SHIVAJI UNIVERSITY, KOLHAPUR
CENTRE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

(Elective Group 4 : Paper-VII)

Indian English Poetry

For

M. A. Part-II
Centre for Distance Education
Shivaji University, Kolhapur

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Preface

Dear Learners,

This book contains the Self-Instructional Material on the Elective Group 4 Paper-VII entitled Indian English Poetry. The syllabus covers the various eight texts prescribed by the university. There are 9 units dealing with the four General Topics and eight texts of Indian English Poetry. The writers try their level best to make them simple for you to understand and grasp easily. You can go back to the units again & again to make you more familiar with the texts. For self check, the answers of questions are given at the end of each unit. This will help you greatly to correct your answers.

But dear students, though the book deals with the topics thoroughly, still these are only notes for your guidance. So you must refer to the original material. You should develop this material by additional reading.

There are exercises given at the end of each unit. There are broad answer type questions and short answer type questions for your practice. This book also provides you the list of the additional reference books which will definitely enrich your study and knowledge.

This SIM is not a comprehensive study material. For detailed study students should refer to textbooks and reference books.

We wish you best luck in your final examination.

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Each Unit begins with the section Objectives -

Objectives are directive and indicative of:

1. What has been presented in the Unit and
2. What is expected from you
3. What you are expected to know pertaining to the specific Unit once you have completed working on the Unit.

The self check exercises with possible answers will help you to understand the Unit in the right perspective. Go through the possible answer only after you write your answers. These exercises are not to be submitted to us for evaluation. They have been provided to you as Study Tools to help keep you in the right track as you study the Unit.
Origin and Development of Indian English Poetry

Contents:
1.0 Objectives
   1.1.1 Introduction
   1.1.2 Early Indian English Poetry (By the Indian Revolt of 1857)
   1.1.3 Indian English Poetry in the Period of Freedom Struggle (1857 to 1950)
   1.1.4 The Post Independent Indian Poetry in English (After 1950)
   1.1.5 Summary
1.2 Major Themes in Indian English Poetry
1.3 Experimentation in Indian English Poetry
1.4 Indianness in Indian English Poetry
1.5 Check Your Progress
1.6 Answer to Check Your Progress
1.7 Exercises
1.8 Further Reading

1.0 Objectives:

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- Know the historical perspectives of Indian English Poetry.
- Understand the origin of Indian English Poetry.
- Explain the development of Indian English Poetry.
- Know the themes of Indian English Poetry.
- Know the Indianess of Indian English Poetry.
- Know the experimentation in Indian English Poetry.
1.1.1 Introduction:

Indian English Poetry is now more than two hundred years old. In Indian English Poetry, Henry Derozio’s ‘Poems’ was the first volume in 1827. To understand the development of Indian English Poetry and its proper perspectives, it is necessary to consider its origin and continuity. Some critics consider Indian English Poetry into two parts: Pre Independent and Post Independent. A group condemns the poetry written before independence while some hail the poetry written after 1947. V.K. Gokak in his introduction to ‘The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Verse’ and also in his studies ‘Indo-Anglian Poetry’ traces the growth and progress of Indian English Poetry. He classifies the pre independent Indian poets as neo-symbolist and neo-modernist. The neo-symbolists have mysticism and neo-modernist’s vision is coloured by humanism. The notable names in pre-independence poetry are Derozio, Toru Dutt, M.M. Dutt, Aurobindo, Manmohan Ghose, Tagore, Naidu, Harindranath Chattopadhyay and R. C. Dutt.

The post independent poetry is of modern poets who turned anthologists and self-styled. It has acquired its own distinct characters. A large number of Indian poets in English appeared in sixties and after. The poets like Nissim Ezekiel, P.Lal, Dom Moraes, K. N. Daruwala, Jayant Mahaputra, A. K. Ramanujan, A. K. Mehrotra, Kamala Das, R. Parthasarathy, Keshav Malik, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Pritish Nandy, Gouri Deshpande, Adil Jussawala, Shiv K. Kumar, Gieve Patel and others have enriched the post independent Indian English Poetry.

In order to understand the origin and development of Indian English Poetry in rather detail, the Unit deals Indian English poetry into three phases like: Early Indian English Poetry (By the Indian Revolt of 1857), Indian English Poetry in the Period of Freedom Struggle (1857 to 1950) and the Post Independent Indian Poetry in English (After 1950).

