy and understanding are expressed in various modes and the life he projected is multifaceted. Anand’s autobiographical novel is **Seven Summers** (1951). As the title indicates, it covers the first seven years of the hero narrator’s life. It is Krishna’s childhood that is set up in the Punjab in the opening decade of the present century. He is a specimen of the Indian children who are now old people.

3.12.4. Analysis of the Text

(i) **Untouchable** : a study of Characterisation:

Bakha, the protagonist of **Untouchable** is a classic creation of **Mulk Raj Anand**. Bakha is modelled on one of the many sweepers known to the author in his boyhood days. In his letter to Saros Cowasjee, **Anand** writes that always his characters are taken from his intimate experience and transformed. Naturally, a great deal of personal urgency has gone into shaping his men and women and Bakha is a typical Anand character. Bakha is a sweeper boy, an untouchable living in the uncongenial outcaste’s colony, he is unlike other scavengers who as a rule look uncouth and unclean and is modelled on **Rousseau’s ‘noble savage’** as he is at once an idealized and romanticized character though he belongs to the alienated, oppressed and exploited strata of the society. He is able – bodied and muscular with an aura of natural dignity about him. Anand endows him with noble qualities to make him distinct from others of his ilk. Bakha looks “intelligent, even sensitive, with a sort of dignity that does not belong to the ordinary scavenger who is as a rule uncouth and unclean”.

Bakha has a penchant for cleanliness despite the penury, his dirty job of sweeping and the filthy surroundings of his residence. Though his job was dirty he remained comparatively clean. He did not even soil his sleeves handling the commodes, sweeping and scrubbing them. His cleanliness is distinct when we look at his younger brother, Rakha, who in contrast to Bakha, is dirty with his running nose ‘a true child of the outcaste colony’. Anand’s love for the tidy appearance of his characters, on the degree of their strength, muscularity, athleticism... man in society rather than man as a work of art, is what concerns him. Thus, Bakha is a dutiful, hardworking and ungrudging individual at work. As he faces the tedium of cleaning latrines he brings in all his natural vitality to the job.

For him work is a sort of intoxication, which gave him glowing health, and plenty of easy sleep. So he worked on continuously, incessantly, without stopping for breath.

Bakha's innate physical prowess manifests itself through his excellence in many games. Havildar Charat Singh, acknowledging him as a good hockey – player presents him a brand new hockey – stick. In the hockey match with the 31st Punjabis Bakha scores a goal which tragically though leads to a meaningless quarrel. As Bakha has principles, his love for games never comes in the way of his duty. With him duty comes first, although “ he is a champion at all kind of games”. Thus, it is a great disappointment for Bakha, in his childhood, as he comes to know that ‘schools’ were meant for the babus, not for the bhangis”. With his great inclination for learning, he loves reading and writing. He wants to speak to the sahibs in English. Later he realises the reason for his remaining an illiterate. It is his caste that hinders his zeal for learning. He entertains the idea of studying on his own. His unquenchable desire to learn makes him implore a boy of fifth class to teach him. He requests the young babu to give him a lesson a day as he will pay for it.

His actions and responses are natural and spontaneous. He neither masks his feelings nor hides his views. He is capable of reflecting, analyzing and formulating his own philosophy. He is critical about the cruel caste system as it bars him from learning. However, he delights at the prospects of the young babu giving him a lesson a day. The profile of Bakha while heading towards the temple to clean is interesting to discern: his basket under one arm, his broom under the other, and in his heart a song as happy as the lark's.

Like **Anand's** other heroes Bakha, too, is a **Victim of isolation**. He is socially and emotionally excluded from the rest of the society. As an untouchable, he has to live in the outcastes colony on the outskirts of the town. For the reason of his caste he does not qualify to go to a school. He is insulted, cheated and exploited because of his caste. Interestingly (though pathetically) he cannot marry another untouchable girl from washerman's community because among the untouchable castes his is the lowest caste. At home, his own father does not approve of Bakha's modern views and supposedly “unconventional” thinking. Insulted by the upper caste people, discriminated by other untouchables and abused at home, Bakha becomes a symbol of suffering and endless inner rage in his adolescent, tender mind. His self – pity is so deep and moving that he is not willing to take the sugar plums from his friend's hand. He asks Ramcharan to throw them to him. Gripped in a moment of unadulterated melancholy, he sets out on a solitary excursion losing himself in the beauty and profundity of nature. In any case, Bakha is noble and ‘majestic’ in his

behaviour. During the quarrel that follows the hockey match in the evening a little boy is injured on the skull and Bakha immediately picks him up and takes him to his mother. His dejection is boundless when he receives abuse instead of gratefulness from the boy's mother. It should not go unnoticed here that, though he does not receive any sort of gratefulness from others, he himself has the quality of gratitude. He is graceful to a disgraceful world. Bakha admires Charat Singh for his affectionate treatment and express his gratitude spontaneously. When the Havildar offers tea Bakha says, "I am grateful, Havildarji, you are kind". Anand renders the feeling of overwhelming gratitude in Bakha's mind on receiving the brand new hockey stick. "Bakha bent his head and evaded the Havildar's eyes. He couldn't look at so generous a person. He was overcome by the man's kindness. He was grateful, haltingly grateful, falteringly grateful, stumblingly grateful, so grateful that he didn't know how he could walk ten yards to the corner to be out of the sight of his benevolent and generous host. The whole atmosphere was charged with embarrassment. He felt uncomfortable as he walked away".

Bakha's character comes out through his own words and also through the authorial comments. According to Cowasjee "Anand has been able to create a gallery of authentic people who compel attention. His success with Bakha is not solely because the character has been taken from real life but because of what Henry James calls 'the power to guess the unseen from the seen'".

His regulation as a docile, good, respectable boy comes in the way of his juvenile amorous thoughts about Gulabo's daughter. He decides to attend the marriage though uninvited for the sake of his boyhood love. He strongly checks himself when a dark thought of embracing her and ravishing her passes his mind. He wonders at himself "How could, I, who am known to everyone as Bakha the good, have such an unholy design?".

The temple episode projects Bakha's indignation. He is irritated and provoked by the hypocrisy of the priest who falsely accuses Sohini of polluting him. His fists are clenched when his sister reveals the indecent advances of the priest on her. He no longer lies down submissively. The proposed outrage on his sister's modesty enrages him. Bakha, the mild, suddenly becomes Bakha the wild: "Bakha rushed back to the middle of the courtyard, dragging his sister behind him. And he searched for the figure of the priest in the crowd. The man was no longer to be seen, and even the singing crowd seemed to show its heels as it saw the giant stride of the sweeper advance frighteningly towards the temple. He felt he could kill them all. He looked ruthless, deadly pale and livid with anger and rage". It does not take long to realize that his is only an impotent rage because of his caste taboo. He is limited by the society. "so in the highest moment of his strength, the slave in him asserted

himself and he lapsed back, wild with torture, biting his lips, ruminating his grievances.”

Bakha’s freshness and sobriety are part of his genial mind as they are not feigned or sentimental. As human nature repels him the confronting mother nature draws him. He walks into the open fields to forget his misery and to refresh himself. He listens to the incoherent whistling of the shrubs. They were the voices he knew so well.

According to Krishna Nandan Sinha: “The very contour of Bakha suggests tense, physical energy. The validity of Bakha’s moral figure, however, lies in the central conflict, in his oscillation between rage and despair His choice is to live between the sun and the slum.” He is a veritable optimist. His zest for life is unsuppressed in spite of the string of incidents on the accursed day. He moves towards home with thoughts full of Gandhi and the young poet. He hopes for the dawn of the day when the machine relieves him from his present lot.

(ii) Plot & Structure

Structurally, Anand makes a judicious arrangement of the various episodes that occur in a single day of Bakha’s life. Here the attempt is to bring out the character of Bakha in particular and the cruel effects of the evil practice of untouchability, in general. Bakha’s day is made up of an admixture of series of incidents, some sad and some happy, to render his varying responses. If the early part dramatized the humiliating experiences of the protagonist there are some incidents bringing and the fluctuating moments of pleasure and misery alike. In any case, the narrative ends on a fruitfully ambivalent note. Bakha gets ready for yet another day of relentless gloom. Certainly as he has become more knowledgeable he anticipates some hopeful change. The narrative ends on a note of prophesy. According to Saros Cowajee, “Untouchable opens quietly on an autumn morning, and by the time the evening approaches the author has been able to build round his hero Bakha a spiritual crisis of such breadth that it seems to embrace the whole of India.”

Bakha’s victimisation is reinforced in a string of events and his degree of misery rises in proportion to the movement of the sun from the morn to its reaching the meridian. All these incidents cause untold distress and disillusionment.

The first major incident that brings realization to Bakha about his real position in the society takes place in the streets of the small town of Bullandshahr. Absorbed in enjoying the jalebis bought from the sweet vendor who has cheated him, Bakha inadvertently touches a Hindu, an upper caste one, who passes by. The infuriated man releases a volley of abuse. He calls Bakha vermin, dog, bitch, swine and such.

Bakha is too stunned to speak out a word. He stood amazed, embarrassed. He was deaf and dumb. His senses were paralysed. Only fear gripped his soul, fear and humility and servility. Instantly, he joins his two hands apologetically and meekly says " I have erred now, I forgot to call. I beg your forgiveness. It won't happen again".

The presence of the increasing crowd with their hostile attitude makes him even more confused. In spite of his apologizing he is given a sharp slap on his cheek. "This incident of getting slapped proves climactic in the sense that Bakha is confronted with the reality of the situation stripped of all romantic illusions".

For the first time Bakha realizes that the society which alienates him forms a moral barrier which he will never, on his own, be able to cross. Bakha's status is defined and demarcated by the society. Bakha's broken condition, his loss of identity and dignity are symbolically expressed by the fallen turban as jalebis on the ground. Anand's world is the Dickensian world of oppression and exploitation of the innocent, helpless young. When Bakha stands helplessly at the centre of an accusing crowd, his embarrassment is enhanced when an urchin levels a false allegation that Bakha beats the children. The situation is dramatized thus, " A street urchin, several of whom had pushed their way through people's legs to see the fun took his cue from the vigorous complaint and shouted "ohe, son of a dog! Now tell us how you feel. You who used to beat us." Even a child takes advantage of Bakha's helpless condition. He becomes reflective and comes to grips with the fact that the whole society is set against him. He is pained and distressed by the apathy of the crowd. His feelings come out in the following way: "Not one of them spoke for me. The cruel crowd! All of them abused, abused, abused -----".

According to Marlene Fisher " When Bakha in a key scene in the novel is slapped in the face for having failed to announce the polluting shadow of his sweeper presence, something is set off within the eighteen-year-old which was to remain permanently with him". According to Shaileshwar Sati Prasad: " The tension in the novel on the material plane builds upto and is relieved by the slap. It is now transferred largely to Bakha's consciousness". This incident effaces all his human dignity and sharpens his awareness that he is nobody, only an untouchable.

It is indeed, an inauspicious day for Bakha. More humiliation and bitterness await him even before he has fully recovered from the slapping incident. The narrative takes us to the temple where Bakha attends to his routine duty of cleaning its precincts. Though he performs his duty there everyday he has never seen the idols inside because the untouchables have no entry into the temples. On that fateful day his curiosity gets the better of him and he stealthily steals a glimpse of the inside temple. The devotees who see him shout that the temple is polluted because of the

presence of an untouchable in such a close range. They abuse him and curse him for his audacity. No sooner does this take place than a priest from near the temple raises an alarm that he is polluted by Sohini, sister of Bakha. The truth is that the priest has made some ugly suggestions and indecent advances to her while she cleaned up the latrine at his house. When she resists and screams for help the priest resorts to the cowardly strategy of accusing her of polluting him and thus extricates himself from the difficult situation. His helplessness, his desire for revenge, his impotent rage, his dejection follow one another and confirm that he is after all an untouchable and it is all his fate. According to Shaileshwar Sati Prasad: "The priest represents a mentality which considers untouchables objects of service – service in any shape – but not human beings. Sohini, Bakha's sister, is the object of the priests lust."

Then Bakha's position as an untouchable is reiterated through another event. At noon time, he goes to the houses of upper caste people for bread. In spite of his repeated shouts of appeal there was no response from the house wives. Overcome by fatigue he leans against the hall door of a house and slips into a nap. On seeing him sitting at her doorstep the woman of the house abuses him: " But, eater of your master! Why did you sit down on my door step, if you had to sit down at all? You have defiled my religion! You should have sat there in the gully." Later the woman flings down a paper-like pan-cake from the fourth storey, which falls on the pavement. He retrieves the roti from the dust swallowing his anger and insult for he is an untouchable.

Bakha's mute anger is symbolically traced by the journey of the sun from morning to noon time. That he is an untouchable is established and consolidated by event after event.

At home also his father, Lakha confirms the same proposition that it is for them to serve the upper caste people, who are their superiors without question or demur. Lakha has digested the historical fact of untouchability and surrenders to the social system accepting his assigned role and position. Bakha is rational and he questions the unreasonable treatment. He rebels in his mind at least if not openly in the public. He becomes a symbol of inchoate insurrection.

One more occurrence which reinforces his victimization takes place at the hockey – field in the evening time. In the course of the free fight that ensued during the match a little boy receives head injury in the melee. Bakha's instinctive human response prompts him to carry the little one to his mother at home. The boy's mother abuses Bakha instead of rewarding him for his good Samaritan service. His service becomes a disservice just because he is an untouchable.

It is no more the individuals but the social system which disgusts Bakha. He is the victim of a cruel and vibrant system which has its roots in the hoary past. Bakha uses 'they' to refer to the hostile society. While complaining to his father he says, " They insulted me this morning, they abused me". The interesting rejoinder of his father is " they are really kind. We must realize that it is religion which prevents them from touching us".

An important idea is projected in the words of Lakha. They, which means the society, are not responsible for what they do, but it is the religion that is responsible for the perpetration of the heinous practice of untouchability. Ambuj Kumar Sharma says, " Social exploitation exists in direct proportion to religious conservatism".

Bakha tastes the milk of human kindness in Havildar Charat Singh who treats him with paternal affection. He receives tea and a hockey stick with a grateful heart. This happy experience is like a silver lining in a cloud. During the whole day studded with insults and accusations this single incident provides relief and respite. According to Ambuj Kumar Sharma : " Social exploitation is totally alien to the nature of Anand's enlightened characters. Far from exploiting Bakha, the enlightened Charat Singh offers him tea and gives him a new brand hockey stick."

When Lakha turns him out of the house for his alleged irresponsible wandering and late returning, Bakha becomes an orphan insulted and injured by the outside society and disowned and dispossessed by his own father. His deep dejection is summed up in his own words: " What a day I have had! Unlucky, inauspicious day! I wish I could die". Also " unlucky, unlucky day! What have I done to deserve all this?"

At the conclusion of the novel Anand dexterously creates a situation wherein some solutions for the eradication of the pernicious practice of untouchability are forwarded. Anand is careful not to give his personal choice but leaves it to Bakha, his protagonist. The fact, however, is that Anand has offered neither solutions nor alternatives, but merely suggested a choice of possibilities.

Bakha's encounter with Colonel Hutchinson, the Salvationist Pastor bewilders the protagonist because he cannot follow the religious jargon used by the evangelist. The missionary's ecstatic hymn-singing only amuses Bakha. There is no sustained communication and the Colonel's activity is only an exercise in futility. Bakha needs no theology at this stage but he needs sympathy and dignity and identity. Thus conversion to Christianity does not appeal to Bakha as an effective solution to his tragedy.

Bakha is impressed when he looks at Gandhiji for the very first time. Even while Gandhi's mass appeal attracts him, his kind words about the untouchables and his views, regarding the removal of untouchability appeal to him. Bakha decides 'to

be sure, he is a good man'. Gandhi has not offered any immediate solution for the lot of the untouchables. In essence, it is for the untouchables to carry on their duty of scavenging while it is for the upper caste people to have introspection and to change their attitude towards the untouchables. Thus Bakha finds it confusing and ambivalent.

Finally there is a young poet, Iqbal who makes a mention of the 'machine which clears dung'. The machine has nothing to do with either religion or compassion of others. Bakha's hope lies in the applied science and technology when he says "perhaps I can find the poet on the way and ask him about his machine". E.M. Forester's last sentence of the preface sounds prophetic: " His (Bakha's) Indian day is over and the next day will be like it, but on the surface of the earth if not in the depths of the sky, a change is at hand".

ii. Use of Language and Imagery:

Any great writer uses language to create an impact and powerful effect, **Mulk Raj Anand** is also known for his sensitive use of language. Style and imagery contribute to the aesthetic significance in his works. Symbolism always lends new dimension to any piece of writing. Novel, like poetry is an art of language. With the help of his language Anand prepares psychological ground for readers' emotional participation. Dr. Feza Ahmad Nasimi tells us about his " language of compassionate objectivity".

The novel opens with the description of the outcastes colony which is an 'uncongenial' place to live in, the squalor, the odour appeal to the senses of the readers creating a concrete image of the area and the thoughts naturally extend to the misery of its residents. It builds up the atmosphere. The description runs as follows: " A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal – clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes."

The opening pages are influenced by Dickens's description of London slums.

The temple – imagery has far reaching implications. The imposing structure of the temple is given in words like 'colossal', 'huge', 'massive' which create the feeling of 'awe'. When he wants to look into the temple with his adolescent curiosity to see the religious rites he suddenly realizes that he is not allowed into the temple. A sense of fear wells up in him. The description here represents the condition in the mind of Bakha. " The temple stood challengingly before him. The unflinching sense of direction of his inner impulse landed him near the steps of temple again. But now he was afraid. The temple seemed to advance towards him like a monster and to

envelop him. He hesitated for a while. Then his will strengthened". This passage mirrors the inner conflict with the help of the outer situation. The temple is not only a massive structure but a historical institution. Bakha's desire to challenge the traditional norms and his inherent fear are dramatized in this passage. It is a visual passage.

The sun image is prominently found in the narrative. The sun represents the potentiality of life and becomes a key symbol. The following passage shows the recurrence of the sun image. " Recollecting this he looked up at the sun He stood lost for a moment, confused in the shimmering rays, feeling as though there was nothing but the sun, the sun, everywhere, in him, on him, before him and behind him". According to K.N. Sinha the sun concerns the hero; it is an emblem of his vital impulse, a movement of energy, an effluence.

Beside these usual images, Anand creates highly suggestive auditory and kinetic effects as found in this following passage: " He saw himself driven in a bullock cart through the thronging streets of a most marvellous city, encountering wedding procession of gaily dressed, laughing people, preceded by a litter, covered with ochre – coloured dragaries, carried by four men, who were themselves preceded by a sikh band, dressed in the uniform of the English Army, carrying clarinets, bugles, flutes, super-saxophones and drums, walking in loose formation and playing not the harmonies which he had heard in the cantonment, but timeless wails, weird and disturbing." We find sounds, colours and movement in these lines.

When he is turned out of his house by his father his broken condition is very aptly described: " It seemed as if the demon in him held a cruel sword and with it hacked everything in its way and by the force of the hacking, acquired a more sinister power, frightening in its intensity and weirdly fascinating in its transmutation of Bakha's body into a wild horse".

The flame imagery is used to bring out the potential power both positive and negative. It is the source and means of purification and destruction. The burning flame seemed to ally itself with him. It seemed to give him a sense of power, the power to destroy. It seemed to infuse into him a masterful instinct somewhat akin to sacrifice. It seemed as if burning and destruction were for him acts of purification.

Anand also uses many swear words to invoke local atmosphere and authenticate the local speech habits to provide the backdrop to action. ' Scoundrel of a sweeper son', ' low caste vermin', ' cockeyed son of a bow-legged scorpion', 'eater of your masters' are a few sample expressions. In any case, the narrative is replete with irony. The very theme is in an ironic mode.

According to Saros Cowasjee, since irony is implicit in the theme, one finds it everywhere and more pervasively than in any other Anand novel. The novel unfolds

with a child of modern India shackled by age old traditions. The untouchable sweepers clean up the society and yet their touch pollutes. They clean the temples outside but they have no entry into the temples.

The priest who desired intimacy with Sohini, Bakha's sister, in order to extricate himself from difficult situation shouts that he is polluted ' The missionary in his contact with God had lost touch with the people'. The Salvation Army pastor, Col. Hutchinson loses contact with man as he is engaged in the charismatic contact with God. He makes a ludicrous character as a henpecked husband. Expressions like 'posh, posh, sweeper coming', 'Bread for the sweeper mother' create word picture bringing to one's eyes the pitiable postures the untouchables assumed. The use of Hindustani words also gives the narrative, a native flavour.

In a brief sentence the author describes the unique mass appeal of Gandhi when he raises his hand in gentle benediction: " This strange man seemed to have the genius that could, by a single dramatic act, rally multi – coloured , multi – tounge India to himself".

Humour is an integral component of Anand's narratives. Bakha who is obsessed with the idea of dressing himself like the Tommies creates hearty humour. The author writes about Bakha : He had felt that to put on their clothes made one a Sahib too. So he tried to copy them in everything. Another passage reveals his obsession: " He shivered as he turned on his side. But he didn't mind the cold very much, suffering it willingly because he could sacrifice a good many comforts for the sake of what he called 'fashion'. Bakha's mind acts as an intensely focused narrative lens through which the lengthening shadows of social discrimination and human indignities are rendered with a reticent fury and well – orchestrated protest through language, symbol and setting and many olfactory smells and auditory effects.

(iv) Narrative Technique :

Anand successfully employs a particular narrative technique for achieving both subjectivity and objectivity in this novel. As Anand renders Bakha through his own mind and sensibility, though with enough artistic restraint, there is also an element of objectivity as Bakha evaluates the outer reality with intelligence and comprehension.

The whole narrative is focused through Bakha's own mind and feeling though with authorial comments, wherever necessary. It means that what we see in the narrative is through Bakha's eyes. All the incidents and situations, human beings and their psyche are projected through the highly discriminating sensibility of Bakha. If the narrative is about Bakha the untouchable, Anand achieves greater levels of authenticity by making Bakha the narrator of his own tale. Anand is indeed the narrative outsider, where his supposed authorial voice is projected and compared

and evaluated by Bakha's own observations. In fact Bakha's narrative mind and the authorial voice are most creatively integrated to present a particular vision of the subversive Indian reality, wherein untouchability is the most heinous crime. In this narrative, Bakha's mind acts not as the authorial self but the universal mind of any victim. Here Anand is creatively fusing fact and fiction, general and the particular, the universal and micro cosmic, to symbolize Bakha as a victim.

The novel may be called an intense and heightened drama. A quick movement of images, and a completeness in organization, and an intensity, characterize the dramatization of Bakha in the novel. There is a dramatic vividness and quickness in movement, in portraying the rising emotions in Bakha in the scene in which he 'pollutes' the caste – Hindus. Bakha is a vivid picture of hurt sentiments. His superego, belief in his superiority to the other members of his caste was hurt: but beyond these, there is the universal question of discrimination and exploitation.

Anand's desire in creating a desire image through subjective consciousness tries to fulfill itself the concept of fluidity of time and association, central for the stream of consciousness technique. There is a dynamic shuffling of the temporal context in the novel. It is in a 'Time – continuum' that Bakha's consciousness shuttles. Though this is a characteristic of the **stream – of – consciousness** technique, it is not fully developed and achieved. The character's psyche becomes self – conscious and the awareness of an external reality and a vowed, interests make it move away from a neutral perception of situation, as it is conceived in the **stream – of – consciousness** technique. Though Bakha's psyche is ideally sought to be presented as neutral, it is bound to be coloured by an anger and partisan interest. This makes Bakha come out of his introvert imagination of the recognition of himself into an interested world of his.

Anand's interest is in "Expressionism", " in rendering the dream of each soul in the crisis of change under the impact of human situation." The result is a great scenic impact; and in a moment of dramatic intensity. Bakha's consciousness is captured through a quickly moving series of images:

But there was a smoldering rage in his soul. His feeling would rise like spurts of smoke from a half – smothered fire in fitful jerks when the recollection of abuse he had suffered kindled a spark in the ashes of remorse inside him. And in the smoky atmosphere of his mind arose dim ghosts of forms peopling the scenes he had been through. The picture of the touched man stood in the forefront, among several indistinct faces, his bloodshot eyes, his little body with the sunken cheeks, his dry, thin lips, his ridiculously agitated manner; his abuse; and there was the circle of the crowd, jeering, scoffing, abusing while he himself stood with joined hands in the centre.

The symbols are apt and show a quickness of perception, in the manifestation of the rage of Bakha. But more than this, the cosmic riddle follows: "Why all this?" He asked himself in the soundless speech of all calls receiving and transmitting

emotions, which was the usual way of communicating with himself: "Why was all this fuss? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him." The image is made lucid, and transparent.

3.12.5. Critical Evaluation:

Critical Evaluation:

According to Marlene Fisher : "The heart of Untouchable, however, is not in its manifest social plea for the abolition of untouchability. It lies, rather, in the kind of person Bakha is. It lies in his trustingness, in his naivete, and in his still unquenchable wonder at life". According to Edgel Rockwood, "**Untouchable** is essentially a tragic poem of the individual caught in the net of age old caste system". Bakha is a perfect individual and his flaw is his low caste. The words of E.M.Foster in the Preface sum up the character of Bakha: " Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes weak and thoroughly Indian."

An instance of neo-realistic perception, which Anand postulates, is to be found in Bakha, who is not a mere phenomenon to be acted upon. His whole turbulent consciousness is conceived in emotions and sentiments. It is an inner drama, which is a continuum of body and soul. It is a study in fine detail, realizing a quick movement, whose graphic curves are detailed out, but which is essentially free from a temporal, and situational demarcation. It is a philosophical conception, realized, and made realizable through fine detail.