1.1.2 Early Indian English Poetry (By the Indian Revolt of 1857):

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809 – 1831) is the noteworthy first Indian English poet. He was a son of Indo-Portuguese father and an English mother. He had started writing in his teens. Before joining as a lecturer in Hindu College, Calcutta he worked as a clerk. Here his spirit of enquiry, his passion of ideas, his
reformist idealism and his romantic enthusiasm fired the imagination of many of his students. As a result the public opinion compelled the college authorities to dismiss Derozio from his service in 1931. He started a daily ‘The East Indian’ and suddenly died of cholera. Derozio lived too short poetic career which was of hardly half a dozen years. There are two volumes of poetry on his name: ‘Poems’ (1927) and ‘The Fakir of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems’ (1928). The short poems of him revealed a strong influence of British romantic poets in theme, sentiment, imagery and diction. His satirical verse and long narrative poems indicated his affinity with Byron. These verses showed energy and vigour. Burning nationalistic zeal was a notable feature of Derozio’s poetry. His patriotic utterances certified Derozio as an Indian English poet, a son of soil. He is also a pioneer in the use of Indian myth and legend, imagery and diction. E. F. Oaten’s assessment of Derozio as, ‘The national bard of modern India’ can be rather debatable today.

In 1930, the first volume of verse appeared ‘The Shair of Ministrel and Other Poems’ which was by a pure Indian blood, Kashiprasad Ghose (1809 – 73). It was an outcome of an ambition to compose original verse in English. His study of prosody and criticism and reading of the best poetry revealed the correct verses. His use of Indian material and Hindu festivals in lyrics show his honest attempt, earnestness and true poetic talent.

The Dutts: Rajnarain Dutt (1824 -89), Shoshee Chunder Dutt (1815 - 65) and Hur Chunder Dutt (1831 - 1901) contributed to Indian English poetry with their undistinguished poetic works. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1924 - 73) is also well known as an Indian poet. He wrote some sonnets, short poems and two long poems in English. The poets like Scott and Byron were his models. One of his long poems: ‘The Captive Ladie’ (1849) deals with the story of the Rajput King, Prithviraj. Here Dutt take liberties with history. The other long poem by Dutt, ‘In Vision of Past’ (1849) is in the form of Miltonic blank verse, with weighty, abstract diction and Latin inversions. In this period of Indian English literature the British rule was accepted as a great boon. The holocaust of the Indian revolt of 1857 ushered in different ideas.
1.1.3 Indian English Poetry in the Period of Freedom Struggle (1857 to 1950):

‘The Dutt Family Album’ (1870) is the first notable poetry work of this period. It is the only instance of family anthology in Indian English Poetry. This is a collection of 187 poems by three Dutt brothers. They are Govind Chunder, Hur Chunder and Greece Chunder and their cousin. These poets can hardly with India. They treat their Indian material as something poetically serviceable. Their major subjects are Christian sentiment, nature and Indian history and legend. Ram Sharma (1837 – 1918) wrote occasional verse, satires, narratives, lyrics on various themes and mystical verse. Hindu yogic experience was expressed through conventional western myth and frame.

Toru Dutt (185–77) brought up Indian English Poetry from imitation to authenticity. Torulata was born in a Hindu family but was baptized with family members in 1862. Reading and music were her hobbies. She learnt English in France and England. She sailed for Europe in 1869 and returned to India in 1873. She died at the age of twenty one when her talent was maturing. There are two collections of poems on her name. Out of which one appeared in her own life time. However it was not in the nature of original work. It was ‘A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields’ (1876) which comprised 165 lyrics by about a hundred French poets. These lyrics are translated by her. To Edmund Gosse, the volume is ‘a wonderful mixture of strength and weakness’. Toru Dutt’s Keatsian progress during the last two years of her life is revealed in her posthumous publication ‘Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan’ (1882). The themes of these poems indicate that Toru Dutt is the first Indian poet who used Indian myth and legend extensively. Though she was brought up in Christian living or in a half anglicized environment, she gives the treatment of instinctive and spiritual understanding of the legends. Toru Dutt’s poetic technique shows a sure grasp more than poetic mode. Her diction is naturally of the Victorian romantic school. She shows her prosodic skill in using different forms like ballad, blank verse and the sonnet. Unlike Kashiprasad Ghose and M. M. Dutt, Toru Dutt’s poetry is virtually free from imitation.

Behram Merwanji Malbari (1853 -1912) wrote ‘The Indian Muse in English Garb’ (1876). It is a slender collection of 32 pieces. It has occasional verses and poems in social criticism. There were contemporary poets like Cowasji Nowrosi
Vesuvala, M. M. Kunte and Nagesh Vishvanath Pai. They belonged to the then Bombay Presidency. But it is said that Bengal was the first home of Indian English literature. Moreover it continued its dominance on the Indian English poetry for many more years. Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848 – 1909) wrote in both, Bengali and English. His all English verses are translations. Dutt aimed to produce condensed versions of the great epics. ‘Lays of Ancient India’ (1894) is a collection of verse translations from Sanskrit and Prakrit classics. To him, he has preserved the ‘musical movement of the original in English translations. For which he employed ‘Anushthubh/Sloka’ meter and reduced the complexity of these Hindu classics. But the use of this ‘sloka’ meter evaporated the spirit of the original. However, they have been remained as the best introductions in English to our great national epics. Very accurately he has delineated basic human motives and emotions.