Bakha synthesizes in himself the ideal of the 'whole man'. He is a staunch individualist with an inquisitive mind, and a 'rationalist temperament'. And his progress to a 'higher consciousness' is, through a process of continuous struggle. He is the embodiment of "revolt", rebelling against injustice and discrimination. He is conceived in his totality, head and heart, his ideas and feelings cohering into a suffering and revolting 'whole'. He displays the qualities of a sharp intelligence, and exhibits a quick grasp of matters. His intelligence and innate abilities and poise outreach the abilities of the fellow members of his caste. He is a 'superego figure' in the presence of contemptible people, who are steeped in their fatalism.

A **god-figure** capable of perfection, the "whole man' is pictured in him: -----
----- "He walked away earnestly, quickly, without a loss of effort. Brisk, yet, steady, his capacity for active application to the task he had in hand seemed to flow like constant water from a natural spring. Each muscle of his body, hard as a rock when it came into play, seemed to shine forth like glass."

He is summed up in the epigram: "And though his job was dirty, he remained comparatively clean."

This describes his position in life and society. The details about his physical appearance are incongruous with his inner compulsions, which are in the realm of

nobility as they are marked by an inevitable longing for perfection. This divergence between his real situation, and his imagined perfection relates to the core of Anand's artistic concern, which is an interest in the vanquished who is innately capable of evolving to a "higher consciousness".

The humanist question posed by the phenomenon of Bakha is great and challenging. He is Man par excellence; but he is limited by a social determinism, and an historical injustice : A superb specimen of humanity, he seemed whenever he made the high resolve to say something, to go and do something, his fine form risking like a tiger at bay. He could not overstep the barriers which the conventions of his superiors had built up to protect their weakness against him. He could not invade the magic circle which protects a priest from attack by anybody, especially by a low caste – man. So in the highest moment of his strength, the slave in him asserted itself, and he lapsed back, wild with torture, biting his lips, ruminating his grievances.

It is true that **Anand** never oversimplified the development of character. Bakha's movement is from superego, to finding his social and historical limitations. Though it is not an evolution in his consciousness, nonetheless, it is through a revelation of the changing graph of Bakha's emotions and sentiments, and naiveté and cynicism, that the novel continuously acquires a degree of authenticity.

The essential human dilemma is presented: "In a moment or two his frame seemed to have sunk into insignificance, drowned as it were in a pit of silence, while the things on the sunny bank began to take life, each little stem of plant becoming a big leaf, distinct and important. The whole valley seemed to him suddenly aglow with life. But the rich and exuberant spaces about him seemed to have sucked all his energy away."

Bakha shows an intellectual temperament, as in evidence, in his tendency to probe and analyse facts. His predicament is similar to that of an individual probing life in and around him. He may be conceived as a 'pure' character, as he is appealing in his own right, now heroic, and now unheroic, and clumsy and helpless; the social and historical interests in his conception, and realization strengthen his claims for universality, and make his predicament, as a continuous struggle against injustice and discrimination.

The novel's artistic interest is decided by non-committal nature. The novel is evenly poised, as it is a human drama, in its own right, and the social and historical injustices reinforce the predicament of the protagonist, and give the novel a universal context. Though it is inevitable that Anand's anger is directed against the perpetrators of social discrimination, and exploitation, it is kept under a firm control, and the culprits are only shown to be pictures of ridicule; in no case, are they realized

as unilateral 'types'. The "point of view" gains in its fruitful blend of art and ideology, and becomes primarily an artistic rendering of a turbulent human consciousness.

The narrative ending is, indeed prophetic, Bakha's mind evolves at various levels during that that eventful day. His mind moves from wonder, pain, questioning the reality, finally leading to a world of hope and prophecy. As Bakha's mind evolves from the questioning level of cause and affect, the question", why should he be discriminated against", is an unanswered though painful question of the idea of universal victimization. Bakha in his endearing mind also asks the very meaning of victimization in his hapless world. His question of victimization is the meaning of **Anand's** creative endeavour in this novel. It means the "noble savage" that is Bakha, is artistically the hero but circumstantially, a victim.

Bakha, inspite of his qualities of head and heart, has no dignity, no identity of his own because he is the helpless victim of the ageold evil practice of untouchability. Being a sweeper by caste, he belongs to the lowest of the outcastes. Condemned as an untouchable he suffers insults, injustice and discrimination.

Even while **Anand's Untouchable** structurally ends a day's life in Bakha, the narrative's prophetic intimations continue to engage our attention. It is true, that if Untouchable lays bear the agony in the pre-Independent India, **Anand's The Road (1963)** finds a concrete, this – worldly solution, through the constitutional guarantee by making untouchability a consignable offence. As untouchability is sought to be eradicated, The Road is at last a road to equality, and avoiding discrimination at all levels. Thus, what is an imaginative statement in Untouchable becomes a cry against hegemony of the social order.

3:12:6 To Sum Up:

Thus, we have studied Anand's interest in evoking the reader's conscience to the idea of victimization through Bakha's travails. The novel in its intense fusion of the particular and the universal realizes its intended purpose with economy of art and highly animated discussion of the problem of victimization.

3:12:7 Sample Questions:

1. Describe Anand's humanism, its qualities and the influences which shaped it.
2. Trace the portrayal Bakha as a universal symbol of victimization.
3. Comment on the narrative technique of Untouchable.

3:12:8 Suggested Reading

1. K.R.S. Iyengar. *Indian Writing in English*.
2. M.K. Naik. *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*
3. C.D. Narasimhaiah *The Swan and the Eagle*.
4. Alaister Niven *The Yoke of Pity*.
5. Meenakshi Mukherjee (ed.) *Considerations*.
6. K.N. Sinha *Mulk Raj Anand*.

Lesson - 13

Arun Joshi : *The Last Labyrinth*

Structure

- 3.13. 1 Objectives of the lesson**
- 3.13. 2 Background**
- 3.13. 3 Life and works of Arun Joshi**
- 3.13. 4 Analysis of the Text**
- 3.13. 5 Critical Evaluation**
- 3.13. 6 Summary**
- 3.13. 7 Sample questions**
- 3.13. 8 Suggested Reading**

3.13.1 Objectives of the lesson

- To critically analyse and interpret Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth*
- To study the theme of Quest presented from the protagonist's point of view.
- To appreciate Arun Joshi as a psychological novelist with an aim to project the inner self of a man.
- To understand Som Baskar, the hero - narrator's struggle for balance of life and his 'Quest' for 'self'.

3.13.2 Background :

During the period between 1920's and 50's, the theme of Indian English novel is the portrayal of the national movement for political independence. All the novelists of that period utilised this great movement as the matrix of their work which they could not avoid being respondent writers that they were.

After the Independence of India, we can observe a shift in the themes of the Indian English novelists. Their interest moved from the nationalistic zeal to the private sphere. They began to delineate in their works. "the individual's quest

for the self” in all its varied and complex forms along with his problems and crisis. Most of the second - generation novelists in their eagerness to find new themes, have renounced the larger world in favour of the inner man. For example in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, and Arun Joshi, their main intention is “Man but not Society”.

3.13.3 Life and works of Arun Joshi :

Arun Joshi came into limelight with the publication of his very first novel. *The Foreigner* (1968). Joshi’s primary concern in his five novels is the predicament of modern man and his attempt to understand the labyrinths of life. Arun Joshi and Anita Desai, two modern novelists of India, examined the theme of the individual’s “quest for the self” in all its varied and complex forms in their novels. Arun Joshi is a writer by choice and a Management consultant by training and profession. Arun Joshi was born in the year 1939, was educated in India and in the U.S.A. He got his Masters degree in Management from the M.I.T. His five novels and a collection of short stories have won him high critical acclaim and a recognition as an author of rare sensibility and exceptional talent. His fourth novel ***The Last Labyrinth*** written in 1981, was selected for the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award, one of India’s highest literary honours.

The source of most of Joshi’s novels is actual experience and he has endeavoured to discover the reality which lies hidden in the actuality of his own life. His fiction is neither a source of entertainment nor an instrument of publicizing some sets of ideas. He experiments with the medium of literature for studying man’s predicament, particularly in the light of motives responsible for his actions and reactions on his psyche. Joshi delves into the inner recess of human pschye where he finds instincts and impulses at work. He seeks a process of the apprehension of reality which may lead him to the core of truth of a man’s life.

Arun Joshi is one of the modern Indian novelists in English, who has treated the theme of the individual’s quest for the self in all its varied and complex forms in his novels. He has tried to present solutions to problems arising out of one’s awareness of the purpose or meaning of life. The most besetting problem that man faces today is the problem of **meaninglessness**. Joshi has written five novels. The Foreigner (1968), The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (1971), The Apprentice (1974), The Last Labyrinth(1981) and The City and the

River (1990), a collection of short stories - The Survivor (1975) and a biography Sri Ram .

Joshi's protagonists are singularly individualistic and completely self-centred. Sindi Oberoi, Billy Biswas, Ratan Rathore and Som Bhaskar are lonely, anxious, depressed and dependent people who are oppressed with the 'Sadness of living'.

Psychic aberrations of Sindi Oberoi in **The Foreigner** which emanate from his orphaned and neglected childhood, push him into untoward relationships and keep him rootless, a foreigner, till the end to himself. **The Foreigner** takes us to the lower depths of human sufferings and the inferno of existential agony which are intensified through his subsequent works. Sindi Oberoi is the central character as well as the narrator of the story. He being the son of a mixed parentage i.e., his mother a British national and his father a Kenyan Indian, Sindi knows that he doesn't belong anywhere. His entire view of life and responses are coloured by his childhood deprivation of love from his parents. Therefore he entertained a deep sense of insecurity, unreality and impermanence about things. He is not only a foreigner to the two cultures between which he shuttled but also to his soul. He was an orphan both in terms of human relations and his emotional roots.

Arun Joshi's second novel ***The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*** was first published in 1971 and aims at delineating the human predicament. This novel is a study in the total alienation of its protagonist, Billy Biswas from the modern bourgeois society of India. Arun Joshi makes deft use of memory - monologues. Billy Biswas is torn between the modern man's problems and his urge to lead a primitive life and to live with the tribals. The hiatus between what the individual aspires for, and the hard reality of what a man faces is the central action of the novel. This novel like Conrad's ***Lord Jim*** is narrated from the witness narrator's point of view.

The Apprentice is the third novel and it was first published in the year 1974. It is set in India, familiar to the urban middle class. Ratan Rathore, the protagonist is both the hero as well as the anti-hero of the novel. The novel is cast in the form of a dramatic monologue. Arun Joshi experiments with the

technique of dramatic monologue to unfold the life of the protagonist, Ratan Rathore, who struggles for a career in the corrupt society of post - Independent India. A minor Government official, Ratan finds himself trapped by his callous and irrational environment. His suffering grows deeper and deeper as his struggle to extricate himself from his net turns more intangible and elusive.

Som Bhaskar, a millionaire industrialist in **The Last Labyrinth**, is relentlessly driven by undefined hungers of his turbulent inner world to possess a woman for whom he lusts with feverish intensity. We can analyse this novel in detail in the coming pages. The last novel **The City and the River** is a political fable using a mixture of fantasy, prophecy and a startlingly real vision of everyday politics; this is a novel that is truly a parable of the times. The theme of each novel is an extension of the earlier one. One can notice a progressive maturity and a deepening of vision.

3.13.4 Analysis of the Text - *The Last Labyrinth*

The Last Labyrinth, the fourth novel by Arun Joshi, published in the year 1981, is basically a love story. It explores the hero's search for the meaning of life. The most besetting problem that man faces today is the problem of meaninglessness. Arun Joshi presents in the story the protagonist's search for some kind of meaning in life. The novel juxtaposes rationality and faith, reality and dreams, materialism and spirituality. The novel is written in the first - person singular form. The narrator-hero-protagonist is Som Baskar, a wealthy young man and an industrialist, who relates the events of his life in flashback. Som belongs to the upper strata of society and his quest is for the meaning of life. Som becomes a millionaire at a very young age. He has everything – fine education, wealth, an extraordinary and co-operative wife, and children. He returns from Harvard to inherit an empire in the plastic industry. He is a name to reckon with in the industrial world of Bombay and his primary aspiration is to grab failing industries and to add them to his dominion.

The root cause of Som's problem is that he is relentlessly chased by undefined hungers. He tries to quench his ravaging desires by possession. Even after possessing he is not satisfied. Som in his student days was very much

upset by the futile activities of life and begged the headmaster's wife, to explain the meaning of life and later on in life convinces himself that life is full of complications - ". . . a labyrinth within the labyrinths".

He calls life "vanity of vanities which could be compared only to a meaningless flights of stairs of a fisherman's net. He compares life to running a hurdle race".

Som tries to analyse himself. He comments that even in the forty-fifth year of his life he has learnt nothing. He thrives on one wish, that is to be called a good man. He comes to know the difference between a good man and a successful man and compares himself and his father, whom every one has admitted to be a good man.

Som is haunted by the single question about life and death. He also compares it with the spoken or unspoken question, to a vulture circling the corpse of his life, that seeking of what ultimately lay in the last labyrinth. Not able to find any satisfactory answers to his questions, he searches for life's secrets and becomes hopelessly complicated as he yearns to have the best of both the worlds – the world of matter and of the spirit.

Som's scepticism and highly rational approach only aggravate his problems. Som struggles hard to come to terms with life and find its meaning, but to no avail. Som, from the beginning realises that he has become a nuisance and that he has been fooling around like a clown performing before a looking glass. Even though he tries to override all his weariness he fails to find the root cause of his problems and mysterious undefined hunger and is always haunted by the cry, **I want. I want. I want.** Not knowing the answer to his quest, Som develops a loathing for the squalid world and he is disgusted with people and himself. He thinks that he is surrounded by voids of the world and the empty spaces, within and without.

Som's troubles get multiplied not only because of loneliness but also because of his awareness of the lack of relevance in life. He finds the world meaningless. Even though Som rushes for happiness and meaningfulness in life, he does not find any valid explanation as to why he is not happy even though he

has everything in life. He tries his best to understand the world but fails to do so and he describes the world as ... *a mysterious world, as pretentious and meaningless as the holy bulls of Benaras.*

Som tries to quench his thirst not fully realising whether his wants are physical or spiritual or material possessions. His insatiable hunger for possession makes him seek substitute satisfaction in sex, wealth and fame, only to find himself increasingly restless and realises that he is leading himself towards endless self questioning till he is lost in the labyrinth of thoughts. Som himself feels that he has been hearing only one strident song, **I want. I want. I want.** Not being satisfied, he buys out other companies in order to add them to his already flourishing industries.

Som encounters Anuradha for the first time in a Delhi hotel at a reception organised by Aftab Rai for the Plastic Manufacturers Association. Som finds her enchanting the very moment he sets his eyes on her. He is irresistibly drawn towards her and feels that Anuradha has cast a spell on him. She exercises such an overpowering fascination over Som that he neglects his business, his family and his health in an effort to win her.

Anuradha was an illegitimate child born of an insane mother and was brought up by one of her aunts. She was molested as a child and underwent many tribulations. Aftab Rai helped her by bringing her out of the miserable life she was leading and from that time onwards Anuradha had been living with him without any formal marriage. Being a true devotee of Lord Krishna it is believed that she is “. . . gifted with a special vision, a vantage point high above the earth, from where she could see the melee below as ordinary men could not”.

Som is fascinated by Anuradha at their very first meeting and is prepared to lose everything to retain her love. Whatever her antecedents may be, Anuradha is a labyrinthine woman, at once young and old, ancient and modern and furious in lust and divine in love. Even though he is happily married to Geeta, Som is more attracted towards the antique looking woman, living in an antique haveli of the more antique environs of Benaras. The house of Aftab, Lal Haveli simply confounds him :

We went through another set of rooms and corridors and then, at the end of a passage, we came upon the same sarcophagus of green marble. And now the artifacts started to repeat themselves, until, I realised, that it was a maze that we were moving through - - -. There are rooms within rooms, corridors that only bring you back to where you started.

Som Baskar lusts frantically for Anuradha and undergoes undefinable experiences in the blue room of the Lal Haveli. Though Som knows fully well that his relationship with Anuradha is the most complex issue of his dilemma, she gradually becomes the centre of his life and makes him go over to Aftab's Lal Haveli with its labyrinth. Anuradha becomes the centre of existence for Som and during one of such visits to the Haveli, Anuradha tells Som that he does not know what is wrong and what he really wants in life.

Som Bhaskar's compassion for Anuradha is pure. In her, he sees Radha, the beloved of Krishna and imagines himself as Krishna. When he is witnessing the dance programme in Haveli, he has the vision of Krishna and Radha, the eternal lovers. His affinity for Anuradha is clean and sincere. When Anuradha has finally vanished from the scene, he becomes almost mad and chants :

Anuradha, listen. Listen to me wherever you are. Is there a God where you are ? Have you met Him ? Does He have a face ? Does He speak ? Does He hear ? Does He understand the language that we speak ? Anuradha, if there is a God and if you have met Him and if He is willing to listen, then, Anuradha, my soul, tell Him, tell this God, to have mercy upon me. Tell Him I am weary. Of so many fears; so much doubting. Of this dark earth and these empty heavens. Plead for me, Anuradha, He will listen to you (pp 222-23).

Anuradha who is an embodiment of the principle of non - attachment in human relationships and the concept of love without possession, advises Som Baskar that all wordly possessions are nothing but illusions and suggests to him that he should have faith in Lord Krishna who is the Supreme being of the universe, and thus attain mental peace and happiness. In spite of Anuradha's

advice Som cannot achieve unwavering faith. He does not attempt to resolve the contradictions of life through faith. He fails to sublimate his desires from the animalistic to the spiritual. In order to gain Anuradha for himself he decides to buy off Aftab's company to humiliate him. This action of Som reveals his hollowness in his journey to spirituality.

Som's approach to know the meaning of life is very close to the scientific methods of experimentation and validation. With this approach, however, he does not get an inch nearer to the secret of life. Through the unwavering faith which Gargi has in Lord Krishna, she tries to explain to Som, when he insists on evidence as to why anyone has to make an unqualified surrender of everything that belongs to them to Lord Krishna. Aftab tells him that,

“. . . you have to sacrifice before you are given. You can't have your cake and eat it, too - - - you want to have faith. But you also want to reserve the right to challenge your own faith when it suits you. "and that while struggling to know life's dilemma, and that we are all children trying to reach up to a crack in the door to peep into a room. Life's problems being what they are, we have no option but to trust and pray if we want to lead a really peaceful life".

Gargi tells him that "God does not work in this simple manner. . . God will send someone to help you - - - someone who has known suffering". Som realises the significance of what Gargi has said about Anuradha. Gargi tells him that Anuradha is his shakti and will lead him to his cherished goal and so not to quarrel with her.

Som has a massive heart attack after he returns from Banaras, which nearly kills him. After his recovery he tries to contact Anuradha who expresses her inability to see him any more. His ego is hurt by this indifference of Anuradha and he determines to wreak vengeance on her and Aftab by ruining the latter's business. In order to acquire the remaining shares of Aftab's company, which are held by Lord Krishna, Som, in spite of his delicate health, covers the arduous journey to the temple on the high mountains.

On reaching the shrine, Som is surprised to find Gargi there. At this time Som learns from Dr. Kashyap about how Gargi saved his life on Anuradha's

request, and how Anuradha promised to leave Som after his recovery from the heart attack. Gargi's silence intrigues Som but unable to believe in miracles he thinks Dr. Kashyap's story to be a concocted one. He tells that he needs the shares to settle a score with Anuradha who has ditched him after his illness. Gargi hands over to Som the package of Anuradha's shares.

He has the experience but misses the meaning. His scepticism does not allow him to understand the essential meaning of his experience without humility towards Gargi's prophetic words he leaves the temple and goes to Banaras in order to force Anuradha to accompany him to Bombay leaving Aftab once and for all. But Anuradha refuses to do so and she insists on his leaving Aftab's Haveli and Banaras and never to return. Som leaves only to return the next day morning and comes to know that Anuradha has disappeared the previous night at the temple.

At the disappearance of Anuradha, Som recognises her as his soulmate, the mediator between him and God and he confesses and pleads for mercy and is also ready to die.

Som's wife Geeta is one of the three women who understands his inner turmoil, the other two being Anuradha and Gargi. Som compares her trust in him to that of a bird, "She trusts like birds fly, like fish swim", who saves him and rather ironically pulls him back to the world of doubts, melancholia, insanity, voids and meaningless death. The question about life and death continues to haunt him throughout his life.

3.13.5 Critical Evaluation

A certain awareness of man's rootlessness and the consequential loneliness and anxiety is the key note in the novel *The Last Labyrinth*. The protagonist in Arun Joshi's novel is more emphatically concerned with the search for the essence of human living and the need for the desire of man to establish him back to his roots, self and peace. The confrontation of the individual is not with the society but with forms and forces beyond the reckoning of reason and science.

It is an irony that Som should not be in a position to give up his reason in the very thick of miracles and intimations of supernatural powers, symbolizing the modern man. Som, being singularly individualistic and completely self - centered, is almost close to believing in God but his habit of seeking evidence frustrates his

efforts to come to terms with reality. The novel seems to assert that the puzzles and contradictions of life can be resolved through “**faith**”. The anxieties of life follow from the lack of a well defined vision of life and confidence in one’s own rightness of action.

When Som comes to know that Anuradha has sold her shares to Lord Krishna, he goes in search of the temple in the mountains to which she had bequeathed her shares. This journey, symbolically, becomes a reaching out to his soul, the essence of human existence. He comes out from the labyrinths of his reason into the freedom and clarities of faith. Som tries to reason with himself that his constant cry of “**I want. I want. I want**” is to believe that God exists. Aftab warns Som Baskar that he is living in a world of doubts and that “. . . doubts are the wolves that are going to eat you up”. Aftab suggests that one has to sacrifice anything he receives and also cautions him that “One can’t have the cake and eat it too.” Victor Frankl calls this “the paradoxical intention” - that happiness lies in giving without expecting anything in return.

Som finally questions himself whether it is for the sake of the last labyrinth i.e., death; that he has strived throughout his life. He questions himself :

. . . was this what I had wanted all my life ? Was this the answer to the relentless chant’ **I want. I want. I want**. Why was it so unsatisfying ? or maybe, the labyrinth hadn’t ended. Something else lay ahead, something more fundamental than a miracle.

Som’s search for life’s secret becomes hopelessly complicated because of his yearning to have the best of both worlds – the world of matter and of spirit. He is not impressed by Gargi’s” words, what he calls ‘Mumbo-Jumbo’. He even admits to Gargi that “I want to believe, but one can’t order belief. I must have evidence”. His approach, which is close to scientific methods of experimentation and validation does not take him even an inch nearer to the secret of life. Som realises that “Reality was so like an iceberg. One never saw the whole of it.” This is the essence of the novel.

Ultimately to nurture self pity and like one who has been completely vanquished by life, Som utters the terrible death wish. Som is haunted by his doubts, his flourishing business is reduced to “a bigness”. Finally, not able to

bear with himself he tries to kill himself, but is saved by Geeta, his wife who shakes him "... gently as though rousing a man from sleep" making us believe that his intelligent and understanding wife will restore peace to his life.

She is a perfect Indian housewife whose world of happiness centres round her husband Som Bhaskar. Geeta is one who serves to highlight Som Bhaskar's restlessness by her apparent calmness. She is presented as a sensible and brave person who is aware of certain fundamentals of life, which her husband cannot understand. She shows him the path of spirituality. Thus she fulfills the duty of an ideal Indian housewife in becoming the guide in his search for solace.

Thus Arun Joshi in his ***The Last Labyrinth*** brings out the human predicament, the inner crisis of the modern man who is affected not only by the outer forces such as war etc., but also with inner problems. Joshi has treated the aspect of meaninglessness of life even when there is immense scientific and technological advancement, which adds in a large measure to the physical pleasures and comforts of modern man. Man is shocked to find that he is no longer the master of his destiny and is made to realise that there are forces which threaten to wither his life and all its joys and hopes.

3.13.6. Summary

Som's character suggests the modern man's quest for some spiritual solace. Arun Joshi explains through the character of Som, man's restlessness in modern life and his futile attempt to escape from it. Som Bhaskar is an archetype of the modern man. Som is not merely a twentieth century Hamlet transfixed between "**to be or not to be**" but adds to his dilemma "**to believe or not to believe**". Som loses himself in the circle of life and death, reality and truth, doubt and faith. Som is relentlessly driven by undefined hungers of his turbulent inner world to possess a woman for whom he lusts with feverish intensity. Thus the novel plunges into a haunting world of life, love, God and Death, the greatest of all mysteries - "the last labyrinth". The novel also raises some pertinent questions about life and its meaning and tries to unravel the still unresolved mysteries of God and death. The theme of spiritual agony appears in this novel The Last Labyrinth, which explores the turbulent inner world of a wealthy young Indian.

Som's own personality is accurately described by himself in the words : "I forget nothing and forgive no one". As R.K. Dhawan says, ultimately, the novel fails to resolve Som's dilemma. He had always been vexed by the questions of life and death, his mystical craving remains unfulfilled and he continues to remain alienated.

3.13.7. Sample Questions

1. Examine the theme of "Quest" in the novel The Last Labyrinth.
2. What is the significance of the title of the Novel "The Last Labyrinth"
3. "Arun Joshi explores the dark mossy labyrinths of the soul of the protagonist in his novels". Discuss it with reference to the novel The Last Labyrinth.
4. Do you consider The Last Labyrinth as a psychological novel ? Discuss.
5. Examine the narrative technique employed by Arun Joshi in the novel The Last Labyrinth.

3.13.8 Suggested Reading

Arun Joshi, The Last Labyrinth, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi : 1981.

R.K. Dhawan (ed.) The Fictional World of Arun Joshi, Classical; New Delhi : 1986.

M.K. Naik. The Achievement of Indian English Fiction, Sterling, New Delhi : 1984.

K.R.S. Iyengar. Indian Writing English, Sterling, New Delhi : 1983.

Mr. M. Suresh Kumar

Lesson – 14

Anita Desai: *Fire On The Mountain*

Structure

- 3.14.1 Objectives of the Lesson
- 3.14.2 Background
- 3.14.3 Life & Works of Anita Desai
- 3.14.4 Analysis of the text
- 3.14.5 Critical Evaluation
- 3.14.6 Summary
- 3.14.7 Technical Terms
- 3.14.8 Sample Questions
- 3.14.9 Suggested Reading

3.14.1 Objectives of the Lesson

- To critically analyse and interpret Anita Desai's Fire On the Mountain.
- To examine Fire On the Mountain as a psychological novel
- To appreciate the novel which has woman as its prime focus
- To study the theme of alienation presented from a woman's point of view.
- To appreciate Anita Desai as a novelist of inner life probing into the deepest recesses of feminine nature with remarkable sensitivity and perception.

3.14.2 Background:

After independence, more and more educational opportunities and employment avenues were thrown open to women. Exposure to reformist movements, economic independence, influence of Western feminist movements – all these helped women go a long way in bringing about a sea – change in their attitudes and position. Impelled by a desire to realize their aspirations for a new and just way of life, women began to voice freely their feelings and experiences. The change, however, was perceptible only in upper-class urban woman while the position of the rural women almost remained unchanged. A majority of Indian women conformed to the culture – defined concept of womanhood mainly for fear of ostracism. This cultural conditioning affected the literary expression of women. While pre-independence literature had been mainly imitative, post-independence literature registered women's protests against the injustices in the patriarchal society.

The Novel was born in India in the later half of the nineteenth century as a result of the Western impact on the Indian cultural front. Alaler Gharer Dulal wrote the first Indian novel in Bengali (1858) while Bankim Chandra Chatterjee bagged the credit of writing the first novel, Rajmohan's Wife (1864), published in English. The ability to write in English opened new vistas for

young Indian women in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The precocious and sensitive Bengali girl, Toru Dutt, wrote the first Indian novel in English. Bianca is published posthumously in 1878 and is significant as the first novel in English by an Indian woman writer.

The early women novelists tried to give their characters justice by posing their problem but owing to lack of experience of writing they soon turned to didacticism, sentimentalism and romanticism which weakened their novels. However, considering the sincerity behind their motivations and at the same time the lack of any guiding tradition their efforts appear admirable. The second group of women writers were more realistic in their approach and the novel, in their hands, reached maturity. They forged a style and projected a vision of their own. Out of this group of novelists four names have risen to eminence – Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. The later women novelists forming a third group give expression to the most recent problems and show remarkable awareness of the challenges of the present. Feminism, alienation and identity crisis are some of the major thematic concerns of the women novelists today.

If Toru Dutt was romantic, some women writers of the time were didactic and sentimental. The Hindu Wife or The Enchanted Fruit (1876) by Raj Laxmi Devi, Krupabai Sathianadhan's Kamala, A Study of Hindu Life (1894) and Saguna, A Story of Native Christian Life (1895), Shevantibai Nikambe's A Sketch of a Bomaby High Caste Hindu Wife (1896) and Meenakshi's Memoirs (1937) by H. Kaveribai are valuable as the first phase of novels written by women writers giving a voice to the mute Indian woman. Indian fiction in English has a historical romance in Swarna Kumari Ghosal's novels and glimpses of Indian life and culture in the stories of Cornelia Sorabji. However many of the novels tend to be didactic and documentary on account of a limited realistic perspective and Zeal for reformism.

However, after these beginnings there is a lull almost till the end of the Second World War. Perhaps the freedom struggle, the thrust of education, the social reforms and the economic strains requiring women to seek employment drew the best talents of women to other fields in life.

Interestingly a group of Muslim women in the forties and fifties came forward to offer an authentic presentation of the life of Muslim women in their novels. Iqbalunnisa Hussain and Zeenuth Futehally reveal the life of Muslim women in the purdah system. Attiah Husain, writing in the 60s, picturises a Muslim family and shows an awareness of the changing times. Venu Chitale, an early post-independence writer, portrays vividly the tremendous social and economic pressures a woman in a high caste Hindu family has to face in the process of growing up. Writing around the same time, Santha Rama Rau appears to believe in the innate strength of the traditional Indian culture even when it comes in contact with the Western culture. Major novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai,

Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal display a deep and sympathetic understanding of the problems of women.

Kamala Markandaya is undoubtedly the most significant woman novelist among the second generation woman novelists. She concerns herself, in novel after novel, with the cultural upheaval arising out of the impact of the Western culture on the native traditional Indian society. She also displays an awareness of the impact of socio-economic forces on women. She focuses on the familial and personal relationships and displays mostly a traditional outlook.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala, like Kamala Markandaya, is preoccupied with the interaction between the European and Indian cultures. Her Polish parentage, German upbringing, British schooling and married life in India earned for her both the labels – ‘inside – outsider’ and ‘outside – insider’. Thus she can be detached and ironical, objective and unsentimental in her portrayals of Indian families. Her forte is north Indian middle class families and she is keen on depicting the changing attitude of the Indian woman in the changing cultural scenario. Anita Desai is distinct from her contemporary women novelists through her method of the psychological exploration of her principal characters who are essentially lonely and sensitive. She fathoms the character below the surface in all its bewildering nuances and makes it lucid.

Nayantara Sahgal, a champion of individual freedom depicts in her novels, mostly upper class women, often against a political backdrop. Her women are well aware of their emotional and social needs and are bold enough to dissolve a relationship like marriage in the absence of fulfillment or self-expression without any fuss or fanfare. She does not merely describe the pathetic lives of her women characters but, like Anita Desai, tries to understand them. According to Shyam M. Asnani, among the four major second generation women novelists, “... the best and the most neglected is Mrs. Ruth Praver Jhabvala, the most gifted is Kamala Markandaya, the most courageous is Nayantara Sahgal and the newest is Anita Desai.”

3.14.3 Life & Works of Anita Desai

Among the major novelists who have made considerable contributions to the Indian fiction, Anita Desai has created a significant place for herself. She enriches the modern Indian English novel through her psychological approach. Each of her novels appears to be a haunting exploration of the psychic self. The movement one finds in her novels is from outward realities to inward complexities. She makes no attempt at social documentation, shows no desire to reflect on social issues and hence the customary strains of rural poverty, caste and class conflict are conspicuously absent in her novels. Differing from Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Nayantara

Sahgal, who mostly concern themselves with social and political themes, Anita Desai ushers in a new era of psychological realism. She focuses on 'the journey within' of her chief protagonists who are women. She depicts poignantly their agonized existence in a hostile, conservative male-dominated society.

Born in Mussoorie (1937) of a German mother and a Bengali father, Anita Desai was brought up in Delhi at the height of the influx of Punjabi culture. She came under diverse influences, foreign and native, which fertilized her imagination. At the age of seven, she began to write prose, mainly fiction and published some small pieces in children's magazines. She had her education in Delhi – first at Queen Mary's school, and then at Miranda College, University of Delhi. She graduated in English literature in 1957. Shortly after graduation, she joined Max Mueller Bhavan, Calcutta, for a brief stint. Then she got married to Ashwin Desai and took to creative writing.

As a writer, Anita Desai has been influenced by Western novelists like D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James and Marcel Proust. Even though each of these writers depicted the predicament of man in his own milieu, the main concern of these novelists was the study of the inner life of their protagonists. In this respect Anita Desai belongs to the tradition of these great novelists.

Anita Desai has to her credit ten novels, children's stories, short stories and review articles. Her earlier pieces were published in an American Children's magazine. When she was in college, her stories appeared in Thought & Quest. Later she contributed to Envoy. Her short stories were published under the title, Games at Twilight. In all her novels, she portrays in a psychological perspective, the problems and the plight of alienated individuals caught in the crisis of a changing society. The miserable plight of highly sensitive and emotional women engages her attention. In her later novels, however, especially in Clear Light of Day (1980) and In Custody (1984), she moves out of her earlier psychological mode and deals with relationships between the individual and the society and between the people themselves. Even the problems of the alienated women have been handled and resolved in a positive way.

She received world – wide recognition as a novelist of rare merit. Besides the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for her Fire on the Mountain, she is also the recipient of Author's Guild of India Award for excellence in writing for her Where Shall We Go this Summer. Clear Light of Day and In Custody were nominated for the coveted Booker Prize.

Works:

Cry, the Peacock (1963) is typically a feminine novel, a novel of sensibility rather than of action. The novel focuses on the problem of domestic incompatibility between Maya who is highly sensitive and emotional and has husband who is intellectual and detached. She is obsessed by a childhood

prophecy of disaster and lives a life of acute sensitivity lost in her own world. Ultimately she is driven to a kind of schizophrenia and dies in her quest to find a fuller life.

Voices in the City (1965) is an examination of the plight of sensitive and independent women caught in the web of a hostile society. Taking two neglected women as its female protagonists – one a housewife and the other, a career woman – it dramatizes their emotional turmoil. It also highlights the hollow existence of the urban people living in the transition phase of India in the post-Independence era.

Bye – Bye Blackbird (1971) is a story of love in the background of immigration. The novel presents the difficulties of adjustment of Indian immigrants settled in England and of those who return to the motherland, often complicated by inter –racial marriages. Problems like loss of identity, alienation and humiliation which immigrants suffer due to racial and cultural prejudices are dealt with in this novel. The main focus of the novel is on the psychic turmoil of Sarah who struggles to find her identity.

Where Shall We Go this Summer (1975) analyses the trauma of a sensitive woman who is unable to accept the dictates and demands of a male – dominated marital life. Sita, an over-emotional and middle – aged mother of four children and expecting the fifth child is obsessed with her loveless marriage and feels isolated from her rational and worldly husband. She wishes to escape the mundane reality of her existence in a bid to discover peace in her childhood home but finally compromises with life which she always felt was so aimless and monotonous.

Fire on the Mountain (1977) projects the conflict between the need to alienate in order to retain one's identity and the wish to be involved in the throes of life. The novel presents the tragic death of Nanda Kaul triggered by the traumatic news of her friend Ila Das's rape and murder. The novel highlights the psychic and corporal oppression to which women are subjected and their intense suffering, loneliness, alienation are portrayed with great effect.

Clear Light of Day (1980) is concerned with the discovery of an identity that emerges out of the seemingly rootless and meaningless life in a small Hindu family. Bim, young and sensitive, sacrifices her whole life for her brothers and sisters. In her middle age, Bim is fairly representative of a certain type of contemporary Indian urban woman – single, independent and self - assured. Intra – psychic conflicts produce alienation in Bim. After a long period of frustration and anger, Bim comes to recognise the importance of an attitude – to forget and forgive. It is by far the most affirmative of Desai's novels. It reveals the vision of the author that love, understanding and forgiveness are qualities which triumph over despair and destruction.

In Custody (1984) in this novel we find neither a sensitive and highly – strung woman protagonist nor any violent neurotic woman. Commenting on a change in Desai's fictional world, Meenakshi Mukherjee says, "Change is towards a widening of human concerns and a willingness to integrate concrete historical and specific cultural dimensions in the creation of interior landscape." The novel presents an ineffectual but well-meaning young man whose problems are not just personal and private but public and social.

Baumgartner's Bombay (1988) is a piercing study in human solitariness. The novel deals with the condition of a lonely man in an alien country where he remains as an outsider throughout his life. An uprooted German Jew, compelled by circumstances, arrives in British India before the Second World War and lives there till his death. But unfortunately, he is not accepted by the Indian society. It shows how time and destiny along with the social, psychological and political problems enhance the already insurmountable misery and despair in human life.

Journey to Ithaca visualizes the quest for attaining enlightenment. The novel delineates the life of a young European couple who set out for the exploration of spiritual truth in India. The central theme of the novel is quest for truth, ultimate reality, beauty, joy, ecstasy or whatever form it has. Here Anita Desai displays a significant balance of tradition and modernity, East and West, humanism and spiritualism and explores newer regions of human experience.

Fasting, Feasting (1999) is Anita Desai's latest novel, which depicts the story of expatriate Indians. It is about a brother and a sister, one an introvert and the other outgoing. The brother goes to America and thereon the novel is about two families, one Indian and other American.

3.14.4 Analysis of the Text

Structure:

Fire on the Mountain falls into three clearly titled sections, each further divided into several short chapters of unequal length. Each section deals with a specific event. The first section titled Nanda Kaul at Carignano runs into 10 chapters and deals with Nanda Kaul, the main protagonist's lonely life in Kasauli. Raka Comes to Carignano forms the second section. It is the longest one composed of 21 chapters. It is devoted to Raka's arrival and sojourn at Carignano. It also portrays, very subtly, the change in Nanda Kaul's attitude towards Raka, her great grand - daughter. It shows how Nanda Kaul changes her attitude from sheer hostility to indifference, from indifference to acceptance and then to admiration and finally to affection for Raka. The final section, Ila Das leaves Carignano, is divided into 13 chapters. It describes in some detail, the visit of Ila Das, a childhood friend of Nanda Kaul and also consists of the denouement. The strands of the two lives of Ila and Nanda Kaul which had run parallel since the very beginning converging at certain points, are finally

tied in the knot of death. It is significant to note that Part-III consists of 13 chapters, the numeral having superstitious connotations of doom and disaster. The structural unity, as suggested by the section captions, is offered by Carignano, Nanda Kaul's house at the hill station of Kasauli. The stories of Nanda Kaul and Raka, running counter to one another, complemented by that of Ila Das, also provide unity of structure. The novel contains neither any story value nor events that are interesting by themselves. The story element is very thin and there is practically no action except for the tragic end.

Fire on the Mountain explores the inner emotional world of Nanda Kaul. It is a three character story, which mainly revolves round the inner lives of Nanda Kaul and Raka. It deals with the sense of alienation experienced by the protagonist, Nanda Kaul, an old lady, who lives in perfect isolation. It also projects the inner turmoil of a small girl, Raka, who is haunted by a sense of futility. It also presents the plight of a helpless woman, Ila Das, who is in conflict with forces that are too powerful to be encountered resulting in her tragic death.

Nanda Kaul, the protagonist, is an aged widow who lives in loneliness at a house called 'Carignano' on the hills at Kasauli in Himachal Pradesh. She lives all alone, attended only by an old servant, Ram Lal. She was forced into the role of a dutiful wife to the Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab University for a number of years. In spite of her efficiency and talents, she led a life of deprivation in the world of her husband and children. She felt emotionally drained out and she retires to 'Carignano' after her husband's death. She wants to achieve her identity in isolation, rejection and withdrawal.

When the novel opens we find Nanda Kaul, a solitary figure in the hills. She prefers her lonely isolated existence guarding her privacy fiercely. "She wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be unwelcome intrusion and distraction." She even resents the occasional visits of the postman. Raka's arrival, conveyed to her through a letter, unsettles her. Raka, her great grand-daughter arrives at Carignano to convalesce after her typhoid attack. The unexpected arrival of Raka unnerves Nanda and disturbs her privacy. Earlier left to herself, she could groan 'with self-pity and pain, certain that she was alone and no one would hear'. But now, in Raka's presence, she was not able to do so. To her Raka is an intruder. Raka is also alienated like her great grand mother. She is presented as shy, wild, withdrawn, alienated, not entirely attractive and a rather unquiet creature. Both Raka and Nanda work out the means by which they would live together avoiding each other and thus guard their independence and privacy. The natural instinctive aloofness of Raka and the planned, self-imposed withdrawal of Nanda Kaul is juxtaposed. Nanda becomes conscious of this polarity. "Raka ignored her, ignored her so calmly, so totally that it made Nanda

breathless". Raka's indifference is a challenge to her. In the quest for aloofness Raka far outdoes Nanda who painfully realises "it was not simple to exist and appear not to exist."

The interaction between these two contrasted approaches of desire for isolation brings out in artistic terms their existential predicament in which the canker of loneliness can contaminate, both young and old, irrespective of their journey from innocence to experience. Nanda Kaul's life was full on the surface but empty at the core. The trauma of childhood, on the other hand, had blunted the native thrust of Raka's soul. Raka becomes an introvert because of the abnormal circumstances around her. Her parents do not love each other. Their marriage has been on the rocks all the time. She has seen bitterness, distrust and violence. Her traumatic feelings have deprived a child's innocent trust and experiences of joy in the company of others. Thus Nanda and Raka seek to exclude what they need most, the security and fulfillment of love. Realising that Raka has lacked the tender care and love, necessary for a child, Nanda changes her attitude towards her and begins to woo Raka with long stories about her imaginary childhood trying to make contact by hooking the child's curiosity. But Raka shows little interest in her stories and further becomes very strained. In the process of winning over Raka's attention, she undergoes a metamorphosis, where she realizes the emptiness beneath the seeming façade of fulfillment, but she fails miserably to establish any contact with the child. The little girl refuses to be befriended and escapes into the hills looking for company in solitude.

Ila Das, Nanda Kaul's childhood friend, visits Carignano to meet Raka. A one time lecturer in the Punjab University, Ila Das had lost her job subsequent to Mr. Kaul's retirement. She is a ludicrous spinster now and her life suggests another dimension of misery and meaningless existence. She has come to Kasauli now in her capacity as an officer in the social welfare department. She fights against child marriage by enlightening the local people about the evils of this practice. This invites the wrath of many of the villagers of whom Preet Singh is one. His attempts to barter his little daughter for a tiny piece of land and a few goats have been successfully thwarted by Ila Das. He is lying in wait to settle his score with her. One evening, when Ila Das returns late from Carignano to her humble house in the valleys, he waylays her, rapes and murders her. When the news of Ila Das's death is conveyed to Nanda Kaul over the phone, she is rudely shocked and falls dead. Raka, unaware of her great grandmother's death, rushes into the house proclaiming wildly that she has set the forest on fire.

Nanda Kaul, Raka and to some extent Ila Das, are embodiments of the existential predicament experienced by the individual in an un-understanding and even hostile universe.

Theme of Alienation in Fire on the Mountain

Solitude, alienation, futility of existence and struggle for survival form the major themes of the novel, Fire on the Mountain. In this novel, Anita Desai portrays the loneliness, isolation and agony in the life of Nanda Kaul, a deserted widow. The Novel conveys an image of emptiness and sterility, an image of Nanda Kaul's loneliness and her inability to make contact. It shows the difficulty of communication between Nanda Kaul and the milieu in which she exists. Her self-alienation however results not out of any existential realization of man's ultimate loneliness, but out of her inability to accept the reality and her refusal to compromise.

When the novel begins, Nanda Kaul is presented as a recluse. Living all alone, except for the company of the servants who dare not disturb her privacy, she brooks no human presence. She spends her days in isolation, musing about her past and experiencing the existential ennui. Nanda Kaul's life, for almost three decades, has been full of disappointments and betrayals. In her total isolation at Carignano when she remembers her life as Vice-Chancellor's wife and mother of a large number of children, she feels disillusioned and emotionally deprived. Her husband treated her simply as some useful object. She played the gracious hostess all the time and enjoyed the comforts and social status of the wife of a dignitary. But down deep, she felt lonely and neglected. To make matters worse, her husband carried on an affair with Miss David, the Mathematics teacher. The other woman has always been like a thorn in her flesh. Till his death, she led her life according to his dictates not because of any love or regard for him, but out of sheer sense of duty. Thus deceived and betrayed by her husband and children, she is a forsaken woman. Now all alone in Carignano, Nanda Kaul feels that loneliness is the only essential condition of human life.

Nanda Kaul's option for total isolation is not related to the spirituality of Indian thought. She does not opt for this isolation willingly but circumstances have left no other way out for her. Her long involvement with the people and the affairs of the world gave her neither satisfaction nor a sense of belongingness. Therefore, in a bid to survive, she opts for withdrawal, for an existence away from the world of messages and visitors.

In her self-imposed isolation, Nanda Kaul is pitted against Raka, her great grandchild. Raka, though a child of nine, regards aloneness as her sole natural condition. Though there is a vast difference of age and experience, Nanda Kaul and Raka understand each other so well that sometimes, to maintain the pleasantness of solitude, Raka ignores Nanda Kaul "calmly". This makes Nanda Kaul "breathless". She has in her unconscious mind a need to be loved, and when finds Raka's attitude akin to her, she draws closer to her and remarks, "Raka, you really are a great grandchild of mine, aren't you?" When she tries to attract Raka's attention by narrating her the stories of her childhood,

Raka would twist restlessly on her stool. The conversation between Nanda Kaul and Raka reveals that Nanda's need for belongingness is stronger than her desire to enjoy her loneliness without any intrusion from the world outside.

Raka's love for isolation arises out of the traumatic experiences of her childhood. Mother's ill health and the excessive drinking and aggressive behaviour of her father turn her against all human connections. Raka's emotional deprivation makes her a detached individual. She turns her back upon the world of human beings and develops a strange fascination for the ugly, lonely and desolate aspects of nature. The intensity of detachment in Raka is stronger than in Nanda.

If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, Raka was a recluse by nature or instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice – she was born to it, simply.

Gradually a noticeable change occurs in Nanda Kaul's attitude towards Raka. Raka's 'natural' and 'instinctive' rejection of Nanda Kaul becomes a challenge to her. However the girl rejects the old woman outright and only then does she realize that she fails to provide comfort to Raka.

Both Nanda Kaul and Raka are branded crazy ones. Both are equally lonely outcasts – Nanda Kaul feeding on imagined past grandeur and Raka, recovering from typhoid and a battered home life, seeking her relief in the fire on the mountain side. Nanda Kaul's married life had not been a fulfilling one. Her husband's unfaithfulness and her children's betrayal create a spiritual vacuum in her life. On the other hand, Raka's love of loneliness springs from her hellish experience at home.

T.S. Eliot speaks of three conditions in life: attachment, detachment and indifference. Ila Das, Nanda Kaul and Raka symbolise the three conditions described by him. Despite all her sincere involvement, Ila Das dies in tragic circumstances. Nanda Kaul's tragedy results from her withdrawal from the world of reality. Raka, who exemplifies the third condition in life – indifference – rejects the social life at Kasauli. Her setting the mountain on fire is her rejection of the world in which life has lost its meaning. Thus the characters of Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das are studies of women in isolation. Essentially a writer of existential inclinations, Anita Desai examines three important aspects of the school of thought through her protagonists. The predominant traits of existentialism are alienation, quest and conflict. These three aspects are epitomized in the lives of the three women. Nanda Kaul is a study in alienation and existential angst. Raka symbolizes the individual's quest for meaning in an otherwise futile life. Ila Das stands for the eternal conflict enacted in the human drama between the individual and the forces of determinism. One common ground for these three characters is that they are women who live in isolation both out of choice and compulsion.

Symbolism

A study of Anita Desai's novels shows a tendency on her part to conceive experience and project it in terms of symbols. She regards them as an effective technique for the articulation of her sensibility and handles it superbly. Her symbols have several functional dimensions. Botanical, zoological, meteorological, colour and nature symbols predominate in the novel. Symbols of ugliness, loneliness, destruction and annihilation are consistently used in order to reflect the existential tone of the novel. Anita Desai has endowed a symbolic and universal significance to the plight of her protagonists. When she receives a call from Ila Das, Nanda Kaul, "turned her head this way and that in escape. She watched the white hen drag out a worm . . . she felt like the worm herself, she winced at its mutilation." The same is continued in the next page also: "Still staring at the hen which was greedily gulping down bits of worm, she thought of her husband's face . . ." This prey – predator image of a hen pecking at a worm is suggestive of Nanda Kaul's present inner turmoil. Her past suffering at the hands of the adulterous husband and her present awareness about the harsh realities of life are both successfully established by this image.

Carignano, Nanda Kaul's house in Kasauli, is symbolic of the loneliness and barrenness of human life in general and Nanda Kaul in particular. Symbolically, its seclusion and serenity defines the stillness and freedom she has been able to achieve in her old age. Its barrenness and emptiness symbolise Nanda Kaul's emotional barrenness.

Another important symbol employed recurrently is that of the pine tree that stands burnt and alone, which is often an object of attraction. "To be a tree, no more and no less." Her desire to become a tree symbolizes her desire to live a free and solitary life having no attachments to anyone. The symbol of the charred pine tree reminds Raka of the futility of existence. The withering yellow rose creeper conveys the withering of Nanda Kaul's hope to maintain privacy and isolation.

Images of insects like lizards, birds like eagles and parrots and fire with its connotations of violence and urgency occur at regular intervals warning the reader of the impending tragedy. The eagle symbol highlights quest. The sight of the eagle flying high, makes Nanda long to be able to soar like the bird. The longing for soaring above the reach of deterministic confines is the hallmark of Raka's character. To emphasise this aspect, the novelist employs the eagle symbol while describing Raka's walk to the Monkey Point. Thus Nanda Kaul's wish and Raka's attempt merge in the eagle – symbol, which denotes their existential angst and quest for values.

The dust - storm moving from the plains to the mountains is also symbolic. It shows materialism. The selfishness and materialism of people from town are growing stronger to perturb the

hills also. It also indicates that the dishonest and mean qualities of men highly impress the innocent, good and genteel people.