Manmohan Ghose (1869 – 1024) was educated in England. He was sent to England at ten. He is a classic example which shows an exile heart, sense of alienation and unhappy childhood and adolescence. Manmohan Ghose published ‘Premveera’ a collection of verse in 1890, ‘Love Songs and Elegies’ in 1898 and ‘Songs of Love and Death’ in 1926. ‘Immortal Eve’ and ‘Mysteries’ are his poetic sequels. George Sampson rightly says, ‘Manmohan is the most remarkable of Indian poets who wrote in English.’ He is a poet as if trained in classic tradition. Sir Aurobindo (1872 – 1950), Manmohan’s younger brother, had also same kind of upbringing. He had passed Civil Service Examination and was a master of many languages like Greek, Latin, French, English, German, Italian, Sanskrit and Bengali. In due course, he became Mahapurusha, a Mahayogi. He founded the centre of yoga at Pondicherry. Sir Aurobindo is well known as a poet and critic of life and letters. His ‘Collected Poems and Plays’ is the best known. Sir Aurobindo has a parallel record of poetic achievements as a translator and narrative poet, as a metrical and verbal craftsman, as a lyricist and dramatist and as a ‘futurist’ poet. ‘Urvasie’ and ‘Love and Death’ are his beautifully articulated narrative poems. ‘Baji Prabhu’ is a first rate action poem, ‘Percus, the Deliverer’ is a blank verse drama. ‘Thought the Paraclete’ and ‘The Rose of God’ are the finest mystical poems in the language. His long poems ‘Ahana and Ilion’ are the best examples of classical quantities’ meters. ‘Savitri’ has created a new kind of epic poetry. He has been aptly called as Milton of India.
Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was another prominent contemporary poet. Mahatma Gandhi called him as ‘The Great Sentinel’. He touched and enriched modern Indian life in many ways. He was poet, dramatist, novelist, short-story writer, composer, painter, thinker, educationist, nationalist and internationalist also. He as a bilingual poet occupied the significant place in Indo – Anglican poetry. ‘The Child’ and a few other poems are written in English. His ‘Geetanjali’ (1913), a prose poem, compelled a world – wide attention and he won the Nobel Prize for literature. His prose works too were written originally in English for international public. After ‘The Geetanjali’, Tagore wrote ‘The Gardener’ (1913), ‘Stray Birds’ (1916), ‘Lovers Gift and Crossing’ (1918) and ‘The Fugitive’ (1921). W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound were the admirers of Tagore’s poetry. Tagore’s verse in English had lyrical quality; it had rhythm of free verse. He dealt with simplicity, seriousness and passion. He used colloquial idiom and archaic vocabulary like ‘thee’ and ‘thou’.

Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) started her career as a poet but later she became a prominent politician of Gandhian era. She had recognition in England much earlier. Her first volume of poetry, ‘The Golden Threshold’ (1905) was followed by ‘The Bird of Time’ (1912) and ‘The Broken Wing’ (1917). Her collected poems appeared in ‘The Sceptred Flute’ (1946). A small collection of lyrics written in 1927, ‘Father of the Down’ was published posthumously in 1961. Her lyrics are strongly influenced by British romanticism and Percian and Urdu poets. In all the four volumes by Sarojini Naidu witness her unerring sense of beauty and melody. Her poems present a feast of delight to the reader. As a lyricist, she always spoke in a ‘private voice’ and never bothered to express the burning problems of her day. But she is the first rank artist having the strength of perfect rhythm with which she can be close to Toru Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. Though she appears hopelessly outdated by the standards of modern poetic taste, she is historically significant and intrinsically important.

Harindranath Chattopadhyay, born in 1898, is also a well-known poet. He has written some brilliant pieces of poetry. Many of his poems are marked a devotional note and his belief in Marxist ideology. He has remained as an idealist and seeker of spiritual truth. He published numerous volumes of verse like ‘The Feast of Youth’ (1967), ‘Virgins and Vineyards’ (1967), ‘The Magic Tree’ (1922), ‘Poems and Plays’ (1927) and ‘Spring in Winter’ (1955). Chattopadhyay’s better poems have been engulfed in a mass of middling. His themes are the staple of all romantic
poetry: nostalgia, melancholy; passion for beauty, the changing moods of love, idealism and humanitarian.


In this period Indian English literature came into existence. India’s rediscovery of her identity became vigorous. The Indian English literature began to progress, though by absorbing, learning and imitating from the West.