The forest fire scene has symbolic overtones. The fire is a destroyer. It is also a purifier. Fire is symbolic of Raka's wild nature while the mountain symbolizes Nanda Kaul. By making use of the universal fire symbol, Anita Desai endows Raka's character with allegorical implications. Raka, the invalid restless little girl who is the product of a broken home, becomes the symbol of the existentialist's perception of the individual who finds herself in this hostile and futile world. Yet out of compulsion, she strives to find or create values and significance for her existence. The symbolic implication of the forest fire is reinforced by the title of the novel, Fire on the mountain.

Poetry, used in the novel, adds to the philosophical implications of the novel. A poem by Hopkins is used to signify Nanda Kaul's desire to be away from the humdrum of life. It highlights the theme of alienation which is the central theme of the novel. The walk which Nanda Kaul and Raka take together to the Monkey Point is symbolic. Nanda sits on one of the benches at the foot of the knoll as she has neither will nor energy to climb up. This suggests the forthcoming final 'rest' that the old woman is soon destined for. The monkeys, jumping on the trees, represent the primitive animal force in man.

Anita Desai uses bird imagery, sights and sounds of nature to weave recurrent patterns and give insight into the situation. The repeated "domestic call" of the cuckoo is symbolic. Nanda Kaul is recalled from her seclusion and harnessed once again to her domesticity. It is interesting to note that Nanda's urge for freedom, represented by the imagery of the eagle sweeping down the valley, is counteracted by the clear "domestic tones" of the cuckoo singing in her garden. On the other hand, Raka's abnormal psychology interprets the Cuckoo's call not as "domestic" but "wild". By using the cuckoo imagery and letting the characters interpret it, the novelist makes us comprehend two different psychologies – the attitude of Nanda Kaul who strives to be alone but cannot help being called to duties and Raka's intrinsic urge for desolation. The nervous and agitated calls of the bird lapwing indicate Nanda Kaul's emotional upheaval when she watches her husband driving back after leaving Miss David.

Thus Anita Deasi employs nature, atmosphere, the associations of memory and action in a recurrent pattern to derive a set of symbols and images that create a web of inter-related meanings. Summing up the significance of imagery in Fire on the Mountain, S. Indira remarks, "It is the charming mosaic of imagery woven so skillfully by the novelist that makes the novel a work of art."

Title:

The title of Fire on the Mountain is perhaps taken from William Golding's famous novel, Lord of the Flies, of which the second chapter is entitled Fire on the Mountain. The title has its symbolic meaning and is highly significant from a thematic point of view. The mountain symbolizes Nanda Kaul and the fire is symbolic of Raka's wild nature. "Nanda is the 'rocky belt', dry, hardened by time and age. Raka is silent, swift and threatening like forest fire." The title also symbolizes fire which burns in the heart of Nanda Kaul, the old lady.

The title refers to the words of Raka, the great grand daughter of Nanda Kaul, who says at the end of the novel, "Look Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani – look – the forest is on fire." R.S. Sharma, commenting on the title, says that the words are expressive of Raka's resolve to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural. Thus the fire on the mountain becomes the emblem of destruction. It seeks to destroy an unkind world where women, like Nanda Kaul and Ila Das, suffer from the slings of misfortune, social inequities and injustices committed on them by a cruel man-dominated society.

The title is also suggestive of the revolt of the new generation of women against a world dominated by harsh and cruel men. Raka's setting the mountain on fire can be taken as her rejection of the world in which life has lost its meaning and has simply ceased to make sense. It is a rebellion against the essential beliefs and values of traditional culture. It is through the death of Ila Das that Nanda Kaul attains liberation. O.P. Bhatnagar supports this view when he says, "The fire becomes a reality and Nanda Kaul attains her final liberation, when Raka announces, "Look, Nani – look – the forest is on fire." Raka raises her voice, then raises her head to look in and sees Nanda Kaul on the stool with her head hanging, the black telephone hanging and the long wire dangling. Atma Ram and Usha Bande remark that in the end Anita Desai makes the reader suddenly aware of the reality that lies behind this world of illusion. As soon as her fictive world is shattered, Nanda Kaul admits the harsh realities of life, her ego is dissolved, her identity is annihilated and she attains freedom. "The fire is like death, the great unifying principle –whether it is Nanda Kaul with her real dignity or Ila Das, the ridiculously pathetic figure, both die and thus end their finite existence on this earth. " Prema Nanda Kumar, on the other hand, offers an affirmative view when she says, "The forest is on fire but so high are the mountains that the forest fire cannot destroy them Humanity will yet survive, and survive to reach the highest heights."

Thus the title, is highly relevant to the thematic content of the novel.

3.14.5 Critical Evaluation

Fire on the Mountain placed Anita Desai's reputation as one of the best Indian English novelists. By virtue of its originality and literary merit, it received critical attention over the years. The Sattelman considered it, "an outstanding novel . . . sharp and refined, descriptive as well as symbolic." K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his Indian Writing in English throws light on Anita Desai's themes, plot, characterization, language, techniques and narration. M.K. Naik points out in his A History of Indian English Literature that Anita Desai is more interested in the landscape of the mind than in political and social realities, and that her protagonists are women who are 'fragile introverts'. S. Ramamurthi in his The Rise of the Indian Novel in English acknowledges her poetic quality and points out the hypersensitive nature of her characters. According to him, her novels are highly poetic and they do not show the harsh realities of the work-a-day life. He also adds that Anita Desai's characters are embodiments of lyrical emotions arising out of a state of loneliness and a sense of isolation and they transform the novels in which they figure into songs. S. Indira in her book, Anita Desai As an Artist undertakes a highly imaginative and rigorous examination of imagery and symbolism in her novels. She says, "A study of this novel shows how Anita Desai succeeds in overcoming her temptation to be lyrical. Though there is no lyricism or exuberance of flowery language, the images in this novel relate to the title and the theme, thus contributing to the symbolic centrality . . . this novel is undoubtedly an artistic triumph of Anita Desai."

Anita Desai's novels lack the traditional plot structure with predictable linear movement in terms of exposition, conflict and its resolution. Syed Amanuddin in his essay "Anita Desai's Technique" surveys the thematic patterns and the plot structure of her fiction. He observes, "Anita Desai's technique of fiction as a process of discovery largely depends on simple plot elements that lead to complex situations. Three simple things shape the plot of Fire On the Mountain: a letter, a telephone call and a forest fire . . . the plot elements remind us of what Shakespeare does with a letter and a handkerchief in his Twelfth Night and Othello. In these plays also simple objects lead to complicated situations."

Ila Das is the third female protagonist of the novel. Unlike Nanda Kaul and Raka who are central to the story, her role is only marginal. But Anita Desai projects her as a thinking individual who dares to exercise her free will and act according to her choice rather than submit meekly to the odds of life. In the process of her struggle with brute forces, her life has become meaningful by virtue of the fact that she chooses a cause, fights for it and sacrifices herself in trying to accomplish her task. Prema Nanda Kumar acknowledges the admirable portrayal of Ila Das. She observes, "Ila comes closer to our heart as somebody who is full of life, is life. Nanda may be dressed up in silks, pearls

and emeralds, but it is Ila who comes with us even after we have closed the book. She has character, will-power not to commit suicide even when there is no sheltering roof over her head. Age does not wither her ability to stand up in the face of adversity, nor do adverse circumstances shake her faith in herself.

In most of the novels, Anita Desai highlights the predicament of her women characters. She explores the inner world of women. As a result, her male characters are insignificant and serve only the peripheral needs of the story. Centre stage is always dominated by women. In his Perspectives on Anita Desai, Ramesh K. Srivastava observes that Anita Desai creates a rich gallery of characters both male and female, though dominated by the latter. One is tempted to hazard a statement that the novelist has used the male characters only as appendices to illustrate their crassness towards the feminine.” Purnima Mehta in her essay on “Dehumanization of the Male in Anita Desai’s Fiction” argues that, “the principal male characters in her works play negative role in their relations with the female. The women characters’ quests are posited as of a higher order, the males’ on the other hand, are depicted as materialistic and hence of an inferior order.. the male is made to suffer from low-esteem.” Jasbir Jain is also of the opinion that Anita Desai’s men stay at the fringe of her novels and adequate attention is not paid to them. She very rarely condescends to grant her male characters the quality of introspection. She observes, “men are either marginally present or entirely absent from the scene.”

3.14.6 Summary

This lesson Fire on the Mountain is studied to find out how Anita Desai portrays the multi-faceted nature of feminine existence. The novel reveals Anita Desai as a novelist of exploration of feminine sensibility. We have seen how Anita Desai delineates Nanda Kaul’s existence in diverse situations – in society, in marital life and in solitude. She deals with loneliness and isolation as well as the resultant agony and anguish in the deserted life of an old woman. The plight of the two friends, Nanda Kaul and Ila Das, who share many characteristics with each other, and that of Raka has been explored.

3.14.7 Technical Terms

1. **Feminism** is a protest against oppression and discrimination of women and a demand for equality
2. **Psychological Novel** is a category of fiction which deals with the spiritual and emotional lives of the character. A subjective approach is preferred to objectivity.
3. **Schizophrenia** is a serious mental illness in which the way one thinks and feels is not connected with what is really happening. It results in depression and abnormal behaviour.

4. **Existentialism** is a philosophy which concerns with man's being. It believes that reason is insufficient to understand the mysteries of the universe and that anguish is a universal phenomenon. It also believes that man is alone in a godless universe, suffers anguish and despair in his loneliness but he can choose his destiny and is responsible for his own actions.

3.14.8 Sample Questions

1. What are Anita Desai's thematic concerns in Fire on the Mountain?
2. Write a critical note on the theme of marital disharmony in Fire on the Mountain.
3. Do you consider Fire on the Mountain as a psychological nond? Discuss.
4. Bring out the significance of the title, Fire on the Mountain
5. How does Anita Desai explore female psyche in Fire on the Mountain?
6. Write an essay on Anita Desai's use of symbolism in Fire on the Mountain.
7. How does Anita Desai deal with the loneliness and isolation in the life of Nanda Kaul?
8. "Fire on the Mountain is an oscillation between attachment and detachment for a meaning in life." Discuss.

3.14.9 Suggested Reading

- S. Indira, Anita Desai as an Artist
- Jasbir Jain, Stairs to the Attic : The Novels of Anita Desai.
- R.S. Sharma, Anita Desai.
- Ramesh K. Srivastava, Perspectives on Anita Desai.
- N. Seturaman, Anita Desai's Novels.
- O.P. Bhatnagar, R.A. Sjoshi (Ed.) Aspects of Anita Desai's Fiction.
- K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Indian Writing in English.
- M.K. Naik, A History of Indian English Literature.
- K.S. Ramamurthy, Rise of the Indian Novel in English.
- Prema Nanda Kumar, "Sombre the Shadows and Sudden the Lights: A Study of Anita Desai's Novels" Perspectives on Indian Fiction in English, Ed. M.K. Naik.

Prof. T. Asoka Rani

Lesson – 15

Shashi Deshpande : *That Long Silence*

Structure

- 3.15.1 Objectives of the Lesson
- 3.15.2 Background
- 3.15.3 Shashi Deshpande: Life and Works
- 3.15.4 Analysis of the text
- 3.15.5 Critical Evaluation
- 3.15.6 Summary
- 3.15.7 Sample Questions
- 3.15.8 Suggested Reading.

3.15.1 Objectives of the Lesson

This lesson aims to

1. help students understand and appreciate That Long Silence.
2. help students appreciate a woman writer's narrative about a contemporary middle-class woman's quest for identity in a male – dominated society presented from a woman's point of view.
3. enable students to appreciate the change in the lives of women and of others around them, providing an insight of India in transition.

3.15.2 Background:

Owing to the spread of education and the exposure to the reformist movements, there emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century some Indian women writers who took to writing in all seriousness. The distinction of writing the first novel, among women writers, goes to Toru Dutt, the marvelous poet. She was followed by other women writers of great promise but unfortunately like Toru Dutt herself, some of them died young before they had chance to prove their abilities. Some women writers' literary growth was thwarted by uncongenial circumstances while a few others were content to write sketches or personal memoirs. The most important names amongst those writers are those of Raj Lakshmi Devi, Krupabai Sathianathan, Shevanthi Bai Nikambe, Rocky Sakhawat Hussain, Pandita Ramabai, Saraswathi, Swarna Kumari Ghosal, Santa and Sita Chatterjee and Cornelia Sorabji.

These first generation women novelists wrote mainly to voice their concern for and sympathy with the suffering Indian women. They voiced the mute suffering of women, their main purpose being awakening of the conscience of men. Didacticism, sentimentalism, and romanticism weakened their novels. In spite of their shortcomings, their historical significance can hardly be ignored.

The post – Independence India witnessed a spurt of fiction writing by women writers of greater quality and depth. It is curious to note that there had not been any significant woman writer between the years 1915 and 1950 and consequently a clear gap of 35 years existed between the post – Independence writers and their fore – runners. Still continuity of trends and tendencies is distinctly visible. These writers were more realistic in their approach than those of the first generation and were able to project a vision of their own.

Venu Chitale, Zeenuth Futehally, Shakuntala Shringesh, Santha Rama Rau, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal are some of the major second generation women novelists who have tried to present women from various angles dealing with their problems in the custom-bound Indian society. East – West conflict is their major thematic concern. These writers reflect the changing status of Indian woman from the submissive, subservient, domesticated figure to the outgoing, liberated and creative woman intent on shaping her own future.

The theme of East – West conflict in the hands of the second generation novelists became the clash between tradition and modernity in the hands of the third generation novelists. Bowed down by the traditional roles and subordinate status, educated women show remarkable awareness of the challenges of the present and find themselves at cultural cross roads. These women novelists, influenced by the feminist ideology, try to redefine woman in the changed social situation. Feminism, alienation and identity crisis are their major thematic concerns.

Attiah Hosain, Vimala Raina, Muriel Wasi, Nargis Dalal, Lotika Ghose, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Padmini Sengupta, Hilda Raj, Sita Ratnammal, Meenakshi Puri, Veena Nagpal, Jai Nimbkar, Kamala Das, Uma Vasudev, Bharati Mukherjee, Veena Paintal, Raji Narasimhan, Rama Mehta, Namita Gokhale, Gita Hariharan and Shashi Deshpande are some of the major writers of the generation. These writers display a deep and sympathetic understanding of the problems of women. Shashi Deshpande occupies a unique position among contemporary Indian Novelists in English. She deals with the middle-class Indian woman who represents the overwhelming majority of Indian women and is struggling to adjust in it rather than get free from the traditional world.

3.15.3 Life & Works:

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most accomplished contemporary Indian women writers in English. Daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Sriranga, she was born in Dharwad, in Karnataka I 1938. A graduate in economics and law, Deshpande has also taken a course in journalism before she started working in a magazine. Her writing career began in 1970, initially with short stories, published in various magazines. Later, these were published in book form.

She is the author of four children's books and six novels. She lives in Bangalore with her pathologist husband.

Shashi Deshpande has emerged as a great literary force. In her writings, she reflects a realistic picture of contemporary middleclass woman. She focuses on women's issues; she has a woman's perspective on the world. Her heroines are sensitive, intelligent and career-oriented. They find themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by society and attempt to assert their individuality. They confront their husbands and revolt against their family traditions in search of freedom. They do try to redefine human relationship and behaviour. They choose to remain with their families but reject the roles prescribed to them by the society. They try to achieve self-identity and independence within the context of marriage.

Shashi Deshpande began her literary career in 1970, but she shot into prominence when her novel, **That Long Silence** was published by the British Feminist Publishing House, Virago. It won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990. The novel has been translated into French and Dutch. Shashi Deshpande's earlier novel, **Roots and Shadows**, won the Thirumathi Rangamalai Prize for the best Indian novel. Her novel **The Dark Holds No Terrors** has been well received and translated into German and Russian. The collection of short stories entitled **The Legacy** is prescribed for the graduate students in Columbia University, U.S.A.

Roots and Shadows deals with a woman's attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. She has discovered the meaning of life in her journey to individuation. She asserts her autonomy and her awareness that she exists as a person and not a dependent on her husband.

The Dark Holds No Terrors explodes the myth of man's unquestionable superiority and the myth of woman being a martyr and a paragon of all virtues. It projects the dilemma of a career woman who strongly resents the onslaught on her individuality and identity.

That Long Silence tells the story of an Indian housewife who suffers throughout her life in her effort to prove herself an ideal wife. The silence of an Indian housewife is the major concern of the novel and it ends with her resolve to speak and to break her long silence.

The Binding Vine portrays the middle-class woman protagonist's predicament in a male dominated society. It also deals with her search for love, meaning and happiness in life.

A Matter of Time is a fascinating story of three strong women representing three generations in a family depicting their pain, endurance, suffering and love, understanding and support extended to one another. It also portrays how the protagonist, an ordinary middle-class deserted wife with three daughters, emerges into a bold, confident and independent individual.

Small Remedies is Shashi Deshpande's latest novel. The novelist has broadened her canvas in this novel to encompass a cross-section of people belonging to different communities and professions in the society. Glaring gender inequalities are highlighted. The novel mainly concerns with the quest for identity of an urban educated woman who refuses to conform to her accepted role as wife, mother or sister.

3.15.4 Analysis of the Text

Plot:

That Long Silence, tells the story of an Indian housewife, who maintains silence throughout her life. The novel ends with her resolve to speak, to break her long silence. The novel opens with Jaya and her husband Mohan shifting from their well-settled, comfortable house to their old house in Dadar, Bombay. They shift into their old apartment in order to escape the scene as Mohan has been caught in business malpractice and an inquiry is in progress. Luckily for them, their children, Rati and Rahul, are away on a tour with their family friends, and if all ends well, they need not even know about this disgrace. For the first time she looks at her life and attempts to decide who she really is.

Jaya is convent-educated and modern in outlook, yet she is influenced by the ideal mythological characters like Sita, Gandhari and Maitrayee. Jaya, which means victory, is the name given by her father when she was born. At the time of her marriage, her husband's people gave her the name Suhasini, which means "a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman". The former symbolizes revolt and the latter submission. She feels suffocated and trapped in the traditional Sita role and refuses to surrender her name Jaya for Subasini. But she cannot afford to insist on for long and willingly accepts her new identity of Mohan's wife, of Suhasini. To be an ideal wife and mother, she suppresses her own emotional needs. To love her husband and be happy is a duty she owes to herself and to society.

When she leaves her home after getting married, her father advises her to be always good to Mohan and she tries her best to follow his advice. Her first and the only outburst with Mohan, soon after her marriage, results in days of Mohan's silence. As a child she used to get angry very soon. But after her marriage, she tolerated her anger. She realized that to Mohan anger made a woman "unwomanly". Since then, she adopts silence as a strategy and withdraws under it. Despite her marriage to Mohan and subsequently becoming a mother of two children, she was lonely. Her husband could not understand her feelings as a result of which she was torn from within. She describes her marriage as "a pair of bullocks yoked together... A man and woman married for seventeen years" because Mohan dictates the terms and Jaya follows them silently. Jaya is deeply distressed to know that the writer in her could not come to light because of her husband. When she writes a true story, Mohan fears that people who read that would think that it is about them. So he

wants her instead to write for the newspaper column “Seeta” about the daily routine of a middle-class housewife.

There grows a silence between the husband and the wife. It creates a gap between them. When Mohan asks her a question she looks into his face and gives him the answer which he needs or pleases him. She longs to be called an ideal wife. Jaya is able to exchange ideas freely with Kamat, an intelligent, middle-aged widower who was free of the usual male complexes. He helped her to analyze her individuality and have faith in her capacity. With his help, Jaya is able to find answers to her pending questions which had caused remorse and grief to her. But when Jaya had found him lying dead on the floor of his flat on one of her visits to him, she had panicked and left the place in silence. This is because friendship between a married woman and another man is viewed with suspicion and disapproval. Afraid of the social stigma and the fear of ruining her married life, Jaya flees from the dead Kamat’s room and shuts out the thought of the dead man. She thinks that she is only Mohan’s wife. But at the same time, she cannot identify herself with her husband. The husband who should be ‘a sheltering tree’ is found wanting.

At the Dadar flat, she feels deserted when Mohan angrily leaves the house. She fears the social stigma of a discarded wife. Out of her anguish, she goes out of her house and in an unconscious state walks aimlessly in the streets of Bombay. However, she manages to come out of her emotional upheaval, for the two nights that she has to herself, she puts down on paper all that she had suppressed in her seventeen years’ silence. As a result, realization dawns on her that she can be a complete woman not merely by being a wife or a mother. She cannot ignore the other equally important self namely a writer. She decides to give up her role model of Seeta. She no longer wants to be a subservient and silent wife. She also decides to give up the ‘Sita’ column. She even rejects the image of two bullocks yoked together. She also realizes that she also has contributed to her victimization.

When she hears the news that all ends up well in Mohan’s office through his telegram and Rahul also comes back, she is again in danger of becoming entrapped in the prison-house of marriage. But she decides to break her silence and refuses to be led by the nose. Now she will continue as a writer of her choice and would not look up to Mohan for an answer he wants.

Tradition and change in That Long Silence or Jaya’s emancipation or Growth in Jaya.

Jaya, the protagonist of **That Long Silence** is born in a conservative, middle class, semi-urban family where the elders, men as well as women, try to instill into their children the notion that women are basically born inferior to men. Women are not considered important in the family. Jaya’s paternal uncle, Ramukaka, prepared the family tree with great pains but Jaya has no place there. Not

even her mother, Ai or her grandmother figure in the family tree. Jaya's mother gifted her flat in Dadar, left to her by her brother, to her son though he did not need the flat as he was settled abroad. She could not think of giving it to her daughter, though it hurt Jaya and made her resentful.

Mohan's mother is very passive, docile and uncomplaining inspite of the piles of humiliations heaped upon her by her husband. While Mohan sees strength in the silent suffering of his mother, Jaya finds in his mother not strength but despair so deep that it could not get articulated. It was a struggle so bitter that 'silence and surrender' become the only weapons for her.

Jaya is told by her paternal grandmother that a wife should obey her husband and should not retort or question him. The ideal woman in the society is one who has lost her identity in her husband's. Ramukaka and Dada advise her to be good to Mohan, her husband. Vanitamani, Jaya's aunt, tells Jaya that a husband is like a sheltering tree. These women are stereotyped images of weak, timid and sacrificing ones, who are comfortable with a blind faith in patriarchy. Jaya's father was different from the others in the family. He inspired her to be confident and courageous. But his sudden death shattered her.

Mohan, Jaya's husband, is a traditionalist. He has clear-cut ideas about his role in life. He always interprets things in relation to the effect it may have on society. He likes unobtrusively to conform to the social norms even if they are strong. He is conventional, gregarious, looking eagerly for wealth and status. His life is centred around his office-work and his family. Jaya learns to suppress her own wishes and act according to her husband's. She is influenced by the traditional archetypes of Sita and Gandhari. She is happy looking after her husband and children. She has surrendered her decisions to her husband. She wants to pattern herself after the docile and silent women of Mohan's family.

A common Indian practice is to give a new name to the girl on the day of her wedding. This practice seeks to replace the identity of the woman while the identity of the boy is continued. Jaya is given the name 'Suhasini' by her in-laws. The name 'Jaya' stands for revolt whereas 'Suhasini' symbolizes submission. Being a convent – educated girl, she feels suffocated in the traditional role defined in the patriarchal society. So she rejects the name 'Suhasini' and it is significant as a manifestation of her protest against such customs. However, her rejection of the name 'Suhasini' remains only a token victory. She cannot afford to insist on for long because quite at an early age she was taught that her husband is a tree of protection, a security. She is Jaya and yet she knows she is Suhasini as well. Thus Jaya has to confine herself in the strait-jacketed role of a traditional wife, repressing her resentment.

In the midst of playing the roles of wife, daughter-in-law and mother, Jaya had forgotten that she was a talented writer. She had even won a prize for one of her short stories. But Mohan wants her to write only light, humorous ‘middles’. So Jaya starts her weekly column ‘Sita’ about the daily routine of a middle-class housewife. In order to see that her marriage is not broken, she compromises with Mohan’s demands and is prepared to sacrifice her career and her aspirations. Suppression of creativity frustrates her. Though she wants to be a traditional wife, she is not able to give up her individuality. The suppression of self and emotions gradually create a strain in her. She finds life unendurable due to the repetitive nature of household chores and emotional loneliness. She realizes that she has lapsed into the stereotype of a woman – nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support.

Mohan faces an inquiry due to some malpractice. He may even lose his job. He is advised to stay away from the office and his home till the storm blows over. Luckily, children are also away on a tour with their family friends. So Mohan decides to move to the Dadar flat along with Jaya and Jaya’s acceptance to his plans is taken for granted. She is to be a “Sita following her husband into exile.” Now Mohan has no office work. Jaya’s whole life revolved around the wants of her husband so far. Now that he does not want anything she is at a loss. She is flooded by the memories of the past – her earlier life, her marriage with Mohan, the frustrations in their seventeen – year old married life. She realizes that they are like “a pair of bullocks yoked together”. Jaya also realizes that she cannot identify herself with her husband. The husband who should be “a sheltering free” is found wanting. Her stay in the Dadar flat makes her to review her life and her relationship with Mohan with some objective detachment. She realizes the futility of a life which is built around the needs of the husband only.

Mohan suddenly goes away from home without informing Jaya and this has frightened her. She is altogether broken for fear of the social stigma of a discarded wife. Jaya waits for him with tension of uncertainty. For the two nights that she has to herself, she puts down on paper all that she had suppressed in her seventeen years’ silence. As a result a great change has taken place in her personality.

She now realizes that she cannot be a complete woman if she remains a wife or a mother and ignores the other equally important self, namely a writer. Now, she decides to give up the ‘Seeta’ column and to write what she really wants to write. This means symbolically giving up her traditional role model of wife. She has decided that she shall no longer be the obedient and silent wife. No doubt, her early training at home made her obedient and submissive towards her husband, but as she grows, she realizes that anything wrong must be resisted. She also rejects the image of ‘two bullocks

yoked together'. Now she has belief in herself. She can choose and can have her own way. This gives a new confidence to Jaya. This is her emancipation.

Earlier, she had denied certain parts of herself that did not fit into the straitjacket of wifedom. Now she is conscious of her own individual personality and asserts, "I'm not afraid any more. The panic has gone".

For Jaya, it is not "women are victims" theory but that women must assert and change themselves. One cannot remain where one is all one's life. One must change and hope that men also shall change. Jaya, confident of her individuality and hopeful of a change in Mohan's attitude, moves beyond the cultural stereotypes with the firm conviction that "life has always to be made possible". On receiving Mohan's telegram that all is well and with the arrival of Rahul, Jaya finds herself slipping again into the grooves of her marital life. A clear change, however, is perceptible in her. When her husband's problem is settled, she does go back to him but as a different person. She shifts from Sita image to that of the questioning individual. She can no longer be a passive and silent partner to Mohan. She breaks her silence and refuses to be led by the nose. Now she will continue as a writer. She has come out of the confining slots allotted to her by the patriarchal society. At the end, Jaya is not a rebel but a redeemed wife.

That Long Silence as a Feminist Novel/or Jaya's quest for identity

Shashi Deshpande portrays the new Indian woman and her dilemma in her models. She concerns herself with the plight of the modern Indian woman trying to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all, as a human being.

Feminists are primarily concerned with the recognition of woman as a being, an autonomous being. They want woman to realize herself through self-analysis. Such a quest for one's own identity forms the theme of Shashi Deshpande's novel, **That Long Silence**. Jaya, the protagonist, thinks of her past days and tries to analyse herself, to decide who she really is. Sarala Palker calls this novel, a "feminist critique". While relating the story of a couple, Jaya and Mohan, Shashi Deshpande unfolds the power relations in the patriarchal structure, the gender differentiation and the typical travails of a woman struggling to shed her inhibitions and the subordinated self.

The fact that Jaya was rechristened as Suhasini by her husband on their wedding day confuses Jaya in her search for an identity. The pseudonym under which she operates as a writer further complicates the issue. Jaya stands for revolt whereas Suhasini symbolizes submission. Jaya rejects the name Suhasini and it is significant as a manifestation of her protest against such customs. But her sense of identity is never certain. She is torn between being Jaya, herself and Suhasini, the good wife. She is also torn between building a self as a writer and a self as a wife and mother. Through the

process of reliving the past in her mind, Jaya gets the guidance for her future. She decides to break her long seventeen years of silence and gives up being a passive and silent partner to Mohan. She also decides to assert herself as an individual. Though she chooses to remain in the family, change has been wrought in her situation. She has come out of the confining slots allotted to her by the patriarchal society.

Inspired by the feminist movements in the West, some Indian women, in their eagerness for freedom, seek freedom from everything including from their culture. Shashi Deshpande's women protagonists find freedom not in the Western sense but in conformity with the society they live in. Jaya's decision is not meek surrender or submission to circumstances. It is an understanding or sensible compromise between conformity and non-conformity. Shashi Deshpande does not believe in the theory that "women are victims". She believes that the 'dependency syndrome' in women is responsible for their victimization. Her feminism is pro-woman but it is not anti-man. Jaya looks for happiness and self-fulfillment within the family itself as she knows that breaking off the family bonds would result in loneliness and unhappiness. Jaya asks for her individuality to be valued equally along with that of man. Jaya, confident of her individuality and hopeful of a change in Mohan's attitude moves beyond the cultural stereotypes.

Narrative Technique:

The narration shifts from present to the past covering the whole life span of the protagonist. All the time, she broods over her fate, questions herself who she really is and ultimately tries to adapt to the surroundings. The novel ends with an optimistic note with the hope of some positive action in the future.

As the narrator's mind switches back and forth, the story travels from her girlhood days to her father's death, her unsatisfactory marriage and settling to domesticity, and the trauma of suddenly realizing that her husband has become involved in a cheating case in his office. It is here that the long silence is broken and all the pent up feelings pour out in the first 150 odd pages of the novel – pages of self - pity and generated hatred. Shashi Deshpande has used the device of first – person narrative to make the story authentic and appealing. It also ensures its credibility by making the protagonist read her inner mind and thus representing the psyche of the modern middle-class learned woman.

3.15.5 Critical Evaluation:

That Long Silence received much critical attention. Majority of the critics consider this as a feminist text. But Adesh Pal is one critic who disagrees with this view. He argues," Scholars like Premila Paul, Sarabjit Sandhu, Indira Bhatt and Sarla Palkar have studied Deshpande's novels as feminist texts despite the fact that the writer herself refuses to be labeled as a feminist writer ... In

fact, Shashi Deshpande's is not a feminist strand. The feminist readings of her novels fail to probe into the serious psychological problems of her protagonists." It is a fact that once Shashi Deshpande refused to be labelled as a feminist. She was very much against such a categorization. But later on, she began to consider herself as a feminist. She affirms the same thing in an interview when she says: "Yes, I am a feminist in the sense that, I think, we need to have a world, which we should recognise as a place for all human beings. There is no superior and inferior; we are two halves of one species . . . The fact that we are human is much more important than our being man and woman. I think that's my idea of feminism." (Interview with Geetha Gangadharan) In yet another interview, speaking to Lakshmi Holmstrom, Shashi Deshpande reiterates the fact that she is a feminist. She tells her, "I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously as a novelist. . . I started writing first, and only then discovered my feminism." (Interview with Lakshmi Holmstrom.) Speaking to M.D. Riti, Shashi Deshpande admits that her novels have feminist perspective when she says, "I began reading feminist writing only recently, while my writing has reflected feminist idea right from the start." (Interview with M.D. Riti.)

Jaya feels that her relationship with Mohan is devoid of meaning and that they did not make up a family with love and understanding between them. Sarabjit K. Sandhu points out that difference in their outlook is the root cause for dissatisfaction in their marriage. "Jaya is basically a modern woman rooted in tradition, whereas her husband, Mohan, is a traditionalist rooted in customs. The difference between their outlook is so great that they fail, time and again, to understand each other. To Mohan, a woman sitting before the fire, waiting for her husband to come home and eat hot food is the real "strength of a woman, but Jaya interprets it as nothing more than despair. The difference in their attitude is the main cause of their failure to understand each other. Due to differences in attitude their marital life grows shaky and gloomy."

Jaya's clandestine relationship with Kamat is a controversial issue in the novel. Jaya's physical intimacy with Kamat is characterized by a spontaneity and ease which she had never felt with Mohan, her husband. In the novel, we find expressions like, Kamat's "gift of casual, physical contact had amazed her" (p.15). They did have sex occasionally, and sometimes she did feel an "overwhelming urge to respond to him bodily" (p.157). Commenting on their relationship, R.K.Sharma says "what draws Jaya towards him is his intelligence, the fact that she can exchange ideas with him. What attracts her even more is the fact that he is warm, friendly and companionable . . . Sex remained basically a minor aspect of their relationship, more important was the intuitive understanding and friendship between them." (R.K.Sharma)

According to Sumitra Kukreti, "Jaya's friendship with Kamat is perhaps her most valuable asset. Unfortunately Deshpande has not given it the desirable significance. Kamat is the man on

whom Jaya always leans in case of any emotional crisis for he understands her better than herself. She reveals her wounded psyche, her depression and anger to him which she can never do in the presence of her husband. She seems to be achieving meaning and totality in Kamat's company . . . Her desertion of the dying Kamat is the greatest flaw in Jaya's character, and by projecting it Deshpande makes her a poor, shadowy, pathetic and, to some extent, even detestable figure."

Analysing Jaya's relationship with Kamat, Rashmi Gaur says that it is significant to the development of the novel, not only because it represents her need of emotional sharing, but also because it enables her to analyse her individuality once again and have faith in her capability to transcend the social barriers in the pursuit of fulfillment. Kamat's words provide her an insight into the truth about herself and make her accept responsibility for her deeds.

3.15.6 Summary

Shashi Deshpande is incomparable for her portrayal of Indian middle-class women with their turmoils, frustrations and for the long silence, which has been their lot for many centuries. In this lesson we have seen how she successfully presents a sensitive portrayal of Jaya's quest for identity in a patriarchal world. In this novel, we find Jaya in a transitional phase where tradition is breaking down and new challenges are tormenting her with the awakening of her consciousness. We also find in her a perceptible shift towards modernity. This lesson shows how Jaya, though deeply and loyally rooted in India culture, struggles to be a free and full human being (Rashmi Gour).

3.15.7 Sample Questions

1. How does Jaya in **That Long Silence** emerge from the margins and occupy a place in the centre?
2. Bring out the significance of the title, **That Long Silence**.
3. Consider **That Long Silence** as a feminist novel.
4. "Jaya of **That Long Silence** gives us the new image of the typical Indian woman." Discuss
5. Bring out the thematic concerns of **That Long Silence**.

3.15.8 Suggested Reading:

1. Sarabjit Sandhu, The Image of Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande.
2. Rashmi Gaur; "That Long Silence Journey towards Self – Actualization", Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande Ed. Suman Bala.
3. Adesh pal, "That Long Silence. A Study in Displaced Anger"; The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande Ed. R.S. Pathak.

4. R.K. Sharma, "That Long Silence: Long Night's Journey into Day," The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande Ed. R.S. Pathak.
5. Sumitra Kukreti, "Female Protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's Novels," The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande Ed. R.S. Pathak.
6. Sunita Reddy, The Novels of Shashi Deshpande.

Prof. T. Asoka Rani

Lesson - 16
Rabindranath Tagore – *Man*
(Lectures delivered at the Andhra University in 1934)

Structure

- 3.16.1 Objectives of the lesson
- 3.16.2 General background
- 3.16.3 The Life of Tagore and his Works
- 3.16.4 Analysis of the Text
 - i. *Man* - context and significance
 - ii. Introduction to *Man*
 - iii. Summary of three lectures – Man, Supreme Man, I am He.
- 3.16.5 Critical summary
- 3.16.6 Glossary
- 3.16.7 Sample Questions
- 3.16.8 Suggested Reading

3.16.1 Objectives

From a study of the lesson, the student will be able

- i. is to acquaint the student with aspects of Indian spirituality. India is a land of spirituality which has expressed itself through various philosophical systems. Whatever may be the system, the quest to know the truth about the world of perception and experience, remains central to them. Spirituality is the name given to this quest.
- ii. to understand the meaning of true religion and religious spirit. It speaks about the qualities which make human beings truly human and explains the essential unity of human beings irrespective of their religion and nationality.

- iii. to understand the thought of Tagore which is free from 'dead habit' and it provides an opportunity for a certain measure of inwardness and introspection which are necessary for a harmonious life on earth which has now become a global village.

3.16.2 General background

India's contact with the West through the British rule in India, resulted in tremendous changes which occurred in the country. Many social and religious reforms were initiated by men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. The translations of Vedas and Upanishads into Bengali, commentaries of the scriptures in Hindi, the opening of Sanskrit studies to people of all castes by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar made Indians conscious of their ancient heritage. Tagore's writing shows the intellectual churning which was the result of the contact with the west. The early 20th century was also a period of political unrest, national struggle for independence, great intellectual churning, of revolutions abroad and world wars.

The infiltration of Western culture, the adoption of western scientific techniques and the study of western philosophy, no doubt, gave a jolt to India's traditional life. Nevertheless, these also served the Indians nobly by shocking them into a new awareness, a sense of urgency, a flair for practicality and alertness in thought and action. The long dormant intellectual and critical impulse was quickened into sudden life. The reawakened Indian spirit went forth to meet the violent challenge of the values of modern science and civilization of the west. The impact of the two civilizations – Indian and Western produced unrest. It also sustained and stimulated life. It is an extraordinary story of endurance, assimilation and integral transformation.

Modernity to Tagore and other writers of his age meant creation of a new approach to life. Tagore put forth some principles of modernism like universalism, permanence, and also ananda which express the inward nature of poetry. Transparency, trustfulness, tearing off the

veil of illusion, definiteness and self-reliance were the characteristics of modernity for the old guard.

Tagore – A general estimate

Rabindranath Tagore was a multifaceted personality, an institution and a force who continues to touch and inspire the hearts of Indians 43 years after his centenary is celebrated. He "was a poet, dramatist novelist, short story writer, musician, painter, critic, philosopher, educationist and patriot, still the man himself both included and exceeded these diverse manifestations of his genius," observes Prof.K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar. He also remarks that the man was greater than the work "yet it is only through his work that we can now approach him". But he did not leave a "supreme single achievement" by which he could be judged. His profound creative energy manifested itself in his almost ceaseless lyrical flow, in all that he created.

3.16.3 The Life of Tagore and his Works

Tagore, the youngest son of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, was born on May 6, 1861 at the Jorasanko house in the heart of Calcutta. He grew up in affluence and aristocratic culture, keenly aware of "the world of man and Nature around him". It was fortunate that he was schooled in elemental and sublime thoughts. He began to write poetry as a boy and never stopped writing. Although he was involved in politics at the time of the 'Partition of Bengal' he was too much of an individualist to remain in politics for long. The result was that the nationalists were angry with him and the government too was suspicious, if not openly, of his activities.

After Tagore lost his wife, daughter and son within five years, he turned more and more towards god and yearned for god. The result of this yearning came in the form of the *Gitanjali* which won international reputation and the *Nobel Prize* in 1913 for its English version. After the rural experiment at Sriniketan and the educational experiment at Santiniketan of his middle

years, he started the Visvabharathi University at Santiniketan in 1920. He became more and more a legendary figure and looked more like a 'rishi' than a modern poet.

As a deeply sensitive human being he was troubled by the political injustice to his motherland and injustice in general. After the Jallianwallah Bagh tragedy in 1919 a troubled and sad Tagore returned his knighthood to the British government. The unhappy years before II World War also hurt him very much and destroyed his hopes for the future. "As he grew older, in some measure he also became sadder". He was ready for the moment of his final passing in the year 1941 on August 7.

Tagore's work

Tagore's active literary career extends over a period of sixty five years. "He wrote probably the largest number of lyrics ever attempted by any poet. He mused and wrote and travelled and talked untiringly. Next only to Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo, Tagore has been the supreme inspiration to millions in modern India. The people of India have accepted him as they had accepted Chandidas, Vidyapati and Kabir earlier.

In addition to his publications in Bengali, and the English *Gitanjali*, some memorable works of Tagore are *The Crescent Moon*, *The Gardener*, *Fruit Gathering* (poems), *Chitra*, *The Post Office*, *Red Olenders* (plays), *The Wreck*, *Gora* (novels), *Sadhana*, *Personality*, *Creative Unity*, *The Religion of Man* (Philosophy) and autobiography *Reminiscences*. Tagore was also the creator of the modern novel in India and the writer of true short stories. Prof.K.R.Srinivasa lyengar writes: "Imagination gave him eyes, ears, wings, and a thrilling and melodious voice – and poems and plays flowed with a rapidity that was amazing... Tagore's prose is worth reading for its own sake, but more particularly because it helps us to get closer to the creator of *Gitanjali* and *Chitra* and other poems and plays".

Tagore's outlook

Tagore was in close touch with intellectual giants like Vidyasagar, Bankim and Rajnarain Bose in his early years; he showed a spiritual affinity with Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo; liked Tilak and “lavished love on Subhas and Jawaharlal”. All that Tagore said, wrote or did ultimately had the quality of poetry. As a poet he saw into the future through his work whatever may be its form, he transcended the moment, form and content. Prof.K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar observes: “Tagore's gaze seems to peer into the future as much as it comprises the present, and so even his casual or formal prose is seen to be the prose of one who is primarily a poet”.

3.16.3 Analysis of the Text

(i) Man – Context and Significance

The three lectures on *Man* were delivered by Tagore at the Andhra University, a new University in 1934 at that time. Tagore chose to speak on this theme of human beings and the common principle that binds them together, perhaps for two reasons: the world was torn by the War in the preceding decade and suffered greatly. And another World War was in the offing. While human beings were prompted by animal instinct to wage wars, there was every need to look deeper into the meaning of humanity. The lectures are significant for their emphasis on the divinity which is innate in man but which is neglected. In India, the national movement for independence in the country had brought about the Round Table Conferences and the Government of India Act was about to be made in 1935. Tagore's ideas expressed in *Man* reflect the deep introspection and idealistic nature of the intellectuals and leaders of the nation .

ii. Introduction to *Man*

Tagore's *Man* lectures comprise “Man, Supreme Man and I am He”. The lectures reveal Tagore as a thinker, philosopher and teacher in the ancient Indian tradition of sages who discussed, reasoned and explained the nature of reality. *Man* presents Tagore's conviction

about the immortal element in humanity, which has been manifesting itself in various glorious acts of transcendence of its smaller self. The central points on which the arguments in the lecture are based are as follows. The lectures serve as an introduction to students about Indian spirituality and philosophical enquiry. They discuss the nature – physical, animal, human and spiritual - of man. Tagore in this discourse draws freely and eclectically from the Upanishads, knowledge of science, from contemporary events etc.

iii Summary of three lectures - Man, Supreme Man, I am He

Man

What is the difference between an animal and a man? According to Tagore it is man's aspiration for that which is not present in this world, which distinguishes him from an animal. Browning, hence, writes "I rather prize the doubt that low kinds exist without" in Rabbi Ben Ezra. An animal or creature which lives a circumscribed, supine life does not go beyond the needs of the security of life. His impulse does not take him beyond the fulfillment of physical needs. "By stooping downward, the animal sees things piecemeal and separate, and his smell is allied to his sight". The animal obtains awareness of objects through smell and sight serves to fulfil its physical needs. On the fulfilment of their physical needs animals enjoy their leisure in play, but "in their life, play is secondary", because their play represents the tendencies of their life's needs. Kittens play at catching imaginary rats and a puppy enjoys the pretence of fighting its own tail. The consciousness of animals is also indistinct; it "is diffused in indistinct life. In addition to such limitations as these "many animals degenerated or died out as the result of some maladjustment in their bodily constitution". Animals live on the terrestrial globe. "The nature of an animal conforms to its conditions. Its claims never exceed what is due to it". They have a desire for what satisfies them. They sustain themselves by taking food from outside and search for the means of their livelihood.

After delineating animal existence Tagore undertakes to explain the qualities, which make man distinct from animal. He mentions that when evolution has created man its emphasis shifted from the body to the mind. The human mind relentlessly pursued its quest for answers which do not lie in the visible world. The human mind is not satisfied with the facts of life; it went beyond to find out the truth behind the physical phenomena. It is a fact that the friction of trees produces fire. It does not answer the question as to why friction should produce fire. Similarly, the answer to the question 'why does fire burn' also lies beyond the fire and the question. Again when a stone or object falls to the ground from above, why a stone should fall down, has its answer neither in the stone, nor in the question but somewhere beyond the two.

In the march of development and growth of mind man has been liberated from the animal status to a thoughtful stage, where he came to ask the question "What am I". This is the beginning of the consciousness of self or 'I' in man. "When in the course of evolution the conscious self, or 'I' appeared in man, any mistake about this self led and leads to a death far greater than bodily destruction". The evolutionary theory of life tells us that those animals or species which did not fit into the scheme did not survive. In a similar manner any mistake in knowing about the nature of the 'self or I' will result in something far more serious than physical destruction. All great prophets have given the same answer to this question about the self. They said that what the self is, has to be distinguished from what the self is not. Not knowing this distinction will become a great obstacle to knowing the self. Man has been trying ceaselessly to remove such obstacles from knowing the self. Thus, man's quest for this truth is reflected in all the institutions which he has built.

Man searches for the answer to his question 'What am I?' In this endeavour he understood that he is not a simple being but hides a mystery of depth within himself. When he finds an answer to his question will he find joy and glory? The answer can be found only when that veil of mystery is pierced. For centuries man has persisted in this attempt. He has founded

many religions and institutions. He tries to overcome his natural instincts. He tries to remind himself that he is far greater than what he appears to be. If he is able to prove what he adores here lies his truth. But unfortunately in this attempt he has often proved to be blind in his intelligence, vulgar in his morality and deformed in his ideal of beauty. Hence, these mistakes in knowing the truth about oneself must be rectified “by a universal standard of truth, goodness and beauty”. Thus, in this march of man for truth, his own natural instincts rebel against him, there is neither comfort nor rest “and yet hundreds of explorers are continually widening the path and opening it up, even at the cost of their own lives”.

The human body is inhabited by millions of cells. The cells live instinctively and at the same time they have a deep direction towards a mystery of unity. They exist separately but work towards a goal of functioning within the body. Knowledge about the whole body would be surely beyond the power of those cells. Similarly man has understood by observing the deeper endeavour of his own heart, that he is not exclusively an individual but he is a part of that Universal Man. Moving under the inspiration of Universal Man, the individual man attempts to cross nature’s limitations and thereby he tries to express the ultimate truth. He calls this ultimate truth by the names of the true, good, the beautiful for the preservation and enrichment of society and also from a sense of completeness of his own self.

Thus the aspiration of man does not lie in the material world. The rituals and ceremonies man engages in seeking perfection are inferior to the sacrifice understood in the inner culture that is jnana yagna as the *Gita* says. “In the words of Christ he heard that purity lies, not in external commands and prohibitions but in the sanctifying of the heart”.

Even the savage in his own way wants to transcend nature for the sake of his glorification. To him it is the expression of his truth. “He pierces his own nose and sticks a rod in it. The savage sharpens his teeth through a painful process. He fashions strange garments and hideous garments and undergoes great discomfort in wearing them. All such attempts of

the savage man are acts of glorification of the self against nature. He is a child of nature yet he seeks to defy nature. In India, instances of men with lifted arms, men lying on a bed of thorns, men hanging with head downwards in a raging fire are unnatural acts which try to declare their superiority over nature. Even the European countries are not wanting in demonstrations of superiority. People court unnecessary hardships in the name of breaking records. Making such attempts is unnatural. A peacock is proud in being a peacock, ferocious animals exalt in the success of their ferocity. But Man prides that in his exaggeration he is more real than in his normal reality”.

Man forever tries to reach out to the larger world. This larger world is not a part of the physical world. Hence, only a “quarter of him lies in the apparent world, the remainder subsists above in the form of immortality. The immortal element in man becomes evident when he “fulfils the desires of many and gives form to the joy that is for everyone”.

Man in the world is like a cell in a body which carries out its function singly yet is directed towards that mystery of unity within the body. Man is an individual but he is also one in spirit with the universal Man. Under the influence of the Universal Man, man tries to express what ultimate truth is to him. In this endeavour he tries to cross the limitations of nature. His search cannot be found in the material world, it is not urgent for his physical life. It belongs to the universal self. The Rigveda mentions that this universal self *pādosya viswābhootani tripadasyamrutam divi*.

Unlike animals who live on the surface of the earth man lives in what he calls his country. This country is not a geographic space but a spiritual realm. It is not limited to the ‘here and now’. It includes the past. Men of the past who contemplated about questions like ‘Who am I’, and who had love for all beings also belong to this spiritual realm. This is an area, a spiritual region where thought of the past is in communion with the thought of the present.

All most all races have recorded a golden age in their legends. Tagore observes that this golden age is nothing but the aspirations of a race which are expected to continue as long as time flows. Man, in the present times is awaiting a golden age in future. All his efforts at excellence indicate this desire. "... he feels that he exists more truly in that unarrived future".

A plant in a dark room gropes towards light beyond the walls. Its growth is related to the light, which is not present in the room, but beyond the room. Similarly man has been groping in the dark for light, a brightness which exists beyond the present. The future is indefinite but man's struggle for attaining the unknown never ceases. He faces many troubles, he meets with obstacles again and again, the path is dangerous but man does not give up. He continues his search with great perseverance. It may be called madness but man has given it the label of 'greatness'.

The experiences of man about knowledge of everyday natural phenomenon like light or a wall have brought many contradictory statements. A stone wall is not merely a static wall but it is the presence of electrons in motion. At one time it was thought that we experience the vibrations of ether as light. It is also known that light is formed by waves. But to call it wave-radiation is not a complete or correct definition of light or its nature. Light also radiates minute corpuscles. In fact, human science has proved all men to be creatures possessed by a universal dementia. It prompts them to say that things are not at all what they appear to be, but just the reverse.

Perfection is the one goal towards which mankind has been striving. Man has been groping for perfection – like the plant for light through his meditations, ideals, resolves, sufferings and even in death. Man's search for perfection, his willingness to suffer, his willingness to even die for the goal of perfection, his attainment of truth, constitutes his wealth. Truth is his wealth. "The ultimate aim of wealth is not to satisfy needs, but to convey a sense of splendour". Man's happiness lies in immensity, not in littleness. Man desires 'extras', more

and more. He is intemperate. Why is it so? On the one hand man is satisfied if his needs are met and on the other hand there is no contentment in his nature. This contradiction in man is due to the basic duality in his nature, his worldliness and other worldliness, his mortal and his immortal self above the animal self. The imperfect self and evil do not allow man to realise that the Universal Man remains in a state of degradation. These show that man has a spiritual self over and above his natural self. Man's efforts are directed towards a higher goal. Crossing the limitations of his smaller self and going beyond selfish interests and dead habit man becomes a world worker, a viswakarma. His love, transcending, limitations of self, makes him a Mahatma. He does not work for the promotion of self but for immortality.

The hunger of the new born babe, the restlessness of the sea, the deviation of a planet from its orbit – the observation of these things made man peep into the realm of spirit. Man has understood that the world and nature and man are steered from that realm. Mankind has been quarrelling about the one who presides that realm through its religions.