1.1.4 The Post Independent Indian Poetry in English (After 1950):

Like American, Australian and Canadian English literatures, Indian English literature used to express the British influence. But the post independent poetry of modern India discarded the so called influence of the West. The post independent Indian poetry in English shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours etc. of the society. The poetry gave wide range cultural trait through symbols, situations, themes and others. They presented the real world conditions, i.e. the contemporary India. Indian legends, folklores, situations, idioms, and themes became the features of Indian English Poetry. Naturally the variety of myths, symbols, images, emotions, sentiments became associated with Indian tradition and culture. The poets’ attempts were consciously Indian. Even the conventional poetic language was replaced by colloquial. The modern Indian English poets reflected perspective and milieu after the independence. Due to the changes in the modern world, the nature, living standard and behaviour of the man was being changed. The persona in this poetry was also changed. His inner conflict, alienation, failure, frustration, loneliness, his relations with himself and others, his individual, family and social contexts, his love, etc. became the themes of the poetry. At the same time the modern Indian poetry in English became complex, harsh and defiance of tradition. Indian poetry in a true sense was being appeared by the fifties. In 1958, P. Lal and his associates founded
the Writers Workshop in Calcutta which became an effective forum for modernist poetry. The first modernist anthology was ‘Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry’ (1958) edited by P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao.

Nissim Ezekiel (1924 – 2003) was the first of the ‘new’ poets. He is aptly called the father/pioneer of modern Indian poetry in English. He is a very Indian poet in Indian English. He experimented idioms and language of Indian’s which became the matter of criticism and was looked down upon as ‘Baboo Angrezi / Bombay English / Hinglish etc. Ezekiel’s poetry was a kind of debut in the literary field. He wrote prolifically in addition to prose and drama. His published poetry collections are: ‘A Time to Change’ (1952), ‘Sixty Poems’ (1953), ‘The Third’ (1959), ‘The Unfinished Man’ (1960), ‘The Exact Name’ (1965), ‘Hymns in Darkness’ (1976) and ‘Latter-Day Psalms’ (1984). His ‘Collected Poems’ was also appeared in due course. He is the poet of situations, human beings about which he wrote with subtle observations. He wrote with a touch of humour and irony but with genuine sympathy. The alienation is the central theme of Ezekiel’s work. He is the poet of city culture especially of the city, Bombay. Obsessive sense of failure, self doubt and self laceration, exile from himself, love, marriage, art and artist are also themes of Ezekiel’s poetry. Ezekiel’s poetry also reveals technical skill of a high order. His talent and major poetic utterance will remain by virtue of opening new vistas.

Dom Moraes (b. 1938) is one of the new poets who won recognition in England. He has published several volumes of poems such as ‘A Beginning’ (1957), ‘Poems’ (1960), ‘John Nobody’ (1968), ‘His Poems 1955 – 1965’ (1966) and his ‘Collected Poems’ (1969). He came in contact with poets like Ezekiel, Auden and Spender. He was deeply influenced by Dylan Thomas and the surrealistic school. His verse often creates a haunted world in which classical, Christian, medieval and fairy tale myths are mixed and dragons and dwarfs, Cain and the unicorn, the tombs of Mycenae and Christ come together. However, Moraes’ verse is of the finest rhythms, easy, refined and of controlled language.

P. Lal (b.1929-) is the earliest and one of the prominent poets during the 1960s. He led the Writers Workshop group of poets. He started the modernist reaction against the romantic tradition of Indian poetry but he ended up as a romantic poet himself. He is essentially a lyrical and pictorial poet. H. M. William finds in his poetry the brevity of Japanese Haiku and Tanka. According to K. R. S. Iyengar, ‘Lal is undoubtedly a sensitive and accomplished lyrical poet’. Mc Cutchion found the

Adil Jussawala (b. 1940-) began to become an ‘English poet’ like Dom Moraes. His first collection ‘Land’s End’ follows Dom Moraes’ footsteps. His next volume ‘Missing Person’ is a mature and full blooded volume in which he emerges as a very Indian poet. As an Indian poet he is aware of contemporary social and political realities. His poetic world is of floods, famines, wars, riots, student-posters, Five Year Plan, colonial apes, police dogs, running dogs, cell-mates, stone throwers, refugees, immigrants, etc. In ‘Missing Person’ there is blending of public and private worlds and the major theme is exile. Jussawala is concerned with disillusionment and defeat in poems. Sometimes he catches at hope, happiness and affirmation. He is a poet of loneliness and alienation, a poet of division between India and western association. Iyengar says, ‘He is the ‘missing person’. He must find himself first before other can recognize and respect him.’