Who is the one that commands the world? God is the name given to this entity. Where does god reside? He resides in his own glory. But what is God? God is 'that' -- 'tadviddhi' – 'know that', not this and this. Similarly man's progress is to reveal the glory of his soul and he shows impatience with limitations. "Beauty and excellence, heroism and sacrifice reveal the soul of man. They transcend the isolated man and realise the Universal Man who dwells in the inmost heart of all individuals.

Tagore concludes the first lecture "Man" with the following words: "All the misfortunes of man are caused by the obscuration of the Inner Man ... We seek ourselves in money, in fame..." and lose the touch of the eternal within us. "... an unfathomed sea is there within you... Seek for the inner man in your inner heart".

Supreme Man

Man's journey in time in the physical world gains meaning only when he reaches its destination. That point or destination is in truth the beginning of the inward spiritual quest. This quest makes human beings eternal wayfarers. Those who are tired in their journey stop to build permanent houses. But by such cessation of quest, by stopping midway, seeking the comfort of a house, men cease to develop. They in fact build their tombs when they abandon their spiritual journey.

The man who pursues the quest for perfection in the world is the supreme man, the one who refuses to be tired, discouraged and defeated. He does not undertake the search "for the satisfaction of his material needs but in order to strive with all his might for the revelation of the Universal Man in the world of men, to rescue his own in most truth from the crude obstacles set up by himself".

Search for the truths of physical and spiritual worlds are beset with difficulties of a similar kind. Scientific truths have been established only after innumerable errors. All impurities and disturbances of the environment and all individual idiosyncrasies should be eliminated and overcome for the realization of pure physical truths. The astronomer who undertakes a study of the planets with his telescope has to cross, eliminate and progress beyond the atmospheric and cosmic disturbances in his observation. "Defects are possible in the instrument, and the mind which observes is clouded by its predispositions". The establishment of a scientific truth for which the astronomer strives becomes possible only after all the defects – in the physical as well as his mental environment are removed. The truth thus established by science becomes a universal truth, it belongs to all – but the errors are only of the astronomer.

For understanding of spiritual truths also elimination of impurities of many kinds becomes essential. Religion and religious dogma sometimes stand as obstacles in the realization of spiritual truths. Perversions in the thinking of an individual or group of individuals from a community or religion promote evil thoughts and blocks realization of spiritual truths. In

the name of worship and devotion, hatred, vanity and intolerance create differences in human beings. They keep man in constant fear of his fellow beings in our country. Religions like Christianity from other countries express contempt of Indian gods or worship. This religion fails to see that it is also a product of human thought. The conception of hell as punishment for sin is an invention of religion. Anti-scientific, anti-religious persecution went on in medieval Europe in the name of observance of scriptural religion. Even today, prisons of civilized man conform to hell where there is no reformation but only the ferocity of punishment.

Like the many errors, which occur in the establishment of scientific truth, errors in religion also occur. Hence, everything and anything connected with science and religion should not be considered as eternal, in which case even today it should be believed that the sun is revolving round the earth. Religion is the name given to traditional opinions of a community religion. The community made a mistake in calling the conflict, cruelty, unreasoning and unintelligent superstition which arise out of its practices as religion. Our mistakes in the field of science occur because of our inability to comprehend the wholeness of truth. But our spiritual life enables us to understand the relation between the small and the whole, whether it is a piece of iron or the whole human race. A piece of iron is visible to the eye, not the mass of electrons which make it; iron is not what it appears to be but a physical symbol. "Likewise, the distinctions of time and place between individual men are very great, and yet there is a large and deep unity encompassing all men". The Mahatma or Great soul has the ability to see this great unity in all men.

Man attains god by realizing the humanity within his own self. The greater, bigger impersonal world of cosmos, stellar sphere beyond the solar system are bounded by human knowledge. The world of physical and scientific truths is itself a human world. "Man alone perceives this world in the form of 'his thought within the scaffolding of 'his' Understanding and Reason". "...a modern scientist describes the universe as the creation of a mathematical mind.

But even this mathematical mind is not beyond the bounds of the human mind. If it were, then we could not have at all known the scientific theory of the world, like the dogs and cats who can never reach it. All the external and internal faculties of man are inspired by the 'Qualified reality' the 'Saguna Brahma'. God is that qualified reality – the humanity which man tries to attain. This is the parenthood, truth of the divine which binds man to god.

We comprehend the actual acquaintance with the physical world through our senses. We comprehend that relation which is deepest and truest between human beings through love. There are many great things and small things in the world. They are no better or worse than the other. But man's mind has a standard of value, a sense of perfection transcending all quantitative standards – which he calls excellence. But there is no unanimity of opinion about what this excellence is. It can be realized on elimination of all errors of perception and understanding.

Pure truth is manifestation of the universal mind but it is doubtful if universal mind can be realized through aesthetic experience. And a lot of effort goes into the creation of beauty. Man strives for attaining the Supreme Object of his strivings but it cannot be reached through mere knowledge. "He has to be realized through the perfection of being, by refraining from evil conduct, by achieving a steadfast mind through the control of the passions".

Tagore narrates an incident from a newspaper 'Nation' published from America; it reported that the British airforce was bombing a village in Afghanistan when one of the aircraft crashed. The airmen were given shelter, food and protection by the Afghan villages. Two aspects of human nature are revealed by this incident; one is the animal nature which prompts killing of enemies and the other is higher nature which forgives and loves its enemies. Forgiveness is not generally found in human behaviour. "He whose spirit refrains from evil and attends to the good has comprehended the 'Sarvam' the totality. He therefore knows what is

natural to him and what is an aberration". Only such men work for the good of all. And only the great among men understand human nature.

The code a society follows is meant for the continuance of the society. The code gives only secondary importance to the principle of Truth. It also believes that introducing pure truth into its religion is harmful. In order to keep common man away from evil, socio-religious codes frighten him with false fears and comfort him with false hopes. In short, religion treats man as a child or brute forever. Social and religious laws try to make themselves powerful and permanent by disguising themselves as eternal truths. They show piety externally and strike terror into men's hearts with threats of Hell. But those who revere the True, the Good, the Human as the ultimate goals of man have, throughout the ages, fought against this attitude.

Truth is also called 'dharma'. Man observed that Truth is sometimes violated or contradicted in daily life. But man gave this Truth his 'dharma' the highest place. There has always been a conflict between what "It is" and "It ought to be", between the animal man and the universal man. Different religious systems attempt at harmonizing the two varied aspects of life.

The selfless man finds that personal happiness and misery have changed their meaning for him. He accepts pain, he transcends it, gives up his happiness with ease. Generally "the burden of pleasure and pain is very great, but when man transcends his self-interest, he feels the burden so light that his patience, when faced with the bitterest suffering, and his forgiveness in spite of the heaviest insults, seem to us to be super human". "It is Esah, this, great He, who challenges man to strike after perfection through endeavours to struggle from the unreal to the real, from darkness towards the light, from death towards immortality". So man, in spite of mistakes, failures, sorrow and suffering aspires for the Truth "The only goal of human life is to offer freedom and be free, the freedom that guides it to the life which is worthwhile".

The supreme man is he who knows the truth, knows his dharma, who overcomes personal pain, misery and suffering, who overcomes his self interest, who is patient and

forgiving. It is Esah or god or divinity who prompts man to seek perfection and thereby immortality.

I am He

It is very easy to worship a god outside oneself through traditional ceremonies, observances and taboos. A verse from the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad says that a “person who worships God as exterior to himself does not know him, he is like an animal belonging to the gods”. Realization of the divine spirit within oneself is difficult but essential. Man becomes servile if he does not achieve this realization. For example, identity with one’s family converts servility into service. Love of mother for her child and her identity for it makes her a mother and not a maid: similarly our relation to a government is honourable when the government represents our own will, otherwise we are servile in relation to it. Similarly in our Indian philosophy dignity of man lies in identification of his spirit with the divine. Recognition and Realization of the divine within oneself and worship of the divine with one’s ego detached from the self are important in the Indian tradition.

But this recognition and realization of the divine within oneself are very difficult to attain. Therefore, it is said that those who are weak cannot attain the truth of the divine or the eternal spirit. Therefore, what is true in thought and action must be taught. The great soul within oneself is beyond age, death, sorrow, hunger and thirst. With this realization comes the knowledge and recognition ‘I am He’ - ‘soham’. This word “carries assurance of the truth of a grand unity, which waits to be realized and justified by the individual”.

Truth and righteousness cannot be realized in the abdication of one’s responsibility. But there are some sanyasis in our country who in the name of identity with the divine self resort to a life of callousness and inactivity. In trying to deny and transcend human life they give up responsibility and work. They do not recognize the ‘mahatma’ and ‘Visvakarma’ to whom work is not fragmentary work but it is world work.

Man is “spiritually much more than his apparent self, he lives in his infinite surplus.” “All that is true, all that is right is there in that surplus. The surplus of which the Atharvana Veda speaks is a quality called greatness – greatness in all efforts of humanity-- in its bravery, grace, strength.

An individual’s achievement may be great. It should be directed towards alleviating suffering and insult to humanity to become ‘Visvakarma’ -- work of the world. “Great men, who have desired the freedom of humanity, have therefore told us ‘Sambhavami yuge yuge’. From age to age they are born in different lands.” “... The stream of that birth flows through history, bearing this message ‘soham’. ‘Soham’ is the mantram of the united evolution of Man, not of one particular individual. In the course of history the Supreme Man appears from time to time. He is a manifestation of the urge in the hearts of all men for spiritual evolution.

What is matter? Matter is that where life is not revealed. It lay inert for innumerable ages. Matter gained meaning with the quickening of life. Matter is external while life lies within. Pure movement is the expression of life. We know that movement as the language of our life. It is the truth in relation to our own inner self. This inner life of our own is also comprehended in the larger movement of universal life. Man tries to understand his inner life by breaking through the shell of his ego. The universe seeks the truth, the ever becoming Humanity in this whole process

“The student, after much effort and time, first learns the alphabet, then the spelling, then the grammar; he wastes paper and ink scribbling incomplete and meaningless sentences, he uses and discards much acquisition of materials: at last, when as a poet he is able to write his first utterance, that very moment, in that composition, all his inexpressive accumulations of words first find their glimmer of a significance.” Similarly in the great evolution of life man has realized the great and mysterious truth of relatedness. He has understood about the supreme unity of all that is there in the world. Only the man who knows the truth can enter into the heart

of all. Only Man can open his heart in a prayer like this: “May all beings be happy, may they have no enemies, may they be indestructible, may they spend time in joyousness. May all living beings be free from suffering and not be denied of their dues”. There may be sorrow and death in the world. But in spite of all this let Man declare across all space and time: ‘I am He’.

The brahmin Ramananda defied social laws to embrace the chandal Nabha, so did a Mahomedan weaver Kabir to save the sweeper Ramdas. Kabir was cast out from his community. Yet he overcame the limitations of petty conventions to proclaim the truth of human oneness and declared ‘Soham’, ‘I am He’. One day Jesus Christ said, ‘I and my Father are one’. “For, in the light of love and good will for all men he crossed the boundary of his ego and realized himself as one with the Supreme man.” Lord Buddha, preached: “Cherish towards whole universe immeasurable ‘maitri’, in a spirit devoid of distinctions, of hatred, of enmity”. He could give a great message because he knew the truth of ‘Soham’ ‘I am He’. “That is why he has said that it is through immeasurable love that man reveals the immeasurable truth within himself”.

Great men like the Buddha, Jesus, Ramananda and Kabir are men who discovered the divine in their own selves. Hence, they declared their union with the divine in the utterance ‘I am He’. The discovery of the great truth and great love within themselves made great men like the Buddha divine.

3.16.5 Critical Summary

Some ideas expressed by Tagore in his work, *Creative Unity*, convey the essence of his lectures on *Man*. In *Creative Unity* Tagore says that “The Joy in our personality is due to our consciousness of a spirit of unity within ourselves”. “No amount of analysis can reveal to us this mystery of unity”. Tagore also observes, “the ultimate truth in man is not in his intellect or his possessions; it is in his illumination of mind, in his extension of sympathy across all barriers of

caste and colour; in his recognition of the world, not merely as a storehouse of power, but as a habitation of man's spirit, with its eternal music, beauty, and its inner light of divine presence.”

As Dr.S.Radhakrishnan puts it, “The problem which faces us today is a spiritual one. What is man?... what is he likely to become? What are the changes, that have to be effected in him?” “Rabindranath’s great gift of imagination and art were used for fostering faith in the unity of man and forging bonds of kinship with others”.

Mankind has always shown the quest to know what lies beyond the physical world. Man is not satisfied with simply being, hence he wants to become the Supreme Man. He wants to achieve immortality or divinity for himself. He tries to achieve what his physical self does not allow him to achieve. Man tries to transcend nature. This is the beginning of his quest for divinity or immortality. Finally, Man discovers these not somewhere outside but within himself. This was proved by the Buddha, Jesus, Ramanand, Kabir, and such men. In order to achieve these, Man has to suffer and struggle, not for himself alone, but for his fellow beings, which leads to the discovery of his divinity. Thus, Tagore’s *Man* conveys ancient Indian Upanishadic thought and modern humanistic philosophy in harmony with each other.

3.16.6 Glossary

atman	personal self; soul, mind, intellect
brahman	creator of the world, primordial supreme being
purusha	person, male, consciousness
viswakarma	architect of the universe
tatwasmasi	that thou art i.e., that which you are
soham	I am He
Upanishad	sacred philosophical treatise attached to the Vedas, forming part of the Hindu scriptures

3.16.7 Sample Questions

1. Trace the sources of Tagore’s philosophy in *Man*.
2. Give reasons for considering Tagore as a humanist from your study of *Man*.

3. Do you consider Tagore as a critic of the 'dead habit' to which humanity is prone to? Give reasons.
4. Give a critical summary of Tagore's lectures on *Man*.
5. Write a note on the significance of the title and contents of Tagore's three lectures.
6. Examine how the importance of spirituality is presented through *Man*.
7. Illustrate Tagore's idea of humanity's goal in *Man*.
8. Examine *Man* as ancient Indian outlook expressed in a modern European language.

3.16.8 Suggested Reading

1. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*.
2. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, *An Introduction to Tagore*.
3. *Rabindranath Tagore Birth Centenary Celebrations*, Vol.I & II.
4. S.Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Culture*.
5. Franklin Edgerton, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy*.
6. Rabindranath Tagore *Creative Unity*

Dr.B.Parvathi

Lesson – 17

Dr.B.R.AMBEDKAR - *NATION AND DEMOCRACY*

(Speech on “the Adoption of the Constitution of India delivered to the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949)

Structure:

- 3.17.1. Objectives**
- 3.17.2. Introduction**
- 3.17.3. Dr.B.R. Ambedkar’s Life.**
- 3.17.4. Dr. Ambedkar’s Writings.**
- 3.17.5. Analysis of the text and Critical Comments.**
- 3.17.6. Summary**
- 3.17.7. Sample Questions**
- 3.17.8. Suggested Reading**

3.17.1. Objectives

This lesson aims to

- (i) introduce you to Ambedkar’s life and writings.
- (ii) discuss his speech on the adoption of Indian Constitution.
- (iii) focus on questions like, what is ‘nation’, and ‘democracy’ in Ambedkar’s conception.
- (iv) to understand the significance of Ambedkar’s speech.

3.17.2. Introduction

In this lesson, we will examine Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s highly regarded and widely quoted concluding speech in the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949. We have extracted this speech from the Constituent Assembly debates and titled it ‘Nation and Democracy’¹. One of the central concerns of Ambedkar in this speech is how to make India a nation and a democracy.

Dr. Ambedkar emerged as a scholar and a leader during the 1920s. His struggles for the Untouchables, his participation as a representative of the Untouchables in the Round Table conferences at London in the 1930s, his debates with Gandhi and his role in the drafting of the Indian constitution in the 1940s made him an undisputed Dalit leader as well as a national leader. Ambedkar articulated a separate identity for Dalits to claim their share in the new nation. He rejected Gandhi’s

¹ *Dr. Ambedkar: The Principal Architect of The Constitution of India* in **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches**, vol.13, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Bombay, 1994. pp.1212 - 1218.

naming of the untouchables as Harijans. Ambedkar argued that annihilation of caste is possible only by destroying Hinduism. He advocated that social revolution must precede political revolution. Unlike the Congress nationalist leaders, he held strategic negotiations with the Colonial government to ensure Dalit rights in the new nation to be born. He embraced Buddhism in 1956. He advised Dalits to convert into Buddhism, as it is an egalitarian social philosophy.

3.17.3. Dr.B.R.Ambedkar's Life (1891-1956)

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was born on 14 April 1891 at a place called Mhow in Central India. He is the fourteenth child of Ramji Sakpal and Bhimabai. The Ambedkar family hailed originally from the Konkan region in Maharashtra and its ancestral village, Ambavade, is located in Ratnagiri district. Ambedkar came from the Mahar caste among the untouchable castes. His father and grandfather Maloji served in the military service with the British. The family belonged to the democratic and humanistic Bhakti tradition of the Kabir panth.

Ambedkar's family shifted to Dapoli in Ratnagiri district after the retirement of his father Ramji. Young Ambedkar was sent to a local Marathi school in Dapoli, when his father again shifted to Satara with a civilian job. His mother died when he was very young in 1889. Ambedkar started his school education in 1900 in the Government High school there. His original name in the school records was Bhima Ramji Ambavadekar. Ambedkar adopted the surname of his teacher for himself as a token of his respect and affection. At school, Ambedkar became a victim of the segregation and humiliation like every untouchable boy. He got married at the age of fourteen even while at school, studying in the fifth standard. The Bride Ramabai was just nine years old.

Ambedkar's family shifted to Bombay in 1904. Ambedkar studied at the Elphinstone High school. He passed his matriculation in 1907, a great achievement for a Mahar boy. Ambedkar was presented with a copy of a biography of Buddha by the author, K.A. Keluskar. Ambedkar continued his college education at Elphinstone College with the help of a monthly scholarship of twenty-five rupees offered by the Maharaja of Baroda. He passed his B.A. in 1913 with English and Persian as his subjects. In the same year Ambedkar lost his father who sacrificed a lot for the son's education. Ambedkar joined the Armed forces of the Baroda state in the rank of Lieutenant for a brief period.

Ambedkar got an opportunity to go abroad for higher studies. He left for Columbia University in 1913. From Columbia in the USA, he went to another renowned centre of education, the London School of Economics in UK in 1916.

Ambedkar came back to India in 1917 and joined as Military secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda. He was humiliated by the caste Hindus in his office and in the city. He moved to Bombay. He

did some small jobs and worked as a temporary professor of Political economy at Sydenham College in Bombay for some time. He left for London in 1920 to complete his studies. Back home, he started his career as a lawyer in the Bombay High Court in 1923.

Ambedkar lost three of his sons and a daughter when they died in infancy. He bravely faced this loss. His only son Yashwant was born in 1928. His wife had to suffer from illness when Ambedkar was away for his studies. Ramabai passed away in 1935. Ambedkar remarried Dr.Sharda Kabir, a saraswat Brahmin, late in his life in 1948.

Ambedkar emerged as one of leaders of the nation and the champion of the Untouchables in the 1930s and 1940s. He was active in political life till his death in 1956. He worked as Professor of Law, Principal, Member of Bombay Legislative Council and later as Labour Member in the Viceroy's Council and as a Member of the Constituent Assembly. He was appointed as Law Minister in the Independent India and as Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian constitution.

3.17.4. Ambedkar's writings

Ambedkar's writings and speeches, 17 volumes of which have been already brought out, speak of his vast erudition and learning. He emerges from these writings as a constructive social philosopher with originality of thought.

He read out **Castes in India**, his first major scientific investigation into the structure and nature of Hindu society, before the Anthropology seminar of Dr. A.A. Goldenwizer at the Columbia University, New York, on 6th May 1916 when he was just 25 years old. He articulated his thoughts on the problem of linguistic restructuring of Indian politico-administrative system in his **Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province**. His **States and Minorities** reveals his most authentic constitutional, political and social commitments. He demonstrates his great familiarity with Indian literatures in his **Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India** and his **Riddles in Hinduism**. Ambedkar embarks on a polemical attack on caste as the single most disastrous feature of Hindu society and the single most important cause of its downfall through history in his celebrated **Annihilation of Caste**, which was originally written as a presidential address to the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore in 1935. We have referred to some of the key texts of Ambedkar from his voluminous work.

It is a tragedy that Ambedkar is not considered an important Indian writer in Indian English literary history. He was excluded from the canon of Indian English Literature and also from the disciplines of History, Sociology, and Political Science. In recent times, the rise and spread of Dalit movement in India has brought Ambedkar to the centre stage of Indian politics and Academics.

Let me offer you a brief comment on Ambedkar's prose style before we start our analysis of 'Democracy'. Ambedkar's prose style has two important dimensions – scholarly and polemical. In the first mode, his prose is classically structured, rooted in principles of balance, symmetry and harmony; his style is close to that of the well-known political philosopher Burke. His second mode, which he employed in his polemical writings, is figurative with frequent use of irony, understatement and overstatement. He combined scholarship and passion in his polemical writings. We have yet to study Ambedkar as one of the masters of Indian English political prose.

3.17.5. Analysis of the text and critical comments

The speech begins with Ambedkar making a few preliminary remarks regarding the drafting of the Constitution and the time taken for drafting by the Committee. He defends the draft and the Committee on certain points which have given rise to criticism. Ambedkar also convinces the members of the Joint Parliament regarding the complaints made against the constitution which has given high-power to the Centre over the States. Let us observe how he confronted these complaints in his own words:

A serious complaint is made on the ground that there is too much of centralization and that the States have been reduced to Municipalities. It is clear that this view is not only an exaggeration, but is also founded on a misunderstanding of what exactly the Constitution contrives to do. As to the relation between the Centre and the States, it is necessary to bear in mind the fundamental principle on which it rests. The basic principle of Federalism is that the Legislative and Executive authority is partitioned between the Centre and the States not by law to be made by the Centre but by the Constitution itself. This is what Constitution does. The States under our Constitution are in no way dependent upon the Centre for their legislative or executive authority. The Centre and the States are co-equal in this matter. It is difficult to see how such a constitution can be called centralism. It may be that the Constitution assigns to the Centre too large a field for the operation of its legislative and executive authority than is to be found in any other federal Constitution. It may be that the residuary powers are given to the Centre and not to the States. But these features do not form the essence of federalism. The chief mark of federalism as I said lies in the partition of the legislative and executive authority between the Centre and the Units by the Constitution. This is the principle embodied in our Constitution.

The second charge is that the Centre has been given the power to override the States. This charge must be admitted. But before condemning the Constitution for containing such overriding powers, certain considerations must be borne in mind. The first is that these overriding powers do not form the normal feature of the Constitution. Their use and operation are expressly confined to emergencies only. The second consideration is: Could we avoid giving overriding powers to the Centre when an emergency has arisen? Those who do not admit the justification for such overriding powers to the Centre even in an emergency, do not seem to have a clear idea of the problem which lies at the root of the matter.

There can be no doubt that in the opinion of the vast majority of the people, the residual loyalty of the citizen in an emergency must be to the Centre and not to the Constituent States. For it is only the Centre which can work for a common end and

for the general interests of the country as a whole. Herein lies the justification for giving to the Centre certain overriding powers to be used in an emergency.

Dr. Ambedkar is known for his forthright views about Indian politics and culture. This speech shows Ambedkar as a visionary and a great democrat who anticipates many of the contemporary problems in 1949. Even after 50 years of Independence, we have not been able to resolve the contradictions in our society. We are a witness to violent struggles and caste and communal agitations today. Given this contemporary scenario, Ambedkar's message and caution to the Constituent Assembly and to the people is significant and relevant today. Let us see his apprehensions:

But my mind is so full of the future of our country that I feel I ought to take this occasion to give expression to some of my reflections thereon. On 26th January 1950, India will be an independent country (Cheers). What would happen to her independence? Will she maintain her independence or will she lose it again? This is the first thought that comes to my mind. It is not that India was never an independent country. The point is that she once lost the independence she had. Will she lose it a second time? It is this thought which makes me most anxious for the future. What perturbs me greatly is the fact that not only India has once before lost her independence, but she lost it by the infidelity and treachery of some of her own people. In the invasion of Sind by Mahommed-Bin-Kasim, the military commanders of King Dahar accepted bribes from the agents of Mahommed-Bin-Kasim and refused to fight on the side of their King. It was Jaichand who invited Mahommed Gohri to invade India and fight against Prithvi Raj and promised him the help of himself and the Solanki kings. When Shivaji was fighting for the liberation of Hindus, the other Maratha noblemen and the Rajput Kings were fighting the battle on the side of Moghul Emperors. When the British were trying to destroy the Sikh Rulers, Gulab Singh, their principal commander sat silent and did not help to save the Sikh kingdom. In 1857, when a large part of India had declared a war of independence against the British, the Sikhs stood and watched the event as silent spectators.

Will history repeat itself? It is this thought which fills me with anxiety. This anxiety is deepened by the realization of the fact that in addition to our old enemies in the form of castes and creeds we are going to have many political parties with diverse and opposing political creeds. Will Indians place the country above their creed or will they place creed above country? I do not know. But this much is certain that if the parties place creed above country, our independence will be put in jeopardy a second time and probably be lost for ever. This eventuality we must all resolutely guard against. We must be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood.

We will discuss two central concerns of Ambedkar in the speech: the task of constructing a nation and building a democratic society. These two concerns are central to the making of the Constitution.

During the national movement, most of our nationalist leaders have argued that India was a nation. Gandhi has argued in his **Hind Swaraj** that the British divided India to rule over its people. He has believed that India was and is a nation. Ambedkar did not accept this view. He puts forth his view:

I am of the opinion that in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion. How can people divided into several thousands of castes be a nation? The sooner we realize that we are not as yet a nation in the social and psychological sense of the word, the better for us. For then only we shall realize the necessity of becoming a nation and seriously think of ways and means of realizing the goal.

In this view, India is not a nation. We have to make India a nation. The Constitution is a document, which has the vision to make India a nation. We commit ourselves to the task of nation building by adopting the Constitution. The Constitution, for Ambedkar, is a document through which we designed 'ways and means of realizing the goal' – the making of India a nation. Ambedkar is a pragmatist who openly addresses the social divisions in India.

Ambedkar identifies the absence of equality and fraternity as the two crucial issues to be addressed to make India a nation. He argues that we lack "unity and solidarity in social life". Why do we lack "unity and solidarity in social life"? Ambedkar's answer is that the caste system is anti-national. As he puts it,

In India there are castes. These castes are anti-national in the first place because they bring about separation in social life. They are anti-national also because they generate jealousy and antipathy between caste and caste.

Ambedkar's concern is to make us aware that India is a land of social divisions. He knows that India is a nation in terms of its geographical unity and the political and administrative control of the Indians over this land. Ambedkar's point is that unless we bring unity in social life through annihilation of caste, we cannot call ourselves a nation. In other words, we have to make India a social democracy. It is significant that Ambedkar makes this argument at the time of the adoption of the Constitution of India. He anticipates that caste will be one of the hurdles to make India a nation. He reiterates the need to recognize "the evils that lie across our path."

Ambedkar's understanding of 'nation' is new and revolutionary. While the nationalist leaders like Gandhi and Nehru have stressed the political unity of the nation, Ambedkar is critical of the nationalist understanding of 'nation'. Mere political unity without social and economic unity will only reproduce "separation in social life". We have failed to address the social crisis in India in the last 50 years. The consequence is that we have a nationwide Dalit Movement in the 1980s and 1990s.

The other issue that Ambedkar addresses in his speech is the establishment of democracy in India. Ambedkar is of the opinion that India has enjoyed the system of Democracy during the rise and spread of Buddhism in India even before the beginning of Christian era. But we lost this democratic system in the process of time. He cautions us that we are not ready to lose the democracy in India for second time. There must be strong roots for the smooth running of political democracy. He suggests some methods which we should follow without fail. Let us learn from his own words:

It is not that India did not know what is Democracy. There was a time when India was studded with republics, and even where there were monarchies, they were either elected or limited. They were never absolute. It is not that India did not know Parliaments or Parliamentary Procedure. A study of the Buddhist Bhikshu Sanghas discloses that not only here were Parliaments – for the Sanghas were nothing but Parliaments – but the Sanghas knew and observed all the rules of Parliamentary Procedure known to modern times. They had rules regarding seating arrangements, rules regarding Motions, Resolutions, Quorum, Whip, Counting of Votes. Voting by Ballot, Censure Motion, Regulation, *Res Judicata*, etc. Although these rules of Parliamentary Procedure were applied by Buddha to the meetings of the Sanghas, he must have borrowed them from the rules of the Political Assemblies functioning in the country in his time.

This democratic system India lost. Will she lose it a second time? I do not know. But it is quite possible in a country like India – where democracy from its long disuse must be regarded as something quite new – there is danger of democracy giving place to dictatorship. It is quite possible for this new born democracy to retain its form but give place to dictatorship in fact. If there is a landslide, the danger of the second possibility becoming actuality is much greater.

If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, what must we do? The first thing in my judgment we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means we must abandon the method of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha. When there was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us.

The second thing we must do is to observe the caution which John Stuart Mill has given to all who are interested in the maintenance of democracy, namely, not “to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or to trust him with powers which enable him to subvert their institutions”. There is nothing wrong in being grateful to great men who have rendered life-long services to the country. But there are limits to gratefulness. As has been well said by the Irish patriot Daniel O’Connell, no man can be grateful at the cost of his honour, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity and no nation can be grateful at the cost of liberty. This caution is far more necessary in the case of India than in the case of any other country. For in India, Bhakti or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. Bhakti in religion may be a road to the salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship.

Democracy, according to Ambedkar, is of two types. One is political democracy and the other is social democracy. How does one preserve the constitutionally guaranteed political democracy? Ambedkar suggests that firstly, we have to abandon our violent / unconstitutional means to achieve our social and economic goals. We have to adopt constitutional methods to solve our grievances. Secondly, we have to give up ‘hero-worship’ – “not to lay their (people’s) liberties at the feet of even a great man”. Ambedkar is of the firm view that hero-worship in politics leads to dictatorship.

Ambedkar further argues, “We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy”. He defines social democracy as “a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life”. He believes that we do not have equality and fraternity in India. We have already examined Ambedkar’s views on the lack of fraternity in India in our discussion on the making of ‘nation’. Let us examine Ambedkar’s views on equality in the context of making India a democracy. We must refer to Ambedkar’s often quoted passage:

On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we shall have equality and in social and economic life we shall have inequality. In politics we shall be recognizing the principle of one-man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy at peril.

This advice, this warning, this caution to the Constituent Assembly and to the political class shows Ambedkar’s foresight in anticipating the challenges to our political democracy. He repeatedly draws our attention to the new reality of India being a nation and democracy on the 26th of January 1950. Simultaneously, he suggests that we are entering into “a life of contradictions”. The adoption of the Constitution makes India a nation and democracy. But we continue to have inequalities in our life in this new nation and democracy. Ambedkar emphasizes the need to recognize the contradictions in our life. He further suggests that we cannot separate the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. These principles, Ambedkar calls them “a union of trinity”. If we separate this trinity, the very purpose of democracy is defeated. In Ambedkar’s words,

Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things.

To preserve independence and democratic institutions, Ambedkar proposes, we must recognize the social and economic inequalities in our life and that we must establish equality and fraternity in all spheres of life.

Ambedkar’s conception of ‘nation’ and ‘democracy’ highlights ‘the social crisis’ in contemporary India. These two terms acquire a new connotation in Ambedkar’s usage. In this speech, we see Ambedkar as a nationalist who believed in social and economic equality. His arguments are convincing and persuasive. His repeated rhetorical reference to ‘26 of January 1950’ draws the attention of the readers to share the significance of independence and democracy and the anxiety of Ambedkar about the challenges before the country.

3.17.6. Summary

In his concluding speech on the draft Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar draws the attention of the members of the Constituent Assembly about the challenges before the independent country-India. He emphasizes that we have to protect the unity and integrity of the country and also democratic values in our society. The adoption of the new constitution on 26th January 1950, Ambedkar suggests, will make us an independent nation and a democratic country. Ambedkar reminds us that we were an independent nation in the past and we lost our independence once. We have won our independence now. Similarly, Ambedkar tells us that we were a democratic country in ancient times. He points out that our Buddhist Bhikshu Sanghas were parliaments and that they observed all the rules of Parliamentary procedures such as Motions, Resolutions, Quorum, Whip, Counting of votes, voting by Ballot, Censure Motion, Regularization, etc. We lost our democratic system. Ambedkar cautions us that there is a danger of losing our independence and democracy for a second time. In this context, Ambedkar offers his 'reflections' on the steps to take to make India an independent nation and a democratic country.

To uphold democracy in India, Ambedkar observes, we have to (i) adopt constitutional methods to achieve our social and economic goals, (ii) give up hero-worship of 'our great men' (read politicians) and (iii) make our political democracy (one vote-one value) a social democracy. What is social democracy? Social democracy, Ambedkar explains, is a way of life that is based on liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar believes that there is no equality and fraternity in this country. We have political equality guaranteed by the constitution but we do not have economic and social equality. This is the situation that Ambedkar describes as "a life of contradictions". He warns us that this contradiction must be removed at the earliest or else those who are subjected to inequality will destroy the democratic structure that the constitution constructed.

Ambedkar points out that we do not recognize the principle of fraternity in our life. As a result, we do not have 'a sense of common brotherhood – of Indians being one people'. One of the reasons for lack of fraternity, Ambedkar explains, is the division of people into several castes. To make India a nation and a democracy in the real sense, Ambedkar suggests, we have to establish equality in all spheres of life.

Independence, according to Ambedkar, has bestowed on us great responsibilities such as providing a Government for the people but not just a Government of the people and by the people. His speech is addressed to the Members of the Constituent Assembly as well as to the people of India. He persuades us that there is an urgent need to make India a nation and a democracy by removing all the hurdles like the caste system. He anticipates the danger that the downtrodden classes may be attracted to class war if a few people monopolize the political power.

3.17.7 Sample Questions

1. According to Ambedkar, “ we are not as yet a nation in the social and psychological sense of the word”. Do you agree with this view? Substantiate your answer with reference to the text.
2. What is Ambedkar’s understanding of social democracy?
3. “On the 26th of January 1950,we are going to enter into a life of contradictions”. Comment.
4. Why did Ambedkar describe castes as anti-national?

3.17.8 Suggested Reading

1. Rodrigues, Valerian (ed), **The Essential Writings of B.R.Ambedkar**, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002.
2. Moon, Vasant (ed), **Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: writings and speeches**, vol 1-17, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, Department of Education, 1979 – 2003.
3. Teltumbde, Anand, ‘**Ambedkar’ in and for the post- Ambedkar Dalit Movement**, Sugawa Prakashan, Pune 1997.
4. Ahir, D.C., **Dr. Ambedkar and the Indian Constitution**, Lacknow, Buddha Vihara, 1973.

Mr. K. Satyanarayana

Lesson - 18

Paramahansa Yogananda – *Autobiography of a Yogi*

Structure

- 3.18.1 Objective of the lesson
- 3.18.2 General background, spirituality and yogic tradition
 - i. Birth and early life of Paramahansa Yogananda
 - ii. Mukunda becomes Yogananda through initiation into spiritual life
 - iii. The science of Kriya Yoga
 - iv. The Yoga school in Ranchi
 - v. Experiments in education, Tagore and Yogananda
 - vi. The law of miracles
 - vii. Babaji, Yogi-Christ of India and his interest in the west
 - viii. Lahiri Mahasaya
 - ix. Swami Yogananda's journey to the West
 - x. Swami's return to India
 - xi. His journey back to the West
- 3.18.3. Critical summary
- 3.18.4 Glossary
- 3.18.5 Sample Questions
- 3.18.6 Suggested Reading

3.18.1 Objectives

The objectives of the study are

- i. to introduce the student to Indian spirituality and its spread in the west in the course of the 20th century. The impression Indian spirituality made on the western mind, especially on account of the horrors of war is noteworthy. Spirituality admits of no distinctions of land, religion and race. The human race is one but divided on many accounts. It has to understand basic truth about itself.
- ii. to view Paramahansa Yogananda's life and work as attempts to bridge the east and the west.
- iii to see how his autobiography conveys the message of truth and peace necessary for humanity for harmony of the world.

3.18.2 General background

Yoga is, achieving union with God. Yogis are followers of Yoga. The practical aspects of yoga play a more important part than does its intellectual content. Yoga holds with Sankhya that the achievement of spiritual liberation occurs when the self (purusha) is freed from the bondages of matter (prakriti) that have resulted because of ignorance and illusion. The Sankhya view of the evolution of the world through identifiable stages leads yoga to an attempt to reverse this order, as it were, so that a person can increasingly dephenomenalize himself until the self enters its original state of purity and consciousness. Once the aspirant has learned to control and suppress the obscuring mental activities of his mind and has succeeded in ending his attachment to material objects, he will be able to enter samadhi – i.e., a state of deep concentration, that results in a blissful, ecstatic union with the ultimate reality.

After the end of the World War II there was a highly visible resurgence of monastic ideals and an overall increase of monastic organizations in all parts of the world, outside the communist dominated countries, such as, the Ramakrishna Mission. On this model quasi-monastic types of Indian origin spread over the western world, some of them with considerable wealth and popularity. Among such groups are, the Self-Realization Fellowship founded by Swami Yogananda Paramahansa, Hare Krishna Movement of Swami Prabhupada and Zen Buddhism in North America and Europe.

In the 20th century, the philosophy and practice of Yoga became increasingly popular in the West. The first important organization for practitioners in the United States was the Self Realization Fellowship, founded by Paramahansa Yogananda in 1920. Some 50 years later, instruction emphasizing both the physical and spiritual benefits of Yogic techniques was available through a wide variety of sectarian Yoga

organizations, non-sectarian classes, and television programmes in the United States and Europe.

Self Realization Fellowship was a spiritual society founded in the United States by Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952), a teacher of yoga, who was one of the first Indian spiritual teachers to reside permanently in the West. His lecturing and teaching led to the Chartering of the Fellowship in 1935, with headquarters in Los Angeles. There are now centres world wide, as well as several independent groups influenced by his teachings. His *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) and other works became highly popular and influential.

Yogananda's teaching was based on the Yoga sutras of Patanjali (2nd century B.C.). He also taught a specific method, Kriya Yoga, combining deep meditation with techniques to control the movement of "life energy" and to withdraw energy and attention from "outer" to "inner" concerns. Self-Realization Fellowship centres emphasize classes in Kriya Yoga and also offer Churches of all Religions, services that combine elements of Hinduism and Christianity, which include meditation, lectures, and music. The Self - Realization Fellowship consists of lay members and of those who have taken monastic vows and who generally play the role of clergy in the movement.

i. Birth and early life of Paramahansa Yogananda

Paramahansa Yogananda was born in 1893 in Calcutta. His father Bhagabati Charan Ghosh was a kind and educated man with an intellectual bent of mind. His mother Gyana Prabha was a pious lady whose heart was full of tenderness and love towards people. Yogananda describes his parents as symbols of tranquility, dignity and

mutual love. Yogananda's original name was Mukunda. The couple were blessed by the guru Lahiri Mahasaya who initiated them into the spiritual practice of Kriya Yoga. Lahiri Mahasaya went into Mahasamadhi soon after Yogada's (Mukunda) birth. Thus Mukunda's birth and life were influenced by Lahiri Mahasaya. The picture of the great guru inspired Mukunda always. The Siddha Purusha's picture gave him comfort at times of distress or crisis. When Mukunda was eight years old he was afflicted with the dreadful Asiatic cholera. Doctors gave up hope of his recovery. His mother offered prayers to the guru, Lahiri Mahasaya. She asked her son also to pray to the guru. Mukunda was too weak to pray. He looked at the picture of Lahiri Mahasaya, when a great light from the picture emanated and entered Mukunda's body, after which he recovered. It was the first of the divine experiences, which Mukunda had. It was followed by many spiritual revelations. This was the beginning of Mukunda's spiritual journey. He developed a longing for communion with god. His spiritual vision could pierce the limits of time and space. He wanted to go to the Himalayas for meditation like the great men of all ages.

Mukunda was very closely attached to his mother, who was his great friend. With her death he was compelled to confront the stunning mystery of death. He was stricken with loneliness and again he wanted to run away to the Himalayas. At this time his brother Ananta passed on the message of his mother who died fourteen months ago. In her message she revealed how Mukunda's birth was prophesied by the Mahayogi Lahiri Mahasaya that Mukunda would be a spiritual engine, which could carry many souls to god's kingdom. Lahiri Mahasaya also gave a silver amulet, which should be passed on to Mukunda, at the time when Mukunda would be succumbing to earthly relationships and thus direct him towards the search for god. His mother in her message also advised him about her absence and that he would be taken care of by the cosmic

mother. Mukunda felt an awe on wearing the amulet, which awoke in him many dormant memories. The amulet made him experience the presence of Himalayas and the great saints of divine order.

With his father's permission Mukunda went to Benaras to meet Swami Pranavananda who told him that Yogis have certain powers that can transcend the obstacles of this physical world. Mukunda was in search of his guru Sri Yukteswar, so he did not stay with Swami Pranavananda. Two years later he met his guru Swami Yukteswar. "God is Simple. Everything else is complex. Do not seek absolute values in the relative world of nature". This philosophical understanding came to Mukunda in course of time. A sage at the Kali temple explained to him the benign and terrible aspects of nature, about the riddles of good and evil in the world, how wise men get over maya and strive for truth. The sage told him that inner search helps to explore the unity of all human minds and suggested that man must believe in both invisible god and visible man. Mukunda at that time was too young to understand fully all that the sage told him. Later he came across two persons, the Perfume Saint and the Tiger Swami. Mukunda who later became Yogada or Yogananda explains how the Perfume Saint produced perfumes through spiritual powers for which he practised rigorously for twelve years. He says that electrons and protons, which have vibratory variations, are regulated by 'life forces' and they produce tactical, visual, gustatory, auditory and olfactory senses. Although Mukunda wondered at this power he is not very much impressed by it. Similarly the Tiger Swami also did not impress Mukunda with his attempt to tame a great royal Bengal tiger. The Tiger Swami, injured seriously by a tiger, was saved by a holy man and initiated into higher spiritual pursuits.

Mukunda had a strong desire to go to the Himalayas but he promised his father that he would not leave home. But later he intended to go to the Himalayas with his friend Jitendra Majumdar. He felt sorry to leave his younger brother to whom he had become attached after their mother's death. He explained that the call of his heavenly father who gave him his earthly father was more important. With his father's permission Mukunda left for Benaras with Jitendra to meet Swami Dayananda. Mukunda did not relish the severe restrictions the Swami imposed on food and his daily needs. He prayed to his mother to send him a guru to teach him about achieving union with god. He heard a divine voice tell him "Thy master comes today". The voice asked him to go to the market place in Benaras. Mukunda went there and found a Christ-like man in the ochre robes of a swami standing motionless at the end of a lane. He was drawn by an overwhelming power towards this man who welcomed him with the words "You have come to me... how many years I have waited for you!" Mukunda requested the saint to grant him samadhi who replied that his body was not yet tuned for samadhi. Just as a bulb bursts when high voltage flows into it so also his body would be shattered by the cosmic current, if infused immaturely. The saint explained to Mukunda the secret of his sleeplessness-- how he used to spend time in deep meditation, which gave him greater relaxation than natural sleep. The saint's touch which sent a flow of vibrations cured Mukunda of his back pain and bathed him in a luminous joy.

His guru Yukteswar granted a miracle to Mukunda. When Mukunda's friend Dwijen Basu expressed his inner restlessness Mukunda told him that his guru Yukteswar would relieve him of it. The guru asked them to come and meet him at the Serampore station on the following morning. Mukunda received a telepathic message from his guru about the delay in the arrival of the train. His friend left for the station while Mukunda remained in the room when he had a vision of the guru who appeared and blessed him

and then his form disappeared slowly from the room. Mukunda felt that the materialistic world of the twentieth century did not believe in such spiritual matters. He regarded his guru Yukteswar as a Yogi Christ. He exclaimed that all Universities are only kindergartens compared to the great powers of our gurus.

The desire to live on the Himalayan Mountains persisted in Mukunda's mind. His father arranged his trip to Kashmir with his guru and companions. When Mukunda was about to leave for Calcutta, his guru Yukteswar asked him to postpone his journey, soon after which Mukunda fell ill with Asiatic cholera. He was miraculously cured from his critical condition by surrendering his will to the grace of Sri Yukteswar. The journey to Kashmir was undertaken in the company of his guru much to the delight of Mukunda.

Mukunda was overwhelmed with joy at the beauty of the great Himalayas and the beauty of Srinagar, Simla and other such places where he experienced some of the miracles of Sri Yukteswar. Mukunda did not relish the strawberries, which his guru bought, because they were sour. He wondered at his guru's words that he would be relishing them in America when they are served along with cream and sugar. It is much later in life in at Somerville in Massachusetts when he was served strawberries with sugar and cream that the forecast of his guru became clear to him. He found the clear lakes of Kashmir in which lotuses bloomed beautiful and also the Siva temple fascinating for their serenity. Years later when he established Self-Realization Fellowship Quarters at Los Angeles, the Siva Temple in Kashmir came to his mind. He finds the same scenic beauty of Kashmir in some of the beautiful places, which he visited in the U.S. Mukunda was so enamoured of Kashmir that he did not want to leave the place. But his guru sent him away to Serampore hinting about being afflicted with a serious illness. Reluctantly Mukunda left Kashmir and came to know later that his guru had taken on the illness of

one of his devotees in order to save him. The guru underwent suffering for the sake of his devotees. Mukunda compared this kindness of guru to the affection a rich man shows towards his prodigal son by paying off his debts. The great gurus share the karmic burdens of their devotees like the rich loving father. In ordinary circumstances also the saints are aware of the illness of people and cure them of their diseases through the powers that they have. That is how they become great healers. Christ could never have been subjected to crucifixion if he had not willingly cooperated with the subtle cosmic law of cause and effect. Because he took the suffering of his disciples they were cured. Thus he made them receive omnipresent consciousness. It is believed that Babur, the Mughal King, sacrificed his life for the recovery of his sick son Humayun.

Mukunda's brother-in-law Satishchandra ridiculed the practice of Kriya Yoga by his wife Rama. He also ridiculed saints, yoga and meditation, On his sister's request Mukunda took his brother-in-law to Dhakshineswar to rid him of his excessive materialistic attitude. At Dakshineswar Mukunda began to meditate for a long time but the goddess did not appear nor show any indication of her grace. The closed doors of the temple and no sight of goddess and going without lunch annoyed Mukunda very much. He wondered why the divine mother who was so kind to Ramakrishna Paramahansa was indifferent to his prayers. Suddenly Mukunda experienced divine grace in a way of coolness, which touched his feet, and the holy presence of the divine mother Kali as a living form. He also had a vision of many scenes passing before his eyes. It was one of the early visions Mukunda had about god in which he prayed for a change in his brother-in-law's attitude. Coming back to consciousness Mukunda found his irritated brother-in-law challenging him about the lunch which the divine mother should provide if she is true. Thereafter the temple priest, observing that Mukunda had

come out of his meditation, came to them with offer of delicious food, which quietened Satish who felt ashamed of his adamant behaviour.

ii. Mukunda becomes Yogananda through initiation into spiritual life

Mukunda completed his university examination of BA at Serampur college under the direction and advice of Sri Yukteswar with the help he received from an old friend. Mukunda's father was eager that his son should join the Railways. But Mukunda whose soul was already drenched in spiritual zeal, was unwilling to oblige his father. So he went to his guru Yukteswar and pleaded with him to make him a monk of the Swami's order. This was not the first time that Mukunda appealed to his teacher to initiate him into spiritual life. Sri Yukteswar could see that his desire was to pursue spiritual life. He immediately accepted Mukunda to make him a monk. Mukunda was determined not to marry. He believed that a married man could not adhere to spiritual discipline. He also believed that we receive everything from god and all that we can give back to god is our immense love to mankind. Sri Yukteswar arranged a simple ceremony called 'bibidisa' to initiate Mukunda into the life of a Swami. An elaborate fire ceremony, wherein the funeral rites performed to the initiate's body upon which he would become a Swami, was arranged and another name was given to mark his birth as a monk. He should feel "I am He". When Sri Yukteswar asked Mukunda to select his new name Mukunda uttered the name "Yogananda" which means bliss through union with the divine. " Be it so. Forsaking your family name Mukunda Lal Ghosh, hence forth you shall be called Yogananda of the 'giri' branch of the Swami order." Mukunda, now Yogananda, knelt before his great teacher and was filled with joy to hear his 'Yogananda' uttered by him.

Swamis' names usually end with 'ananda', which indicates 'bliss' signifying their aspiration to attain emancipation through particular path, state or quality. Their goal is

to renounce personal ties and engage in activities of human welfare. They should rise above all human frailties like prejudices of caste, creed, colour, sex and race. Their objective is to remain with God. Whether in sleep or wakefulness their identity is with God --" I am He".

Yogada tells that Sri Yukteswar is both a Swami and Yogi. A Swami should follow only the path of cold renunciation. But a Yogi gradually gets detached from his body and mind and his soul is liberated. Yoga, he says is nothing but a method for restraining the natural turbulence of thoughts. Most of the human minds are restless and capricious, and manifest the need for Yoga. Even our Upanishads and other ancient scriptures uphold yoga as a successful path for health and happiness.