A.K. Ramanujan (b. 1929 -) is the most outstanding poet of the sixties. He wrote in Tamil and Kannada, ‘The Interior Landscape’ (1967), and ‘Speaking of Siva’ (1972) are translations into English respectively. Though A. K. Ramanujan settled in America, his poetry grows out of Indian experiences and sensibility with all his memories of family, local places, images, beliefs and history. His memories play a vital role in composing poems. Ramanujan’s indianness is a notable in terms of Indian myths, history, culture, heritage and Indian topography and environment. His style is lucid and calm. He gives details in narrative technique by using exact and clear images. His love poems are of deep emotion and fineness of perception. His technical accomplishment is indisputable. His views of life are ironic, skeptical, controlled, refined finely, detailed, natural and unaffected. His vision is keenly

R. Parthasarathy (b. 1934 - ) is a Tamil fellow who is acutely conscious of complex relationship between Tamil mind and Europe. Though he was hoping for England, as a future home, he returned with ‘a new understanding of myself and India.’ His ‘Rough Passage’ (1977) illustrates his intellectual and rational make-up. The volume is divided into three sections: Exile, Trial and Homecoming. In Exile there is a pain of isolation and alienation, Trial talks of his personal love which makes his life meaningful and Homecoming deals with death as a time changing process and a reality of human life. ‘Rough Passage’ is an autobiographical poetry. The poet concerns with his mother tongue, homeland and his personal experiences. He uses shocking but apt imagery and metaphors. It symbolizes rough passage in England and rough come-back in India.

Gieve Patel (b.1940 -) from Parsi community published his first book ‘Poems’ (1966) and the second ‘How Do You Withstand, Body’ (1976). Like Ezekiel, an outsider, being neither Hindu nor Muslim in India, he is rather conscious. But he feels no rootlessness. Though he was a physician by profession, he has a surprising poetic art. R. Parthsarthy says, ‘Patel’s poems are unspectacular take-offs, on the Indian scene on which he comments with clinical fastidiousness.’ His keen observation, passion of expression and integrity of language impress us. ‘From Mirrored, Mirroring’ (1991) is his latest volume. M. K. Naik describes, ‘His poetry is mostly situational. His style is colloquial and ironical and most directly reflective’.

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (b. 1947) writes poetry in which the image is all dominant. He began his career in 1966 with ‘Bharatmata’ (Mother India), a long satirical poem on modern India. ‘Woodcuts on Paper’ (1967), ‘Pomes / Poems / Poemas’ (1971) and ‘Nine Enclosures’ (1976) are volumes of poems on his name. He enjoys imaginative freedom and his world is of childhood fantasy and play. He is an experimentalist and force of liberty in Indian English poetry. Mehrotra is a surrealistic who returns to realism later. His poetry is an immediate reaction to his discovery of various modern and post-modern styles and poetics. Some of his poems are autobiographical and nostalgic. A. K. Mehrotra asserted, ‘I am not an Indian poet but a poet writing a universal language of poetry, of feeling, of love, hate and sex.’
He has also expressed his belief that ‘poetry has no ‘real public’ anywhere in the world.’ Thus he is the modern poet in content and technique.

Pritish Nandy (b. 1947-) produced a dozen collections including ‘Of Gods and Olives’ (1967), ‘The Poetry of Pritish Nandy’ (1973) and ‘Tonight This Savage Rite’ (1977). He is an innovator in various stanza patterns, italicized expressions and metrical patterns like Eliot. K. N. Daruwalla (b. 1937-) is the most substantial modern Indian poet in English. He has published ‘Under Orion’ (1970), ‘Apparition in April’ (1971) and ‘Crossing of Rivers’ (1976). ‘The Keepers of the Dead’, and ‘Sword and Abyss’ are also his notable works. Northern India: hills, plains and rivers are evoked in many of his poems. Shiv K Kumar (b. 1921) is a senior who published his first collection of poems ‘Articulate Silences’ (1970) when he was fifty. This was followed by ‘Cobwebs in the Sun’ (1974), ‘Suberfuges’ (1976), ‘Woodpeckers’ (1979) and ‘Trap falls in the Sky’ (1986). His poetry reveals boredom, horror and restlessness of modern man. He is the poet of city and urban images.


Arun Kolatkar (1932- 2006) is a bilingual poet of quality rather than quantity. He wrote bhakti-poetry. Commonwealth poetry prize winner ‘Jejuri’ (1976) and ‘Arun Kolatkaranchya Kavita’ (1977) are well known works of Kolatkar. Dilip Chitre (b. 1938-) is another Maharashtrian and bilingual poet whose ‘Travelling in a Cage’ (1980) is a sequence of twenty-one poems. The second part ‘ From Bombay’ contain fifteen poems and the third ‘Ambulance Ride’ is a funeral elegy of his friend. He is obsessed with sex, madness and death. ‘Tuka Says’ is a translation of the Abhangas by Marathi saint, Tukaram. Like Kolatkar, Chitre is an experimental poet in Indian English.

Kamala Das (b. 1934-) is one of the women poets of this period. She is wrote in Malyalam and English. She has published books of verse in English like: ‘Summer in Calcutta’ (1965), ‘The Descendants’ (1967), ‘The Old Playhouse and Other Poems’ (1973) and ‘Stranger Time’ (1977). She is a confessional poet of love and tenderness.
She gives living expressions of modern Indian women thoughts and feelings. Her poems are condensed with the images and symbols of love and lust. Her poetry is of feminist and religious rebel.

The post independent Indian poetry in English is abundant but the quality of its minor verse does not match its abundance. B. K. Das remarks, ‘Indian poetry in English is Indian first and anything else is afterwards. Its base is pan-Indian and it has audience all over the country.’ Moreover, the Indian English poet is concerned with ‘Indianness’ of his experiences. Indian poetry in English stands in comparison with the poetry of the third world countries.

1.1.5 Summary:

The first period of Indian English literature may be said to the end of 1850s. During this period the British rule in India was accepted generally most of Indians thought that it was a great boon. The holocaust of the Revolt ushered in different ideas. Ultimately the combined results during the next two generations took place. After the Revolt of 1857 India’s rediscovery of her identity became vigorous. The thought of freedom and nationality overwhelmed the literature. The Indian English poetry also learnt enough from the West through imitation and assimilation. The post independent poetry in Indian English established its own character and voice. It has abundant in quantity and up to some extent in quality also. It has made its own place in the realm of world literature. It has three manifestations. The modern poets are brilliant commentators on Indian scene. The future of Indian poetry in English is very bright.

1.2 Major Themes in Indian English Poetry:

Indo-Anglian poetry, an offshoot of Indian English literature is about two hundred years old. It is next to the British and American poetry. Besides, it is far ahead of the poetry of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Henry Derozio, the bard of modern India, imitated Byron, Moore and Keats. K. Praeald Ghosh imitated Walter Scott. M. M. Dutt’s poetry was influenced by the English romantics. Their poetry is derivative and imitative. It does not form in independent poetic tradition. It became mature and non-derivative in the hands of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Tagore and Aurobindo. They formed the worth poetic tradition. They have revealed poetic insights, originality of themes and styles and
technical excellence. Harindranath Chattopadhyay is noted for force and clarity, ideals and lyricism in poetry. The 19th century Indo-Anglian poetry ends with the poetry by Harindranath Chattopadhyay.

In the first quarter of the 20th century, many of the Indian poets in English wrote in Romantic and Victorian fashion. Anand Acharya was greatly influenced by Tagore’s English translations of his own prose poems. In the second quarter of the twentieth century, the poets like M. Krishnamurthi, V. N. Bhushan, K. D. Sethana, Manjeri Ishwaran and B. Dhingra continued to show a love of compact expression and new techniques. The third quarter of 20th century is the richest poetic harvest. The modern Indian poetry in English has formed an independent poetic tradition of its own. Many of the modern poets contributed to the enrichment and growth of Indian English poetry. Today it is of international reputation and expressing the meeting of two vital cultures, i.e. the Indian and the English.

Many of the pre independent Indian English poets hailed from Bengal. The history of Indo-Anglian poetry is mainly a development from neo-romanticism to mysticism and to neo-modernism. From Derozio to Naidu, the trend was of romanticism. Toru Dutt was the first neo romantic poet. She glorifies India’s cultural heritage in her poems. The phase Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with the poetry by Sarojini Naidu. Sri Aurobindo’s poetry was of mysticism. His poetry is lyrical, narrative and philosophical. His mystic poetry has a mantric quality and very close to Vedanta. In his poems we find a fusion of personal vision and spiritual personality of India.

The poets in the beginning explored Indian themes. Toru revealed utter Indianness of theme in her ‘Our Casuarina Tree’. Tagore, Aurobindo and Naidu helped to build Indian English poetry on Indian myth, legend and history. Since then Indian poetry has been Indian first and everything later. The changes in national climate have been expressed in the poetry. The poetry proved the glorious voice of the essential humanity and universality. Love, nature, life, nationalism, patriotism, motherland, man, myths, legends, fine arts and beauty are the major themes of this poetry. They are the poems of introspective and metaphysical qualities.

The post independence Indian English poetry became the vital body of Commonwealth and Third World literature. The political freedom changed not only the socio-economic features of India but creative literature also. The post colonial
poets protested the imitation of the British and American poetry. The modern Indian English poetry deals with the contemporary India. It evokes the tradition and culture of the country to establish its own identity. Many poets published their works in Writers’ Workshop. The modern Indian English poetry won recognition in the country and abroad.

These ‘new’ or modern poets deal with themes like protest, escape, affirmation, self expression, rootlessness, loneliness, alienation, feminism, love, sex, religion Marx, Freud, romance, primitivism, sensualist, symbolism, spiritualism, etc. Some poets scrutinized the inner and outer world through the poetry of introspection. The exile is also one of the dominant themes of this period which accompanies the theme like cultural interaction. Birth, marriage, death, disillusion and life are also the major themes of this poetry.