Shortly after Yogada entered the order of Swamis during the course of his meditation, his inner consciousness prophesied about the death of his elder brother Ananta. He went to Gorakhpur to see his sick and helpless brother. From Gorakhpur he set out to Burma, China, and Japan. He bought some gifts for his guru, for his father and his brother in Shanghai. But the article he bought for his brother was broken as the shop man handed it over. Yogananda exclaimed involuntarily that his brother was dead. He was deeply touched by this symbolic occurrence and on reaching India he came to know that Ananta had already passed away. Yogada's younger sister Nalini used to be a very thin person. Her husband a doctor, gave her medicines and tried several means to make her gain weight in vain. On becoming a Swami Yogada prescribed a diet and also spiritual injunctions to his sister. After his visit from China and Japan, he was told that she gained weight. Her affliction with typhoid was cured with the blessings of Sri Yukteswar who also blessed her that she would have two daughters.

iii. The Science of Kriya Yoga

Yogananda mentions that Kriya Yoga is widely known in modern India through Lahiri Mahasaya of Kasi who was the guru of his guru Sri Yukteswar. The Sanskrit word 'blavi' is the root of the word 'Kriya' which means 'to do, or to act'. Yoga is an action or rite, which is undertaken for attaining reunion with god. Kriya Yoga is a simple, psychological method by which human blood is decarbonized and recharged with oxygen. The atoms of this extra oxygen are transmuted into life current to rejuvenate the brain and spinal centres. While stopping the accumulation of venous blood the Yogi is able to lessen or prevent the decay of tissues. The advanced Yogi transmutes his body cells into energy. Elijah, Jesus, Kabir, and other prophets mastered the Kriya Yoga or a similar technique by which they caused their bodies to materialize and dematerialize at will. Kriya is an ancient science. Lahiri Mahasaya learnt it from his guru Babaji who rediscovered and gave clarification about this technique, which was lost in the Dark Ages. Babaji renamed it as Kriya Yoga. He passed it on to Lahiri Mahasaya with the message that he should revive it. It was the science, which Lord Krishna gave to Arjuna millennia ago. In the later ages Patanjali codified it. Jesus practiced it and passed it on to his disciples St. John and St. Paul. Lord Krishna referred to it twice in the BhagwadGita as inhaling, exhaling and neutralizing breath-- that is prana. Thus the Yogi arrests the decay in the body by securing additional supply of prana. Lord Krishna also explained that a muni i.e., a meditation expert, withdraws his senses from external phenomena by fixing his gaze at the centre of his eyebrows and neutralizes the currents of 'prana' and 'apana' -- the flow of air into the nostrils and lungs, and control his sensory organs, mind, intellect and banishes desire, fear, and anger. Yogananda related that this yogic practice was transmitted by an ancient Vivasat to Manu to Ikshvaku and so on. The royal yoga was guarded by rishis until the beginning of the materialistic age. Then due to priestly secrecy and man's indifference the sacred lore gradually became inaccessible. Patanjali

described yoga, the control of life force through which one can disjoin the course of inspiration and expiration and thus attain pranaya. St.Paul knew about Kriya Yoga as a technique with which he could switch life currents through and from the senses. Thus everyday he was able to experience 'Christ Consciousness'. The Kriya Yoga directs life energy to move upwards and downwards around the six spinal centres namely, the medullar, cervical, dorsal and others. Sri Yukteswar explained the significance of Yoga to his disciples.

iv. The Yoga school in Ranchi

Yogananda was at first averse to start a Yoga institution as his master suggested. Sri Yukteswar explained to him that it was selfish on the part of a yogi to retain god who is like honey, all to himself. Organizations are like hives which are full of spiritual nectar for which he advised Yogananda to start such busy hives. Yogananda who was moved by this advice determined to institutionalize his spiritual order. Sri Yukteswar also told him that a person who rejected worldly duties should take on the greater responsibility of taking care of the much larger family of humanity. Yogananda felt that education should result in development of body and mind. The right type of education according to him included moral and spiritual values without the appreciation of which no man can attain happiness. He started a school with seven boys at Dilika, a small village in Bengal. The number of pupils in the school grew fast and the school was shifted to Ranchi, with the benevolence of Sri Manindra Chandra Mundy, the Maharaja of Kasim Bazar. The Kasim Bazar palace became the site for the new school, which was named as Yogada Satsanga Brahmacharya Vidyalaya. The instruction in the school included agricultural, industrial, and academic subjects following the educational ideals of the rishis. It was both secular as well as divine education. Most of the

instruction was done outdoors where the students were taught meditation, which is a unique system of health and physical development.

Man's body is like a battery and it can be charged mainly by will power itself. With the help of some simple Yoga techniques, human body can be instantly and constantly be recharged with life force. Yogada's younger brother Vishnu Chandar Ghosh joined the Ranchi school and later became a noted culturist. He and one of the students of Yoga travelled to the west in 1938-39, and demonstrated the power of yoga which attracted many professors of Columbia and other Universities who were amazed at the power of Yoga. The Yoga school of Ranchi became very popular in Bihar and Bengal. Branches were established at Midnapur and Lakshmanpur. The school received financial support. The Ranchi school also developed a medical department, which served the poor people of the province. Many great personalities and saints from east and west visited Ranchi. Swami Pranavananda of Benaras known as the saint with two bodies came to Ranchi in 1918 and he was profoundly impressed by the instruction there. He expressed his happiness that the ideals of Lahiri Mahasaya for training the youth were being realized. Bhavani Ghosh i.e., Yogananda's father felt very happy on the excellent service that was being rendered to mankind by his son.

v. Experiments in Education, Tagore and Yogananda

Yogada respected and admired Rabindranath Tagore, who was a great poet. He sang the songs of Tagore since his early youth. He enjoyed singing Tagore's songs with Bholanath, a student of his yoga school. Yogananda met Tagore after he received the Nobel Prize for literature. Some scholars of the day severely criticized Tagore for mixing classical and colloquial expressions in his poems and songs. Tagore's songs embodied deep philosophical truth in emotionally appealing tunes. Tagore taught his students at

Shantiniketan that singing was a natural form of self-expression and therefore he asked them to sing as effortlessly as birds. Yogananda was impressed by Tagore's undiplomatic courage in disposing off his literary critics. He stated that from Tagore there emanated an aura of charm, culture, and courtliness. Tagore told Yogananda about the deep religious influence of the epics, and Vidyapati, a popular poet of the fourteenth century. Yogananda who was invited by Tagore to Shantiniketan two years after the founding of the Yoga school was impressed by Tagore's beautifully chiselled face which was framed in his long hair and flowing beard, large melting eyes, angelic smile and voice which had a flute-like quality. The two great men talked at length about their schools, which were un-orthodox in their conception and instruction. They talked about how the stress caused by formal education could be relieved by yoga, music, and practice in arts. Tagore said that a child learns less when learning is cramped upon him from outside sources. A calm atmosphere helps the learners to discover the infinite wisdom which lies within them. In this connection Tagore confessed how he ran away from formal education in his childhood. He paid homage to his noble father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, who donated liberally to Shantiniketan. Yogananda admired the family of Tagore as a family of geniuses. He was also very much impressed by the tableau at Shantiniketan. He felt that Tagore knitted each tie of friendship with great harmony. Never assertive, Tagore drew and captured the heart with an irresistible magnetism, a rare blossom of poetry in the garden of the lord, attracting others by its natural fragrance. That night when Tagore sang some songs, which he composed at Shantiniketan, Yogananda thoroughly enjoyed the beauty of his lines and the bliss of his song.

vi. The law of miracles

In this chapter of his autobiography, Yogananda deals at length with the scientific theories concerned with space, time, light, relativity, and so on. These are great discoveries, which have already been explored in our scriptures. Great seers and sages of all ages experienced the inner power of the cosmos. Once, when Yogananda saw a cinema on World War, he was deeply disturbed. He experienced the deep agony and pain of the mystery of death after which he came back to normalcy. Then a divine voice revealed to him that light, sound, space, and theories about them have nothing to do with the birth or death of man. The cosmic motion picture mechanism was nothing but an illusion. This revelation filled him with an ecstatic joy. The physical world operates under the one fundamental law of 'Maya', the principle of relativity and duality. Man's highest goal was conceived as perceiving the unity of the creator and rising above maya. Those who cling to the cosmic illusion must accept the essential law of polarity, flow and ebb, pleasure and pain, good and evil, birth and death. This cyclic pattern assumes a certain agonizing monotony. After thousands of human births, man begins to cast an eye beyond the compulsions of 'maya'. Ancient prophets had assigned the task of surmounting 'maya' to the human race. The Vedic scriptures reveal these facts.

Modern science deals with natural activities and physical facts. It deals with the entire phenomenal world, which is outside 'maya'. Hence it cannot provide answers to issues which are beyond physical life. Illusion is present in human beings in the form of avidya i.e., ignorance and delusion cannot be destroyed through intellect, but only through 'Nirvikalpa Samadhi'. Prophets, seers, and saints of all lands and of all ages have spoken about the state of human consciousness. Whether it is the Old Testament or Vedic scriptures, they declare the mysteries of the cosmos. Newton's Laws or the discoveries of Einstein deal with a certain aspect of majestic universal phenomenon. All these intellectual deliberations emerge from the human intellect. Science remains in

perpetual flux yet it fails to reach the ultimate. Science discovers the laws that are already existing and functioning in the gospels, but it is powerless to detect the Law Framer and Soul Operator. Wisdom is that attempt to know the actual reality, which lies beyond this intellectual awareness. Real Yoga is to realize and achieve union with the Great Maker. This chapter on the law of miracles begins with a story of Leo Tolstoy – ‘The Three Hermits’. The story is about three hermits who live on an island, whose only prayer is the simple ‘We are three, thou art three, have mercy on us’. During this naïve prayer great miracles were manifested. The local bishop, in his attempt to improve the hermits, teaches them many customary prayers in the place of their simple one. The bishop leaves the island in a boat. He sees a great light following him, he is awestruck on seeing the hermits running upon the waves. They run after him because they have forgotten the prayers he had taught them. Then the bishop lovingly asks them to continue with their old prayers. But modern science does not believe in this sort of power of great men to walk on water.

Yogananda realized his long cherished desire of meeting Kasimani, the wife of Lahiri Mahasaya,. He felt honoured on her gracious welcome and saw the shrine in which the fearless master condescended to play the human drama of matrimony. She spoke to him about the levitation of her husband after which she requested him to be her guru. Her husband Lahiri Mahasaya advised her to concentrate on the kingdom of the infinite and initiated her into Kriya Yoga. She once committed the mistake of accusing her husband of neglect of his duties as a householder, upon which he instructed her to seek only divine wealth. She told Yogananda that after that moment she was not bothered by worldly problems. Lahiri Mahasaya’s friend Trailanga Swami was reputed to be over 300 years old. Trailanga Swami weighed above 300 pounds, ate very little, people saw him sitting on water and remaining under water for days together. He

sometimes sat motionless under the blistering heat of the sun. The most deadly poisons did not harm him. The swami many a time defied the laws of the physical world. Yogananda explains that the saints manipulate the body with the power of the mind. Though scientists now understand that matter is nothing but congealed energy, illuminated masters had long passed from theory to practice on the field of control of matter. Jesus Christ triumphed in Jerusalem illustrating the omnipotence of spiritual levels. He was unmoved by praise and blame. He advised his disciples to seek wisdom and bring the peace of heaven on earth. Trailanga Swami appeared to Yogananda to have a Christ-like grace.

Sri Yukteswar explained the significance of Christ's reference to himself as the Son of God. Though he was truly united with god he called himself only the Son of God because man cannot explain an abstraction which he does not know. In this context he referred to the resurrection of Lazarus. Sri Yukteswar blessed Yogananda to spread the message of the sublime life which would encircle the globe and establish the brotherhood of humanity.

vii Babaji-Yogi Christ of Modern India

The Upanishads have classified every stage of spiritual advancement. A Siddha i.e., a perfected being, is a person who has progressed from a state of Jeevan Mukta i.e., freed by living, to that of Mukta, supremely free, full of power over death. Thereafter the pure body becomes visible as an image of which light is free from any debt of nature. Such a god-man knows the truth behind the dualities like birth and death etc. There have been avatars like Krishna, Rama, Buddha, Patanjali, and Jesus is also an avatar. Persons like Agasthya are rishis. The work of the great rishis was to inspire nations to forsake war, hatred, religious sectarianism and the evils of materialism. Disciples like Lahiri

Mahasaya considered Babaji as an avatar whose life's mission was to initiate yoga. Babaji who was fully aware of the trend of modern times, especially the influence and complexities of Western civilizations, realized the need for spreading self-realization Yoga both in the west and in the east. Yogananda believed that Babaji was in communion with Christ. He worked silently and alone like the creator but in humble obscurity like Jesus Christ. He lived only for the upliftment of human beings. Lahiri Mahasaya met his guru Babaji in the Himalayas. He was thrilled on meeting his guru who initiated him into the deathless realm of spirituality through Kriya Yoga. Babaji directed the young Yogananda to Sri Yukteswar to assist him in the dissemination of yoga in the West. Babaji also instructed Sri Yukteswar to write a book on the similarities between Christian and Hindu scriptures. Inspired sons of god spoke the same truths whose unity is now obscured by men's sectarian differences. The book on spirituality called "The Holy Science" was completed within a short span of time.

viii Lahiri Mahasaya

Modern Christ-like sages like Lahiri Mahasaya and Sri Yukteswar in modern times proclaim that a knowledge of Yoga, the science of god-realisation is vital for man's happiness and for a nation's longevity. When he was in his 33rd year Lahiri Mahasaya understood the purpose of his re-incarnation on earth. He was initiated into Kriya Yoga by his guru Sri Babaji, whom he met in the Himalayas. Just as Bagiratha brought Ganga for the welfare of mankind, Lahiri Mahasaya also brought back the long forgotten Kriya Yoga for the benefit of mankind.

The great masters of India who have shown keen interest in the West have well understood modern conditions. They knew that, until there is better assimilation in all

nations of the distinctive Eastern and Western virtues, world affairs cannot improve. Each hemisphere needs the best offerings of the other.

Yogananda narrates the mention of re-incarnation from the Bible, from the life of Christ how John and Jesus were Elijah and Elisha. Under the influence of Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya had undertaken the responsibility of relieving the suffering of people and taught Kriya Yoga to his devotees. He organized many groups for the promotion of education among the Bengali's of Benaras. He organized meetings for explaining the scriptures to many eager seekers of truth. He gave initiation into Kriya Yoga to all people irrespective of their religions. He believed that people could solve most of their problems through yoga, which generates the power to throw off dogmatic theological debris and let in healthy perceptions. At the same time people could follow their religious customs and practices. They could be guided to Bhakti, devotion; Karma, action and Jnana, Wisdom or Raja Yoga - royal yogas, according to their own natural tendencies. Yoga helps the development of a natural resourcefulness to hear the divine voice, provide answers to dilemmas of daily life. After his retirement in 1866 from government service Lahiri Mahasaya was able to devote time for his devotees. To the awe of all beholders, Lahiri Mahasaya's habitual physiological state exhibited the super human features of breathlessness, sleeplessness, cessation of pulse and heart beat, calm eyes unblinking for hours and a profound aura of peace. No visitor left without upliftment of his spirit; all of them knew that they had received the silent blessing of a true man of God.

There is infinite power in nature. Nature has its phenomenal manifestations. In our mundane anxieties we tend to ignore the power of nature. Science helps us to know the power of nature but fails to help us perceive our relations with nature. We tease

nature with our ignorance. If we once try to communicate with nature, we can command it, which is called a miracle. This can be achieved through Kriya Yoga.

A yogi does not depend upon society for his needs. He is the ascetic who takes to streamlining the society. Thus Lahiri Mahasaya illustrated through his personal example that divinity is not which you reach at the end of life, but which is discovered in us. Lahiri Mahasaya passed away in 1895. His disciples saw him in his physical form after his passing away.

ix Swami Yogananda's journey to the West

In 1920 Swami Yogananda received an invitation from the American Unitarian Association as the Indian delegate for the International Congress of Religious Liberals in America. He considered the invitation to be a call of the Lord. But he hesitated because he was not fluent in English to lecture to the people there. Sri Yukteswar encouraged him that the words of Yoga should be heard in the West. He said that Kriya Yoga would bring harmony among nations in the years to come. The immensity of the task caused him trepidation. He prayed for divine permission to undertake the task. Before he started on his journey to America Sri Yukteswar blessed him and advised him not to forget that he was a Hindu. At the same time he also advised that Yogananda should incorporate what is best from the West. In the city of Boston Yogananda lectured on the "Science of Religion" which became very popular. In 1925 with the help of his large-hearted students, he established the American Headquarters at Los Angeles in California. During 1920-30 Yogananda addressed hundreds of clubs, colleges, churches and groups. He wrote a book of prayers and poems and dedicated it to his American devotees. The increasing understanding between the East and West made him happy.

Luther Burbank was a scientist who wrote a book called "The Training of the Human Plant". He conducted very interesting research about plant behaviour. His loving talk and assurances to the Cactus plants, made them withdraw their defensive thorns. Many other similar experiments were made by him successfully. Yogananda was deeply impressed by this scientist with a human touch. Luther Burbank also believed that children should be taught the principles of simple and rational living. The scientist later commented that the East had a vast store of knowledge, which the west had scarcely begun to explore. Yogananda initiated him into Kriya Yoga.

For fifteen years Yogananda spent his time spreading his guru's teachings in the West. He received the call of his guru in 1935 to come back to India. He sailed to India via Europe. He addressed the London audience in England. Yogananda met the Catholic mystic, Therese Neumann of Konnersreuth of Bavaria. After her recovery from an accident in 1923 she abstained completely from food and drink except for a small amount of consecrated wafer. From 1926 the stigmata (or) secret wounds of Christ appeared on her body and she began to experience the Passion of Christ. Yogananda felt an aura of Joy and peace in her presence. She was happy that Yogananda understood that she lived not on food but from the energy that flowed into her body from the sun, ether and air. The message of her life was to inform people that man could live by god's invisible light and not on food alone. Yogananda realized that her strange life was intended by god to reassure all Christians of the historic authenticity of Jesus Christ's life and his crucifixion as recorded in The New Testament. Then he visited Holland, France, the Swiss Alps, Italy, Greece, and Palestine. Yogananda saw the divine drama of Christ played for ages when he visited the places connected with Jesus.

x. Swami's return to India

In 1935 Yogananda gratefully inhaled the blessed air of India in Bombay Port, and an immense crowd welcomed him at the Howrah station. His aged father was extremely happy to see his son. Yogananda went to pay his respects to his guru Sri Yukteswar at his ashram. Sri Yukteswar was very happy about the return of his disciple and spiritual product. Yogananda then proceeded to the School at Ranchi, which at that time faced financial difficulties. With the help of the young Maharaja of Kasim Bazar and with the help of his father, affairs were set right for the school. Donations also came from his American students. The Dakshineswar Satsanga Society with its headquarters in Dakshineswar, Bengal was affiliated to the International Headquarters of Self - Realization Fellowship in America. The Yogada Satsanga Bramacharya Vidyalay was the dream of his life. It gained a legal status, a few months after Yogananda's return from America. Mr.Wright, his secretary, expressed his impression that India has an aura of peace. He felt that the 'racial aura' of India is peace.

In 1935 the Maharaja of Mysore invited Sri Yogananda to the city of Mysore, where he addressed thousands of students. Yogananda and his secretary spent some days among the idealistic beauty of South India. They met Sir C.V.Raman at Mysore, after which they started for the Indian Philosophical Congress at Calcutta University. Yogananda also paid a visit to Ramana Maharshi at the Arunachal Ashram.

In 1925 Mahatma Gandhi visited the school at Ranchi to which he paid rich tributes. Yogananda met the Mahatma at his ashram, which he describes thus: "The tiny 100-pound saint radiated physical, mental, and spiritual health. His soft brown eyes shone with intelligence, sincerity, and discrimination; this statesman has matched with and emerged the victor in a thousand legal, social, and political battles. No other leader

in the world has attained the secure niche in the hearts of his people that Gandhi occupies for India's unlettered millions and their spontaneous tribute in his famous title – Mahatma, “great soul”. For them Gandhi alone confined his attire to the widely cartooned loincloth, symbol of his oneness with the downtrodden masses who can afford no more. Yogada paid tributes to the principles of non-violence, truth, non-stealing, non-position, physical labour, control of the palate, equal respect to all religions, use of home-made goods propagated by Gandhiji. Yogananda quotes the words of Mahatma Gandhi who said, “I call myself a nationalist, my nationalism is as broad as the Universe. It includes the well being of the whole world. I do not want my India to rise on the ashes of other nations...I want India to be strong in order that she can inject the other nations with her strength. Not so with a single nation in Europe today. They do not give strength to the others”. The Mahatma explained about the principle of non-violence, to Yogananda. Gandhiji requested Yogananda to initiate him into Kriya Yoga. At the time of his departure Yogananda touched the feet of Mahatma and said, “India is safe in Your Keeping”.

xii. Yogananda's journey back to the West

In 1936 on his way back to America, Yogananda stopped in England to address the English students who started a Self-Reliazation Fellowship Centre. They continued to hold their meditation meetings during the bitter war years. Members of the Self-Realization Fellowship of London informed Yogananda about how they achieved beauty, peace, calm and order even during the war-ravaged period. Yogananda reached America in October 1936. Christmas was celebrated especially well that year. The Swami gave articles, which he brought from India as Christmas presents to his American disciples. He completed the work ‘Cosmic Chants’ – Indian songs in English words and western notation, at Cincinnati in California, on the large, peaceful and beautiful estate

presented by his disciple, a businessman James J.Lynn. The 'Cosmic Chants' included Sankara's chant and Tagore's song, along with a number of songs he composed which were well received by Americans. A Self-Realization Fellowship Church of All Religions was built in Hollywood in 1942 and Long Beach in 1947. The Pacific Palisades section of Los Angeles, a floral wonderland was donated to the Fellowship in 1949. The Mahatma Gandhi World Peace Memorial was dedicated in 1950 at the shrine.

Yogananda asserted that Yoga should be taught in this atomic age as a part of the curriculum, by a guru. As Babaji planned, world peace can be realized if thousands of students are taught yoga who can rise to become the sons of the Divine Father. But unfortunately there are more sinners and very few saints in the world.

Yogananda dreamed of a lasting bond between the east and west, which could be achieved by assimilation of eastern and western virtues, which will improve world affairs. He felt that each hemisphere needs the best offering from the other. While countries like India needed the practical approach and efficiency of western nations like America, the occidental on the other hand, require a deeper understanding of the spiritual basis of life and particularly the scientific techniques that ancient India developed for man's conscious communion with God. East and West are learning great truths in two different ways and they should gladly share with each other their discoveries. The world should strive to achieve a world civilization, which is free from poverty, disease and ignorance of the soul. He felt that the time-tested scriptures of the world are one in essence which inspire men for his upward journey. Yogananda conducted classes on the Yogasutras of Patanjali and other profound works of Hindu philosophy. The divine purpose of creation as expanded in the Vedas was that each human being is created by God with a soul that would uniquely manifest some special

attribute of the Infinite before reaching its absolute identity. All men are thus endowed with a facet of divine individuality. Every saint who has gone deep into the core of Reality has testified that a divine universal plan exists and that it is beautiful and full of joy.

Only spiritual power can sustain the world and human race. Though human race and its works have sometimes disappeared without trace, the sun does not falter in its course. The stars keep up their invariable vigil. Cosmic law cannot be changed and man would do well when he is at harmony with the cosmic order. Good and not cruelty will arm the universal sinews. A humanity at peace will know the endless fruits of victory which are sweeter than those grown on the soil of blood.

The effective United Nations will be a natural nameless league of human hearts. The broad sympathies and discerning insight needed for the healing of earthly woes cannot flow from mere intellectual considerations of diversities but from knowledge of man's deepest unity with god. Peace through brotherhood, the realization of the world's highest ideal through yoga, the science of personal communication with the divine, will spread in time to all men of all lands.

Though India possesses a civilization more ancient than that of any other country, few historians have noted that the feat of survival is by no means an accident, but a logical incident in the record of devotion to the eternal verities that India has offered through her best men in every generation. India has given the worthiest answer to the challenges of time. When Abraham prayed to the lord that the city of Sodom be spared if ten righteous men were found in it and got the reply 'I will not destroy it for ten's sake', gains a new meaning in the light of India's escape from oblivion. The ancient empires of Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and Rome have disappeared. "The Lord's answer

in the Bible clearly shows that a land lives not in its material achievements, but in its masterpieces of man”.

3.18.3 Critical summary

The *Autobiography* of a Yogi gives the student an excellent opportunity to know about one form of prose writing namely autobiography and also to read about the life of a great man, a modern Yogi. Some men are born different, they are born great to be leaders of men, to be institution-builders and to be sources of wisdom. Their power comes from their soul for which they have trained themselves spiritually under the guidance of their gurus. Spirituality is a pursuit of the individual, but great men like Swami Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda and Sri Aurobindo have built institutions to universalize spirituality for peace and harmony. In a world of excessive materialistic concerns spirituality is one counteracting pursuit, and a panacea.

In this narrative of the Swami's life in the first person the student reads the story of a great being and his early years, whose self-realization has led to the establishment of a school in Ranchi for training young boys in India on conventional Indian lines and of Self-Realization Fellowship in the West. The important feature of Paramahansa Yogananda's Yoga is the mingling of Indian yoga with Christian principles. *The Autobiography's* value lies in its revelation of elements common to Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and other religions. The concept of Christ as a Yogi who practised meditation and also taught it to his disciples, is an edifying revelation. *The Autobiography* is a message to the modern world about the uses of yoga for individual self-realization as well as for building bridges of understanding across nations for amity and peace in the world.

3.18.4 Glossary

purusha	-	consciousness
prakriti	-	matter
yoga	-	science of uniting the individual soul with the Cosmic Spirit
bhakti yoga	-	union with god through devotion
jnana yoga	-	union with god through knowledge
karma yoga	-	union with god through action
kriya yoga	-	technique for God – realization
karma	-	universal law of cause and effect
mahasaya	-	religious title
mahasamadhi	-	final earth exit of a great yogi
maya	-	Cosmic illusion
pranayama	-	technique for control of life force
prana	-	life energy
niyama	-	religious observances
rishi	-	illuminated sage
samadhi	-	state of god – union
spinal centres	-	medullary cervical, dorsal, lumbar, sacral, coccygeal
siddhi	-	the power of appearing in more than one body; yogic power

3.18.5 Sample Questions

1. Write an essay on the life of Swami Yogananda
2. Explain the circumstances of Swami Yogananda's initiation into the life of yoga.
3. Sketch the spread of Indian spirituality in the West in the 20th Century.
4. Explain the origin of Kriya Yoga and its importance .
5. Illustrate Swami Yogananda's attempts to educate Indian youth.
6. "The path of Yoga is ancient and common to all religions of the world".
Discuss.

3.18.6 Suggested Reading

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Yoga*.
2. Swami Rama, *Living with the Himalayam Masters*.
3. *Kriya Yoga – Manual*.
4. Dr.S.Radha Krishnan *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*.
5. Dr.S.Radha Krishna *The Hindu View of Life*.
6. Ravindra Kumar *All you Wanted to Know About Kriya Yoga*.

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