1.3 Experimentation in Indian English Poetry:

Prof. V. K. Gokak, in his introduction to ‘The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Verse (1970)’ and in his ‘Studies in Ind-Anglian Poetry (1972)’ traces the growth and progress of Indian English poetry. He claims that Tagore and Sri Aurobindo are the great innovators of the art of versification. Prof V. K. Gokak classifies Indian Poets as ‘neo-symbolist’ and ‘neo-modernist’. They were the poets of mysticism and humanism respectively. Tagore’s ‘Geetanjali’ is a transcreation in English. Poets like Prof. P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao dismissed the old Indo-Anglian school of poetry. The poetry became the private voice to demonstrate their age, its mass approval and hysteria. It was a reaction against the Indian poetry written in English before and during the nineteenth century.

The Independence in India brought new movements in literature, for example the new uses of language. The new minds required new voices and new voices discovered the poets’ genius to register the idiom of their age intimately. The ‘new’ poets of the post independent India have won recognition both in our country and abroad. They speak in new voice. Their idiom, style, syntax speak of their freedom. The Indians won not only political freedom but also cultural freedom to creative literature. Post-colonial Indian English poets registered a protest against the imitative poetry influenced by the British and American poetry. Modern Indian English poetry depicts the contemporary India. The tradition and culture of India is depicted in order to establish its own identity. The Modern Indian English poetry has acquired the
distinct features and its own voice. The ethos of the post-independence Indian English poetry and pre-independence Indian English poetry are different.

The modern Indian English poets became self-conscious about their language and form. They tried to make a creative use of English in the most effective manner. The themes of these poems are very quite new regarding innovation and creation of modern poetry. Modernity, Indianness, Use of Indian idiom, Bilingualism, Exile and certain motifs are the distinctive features of Modern Indian English poetry.

The Modern Indian English poetry means a break with the past. It has three manifestations: 1. A past oriented vision associated with a sense of loss and hopelessness, a sort of cultural pessimism, 2. A future oriented vision, associated with a desire to remake the world and 3. A present oriented attitude, historical, immoral, neutral, stoic, ironic, and ambivalent and absurdist. This modernity has two modes of expression: a) Voyage within and b) Voyage without. The modernism in the post 60s Indian English poetry has been very strongly presented. The French symbolism and surrealism are also practiced very successfully in the Modern Indian English poetry. The present Indian scene is also commented brilliantly.

Indianness has been very distinct feature of Modern Indian English poetry. These poets reveal the Indian sensibility in their poetry. History, myths, legends, folklores all go together to establish a distinct Indian idiom and identity. Modern Indian English poetry is truly Indian which draws artistic material from its heritage. Mostly the Indianness is expressed through imagery. The Indian idiom has been the validity of Indian poetry in English. Very few of the modern Indian English poets write in English only. Most of them are bilingual poets. The poet like Nissim Ezekiel writes only in English. Otherwise all these poets wrote in their regional languages as well as in national language. These poet tried to mold enrich Indian English in a true sense.

The Modern Indian poets are classified on the basis of their exile. Some Indian poets (Parthasarathy, Vikram Seth and Ramanujan) have visited foreign countries and lived there. However they contributed Indian English poetry. Some (Ezekiel, Moraes and Jussawala) went abroad but returned and settled in India. Some never visited the abroad. There fore their poetry reflect accordingly. They express the feelings like anxiety, self identity and alienation.
We observe some motifs in Indian poetry. Some poets have written on rivers, Bombay life, childhood memories, personal life, etc. The living contemporary situations are largely presented in the modern poetry in Indian English. The poets try to bring innovations in both form and content. They are conscious in creating new images and idiom. There is variety in Indian poetry and they write in living Indian English. Some of these poets are recognized by offering the commonwealth and the Third World Countries like international awards in literature.

1.4 Indianness in Indian English Poetry:

Modern Indian English poetry is Indian first and everything else afterwards. In Indian English poetry Indianness is a matter not only of diction and syntax but also of imagery, myths and legends. The thoughts are Indian but drapery is English. M. K. Naik has raised three basic questions about the Indianness of Indian English poetry. These questions are: 1. Is Indian verse in English only sometimes ‘Indian’ and only occasional poetry? 2. Must Indian poetry be ‘Indian’ before it can be true poetry? 3. In what exactly lies the genuine ‘Indianness of Indian poetry in English’? It is true that all Indian English poetry, since Derozio to the present day poets, qualify as genuine poetry. Of course it is occasionally poetry and sometimes ‘Indian’. For example, Sarojini Naidu’s ‘India’ and ‘Lotus’; Humayun Kabir’s ‘Mahatma’ are about the motherland and national leader.

The nineteenth century Indian poetry in English was imitative. Sri Aurobindo’s ‘Savitri’ is essentially an expression of Indian sensibility but his brother Manmohan Ghose felt a stranger in India. Indianness may be assessed in respect of several forms and shapes but it has remained one of the major features of Indian poetry in English, especially of the modern Indian English poetry. Prof. David McCutchion speaks of ‘Indianness’ as ‘life attitudes’ and ‘modes of perception’. Prof. V. K. Gokak defines Indianness as ‘a complete awareness in the matter of race, milieu, language and religion.’ C. Paul Verghese thinks Indianness is nothing but depiction of Indian culture. Indianness is some total of the cultural patterns of India and the deep rooted ideas and ideals regarding political, economic, secular and spiritual minds of India. The true image of India is portrayed by the Modern Indian English poetry. Indianness has been the traditional and distinct feature of post independence Indian poetry in English.
Some critics disregard the Indian sensibility and argue that Indo-Anglian writers have imitated British and American literature. They have committed to the western consciousness and catered the western readers.

But this is a blind criticism. Most of the writers have written on Indian traditions and cultures. They have presented a justifiable, artistic image of India to the people outside India. Hence Indianness is striking feature of Indian poetry in English. According to K.R.S. lyengar, ‘to be Indian in thought and feeling and emotion and experience is a novel experiment in creativity’. Indian English literature is conditioned by Indian Geography, Indian style of life, culture, the grammar and speech habits of Indians. They write only in an alien and borrowed medium, that is, English language. Most of the pre-independence poets took inspiration from Indian mythology, legends and philosophy. They have brought a true marriage of Indian poetic processes of poetic experience with English formula of verse expression. Toru Dutta, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Anand Acharya, Puran Singh, J.Krishnamurti and Kabir deal with Indian myths and legends and landscapes in their poetry. Aurobindo’s ‘Savitri’, Gitanjali’ and Derozio’s poems show indiannness in themes. The Indian poet’s indianness may also find expressions through his imagery. The feudal imagery in Tagore establishes his links with the medieval Indian saint poets; Naidu’s imagery stamps the Indian soil. While the archetypal imagery of light and darkness in Aurobinodo’s poetry shows his affinities with all mystic poetry. His use in ‘Savitri’ of images drawn from science shows his modernity. The quality of Indianness can be seen in the ethos of the best Indian poetry in English. Tagore’s ‘Gitanjali,’ Aurobindo’s ‘Savitri’, and Naidu’s lyrics are the finest examples of Indian ethos in pre-independence poetry. In the post-independence poetry, Ramanujan shows how an Indian poet in English can derive strength from going back to his roots. The post-independence poets write not only for Indian but for non-indians also and their appeal is universal.

It is true that the achievements of the early Indian poets in English are not quite satisfactory. Their poetry is imitative and derivat ive. Yet Derozio’s ‘The Harp of India’, Tagore’s ‘Heaven of Freedom’ and Aurobindo’s ‘Savitri’ reveal the glorious past of India and Indian culture. Naidu is purely Indian in thought and feelings. In Manmomohan Ghose and Toru Dutt, we observe experiments, imitation and innovation.
The question of Indianness is not only a question of material of Indian poetry or even of sensibility. The post-independence poet faces a special problem related to the expression of an Indian sensibility. He lacks Indian sensibility. His poetic roots are superficial. His themes are alienation, restlessness and disillusionment. His poetry is city-centered and urban-oriented. But it does not mean that he does not belong either to India or to the west. The most important thing is the use of English language. He has to use English to convey the feel of the culture.

Since 1950, there is a change in the poets, attitude, outlook, themes, imagery and the use of English language. The new poets like Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Daruwalla, Shiv K. Kumar, Ramanujan, Mehrotra, Mahapatra, Kolatkar, Parthasarathy, P. Lal, Chitre, Patel, Dom Moraes, and many others have given Indian poetry in English ‘a local habitation and a name,’ Ezekiel’s commitment is to India and he deals with various aspects of Indian life, the superstitious rural people, the Babu English and the city life in Bombay. Ezekiel creates Indian characters in their situation. He also recreates their language as well. His ‘Very Indian poems in Indian English’ are not caricatures. His language is typical Indian English. He creates new idiom. He brought everyday conversational language very close to poetry. Moreover, the Indian poet is concerned with the indianness of his experience. The validity of Indian poetry in English depends on the creation of Indian English idiom. In the post-1960, poets have succeeded in it. In Ezekiel’s poetry, we see a number of Indian words; Kamala Das and Kumar use a new kind of unconventional vocabulary in their love poems. Indian English poetry has now taken its themes and various Indian subjects from legends, folklore to contemporary Indian situations.

The images of Indian pervade in Mahapatra’s poetry. He evokes history, myth and the tradition of his land of birth. He speaks of the myth of Sun God and Konark temple. Daruwalla evokes Indian landscape in his poetry. Kamala Das’s feminine sensibility finds its true expression in her love poems. In a poem ‘Ghanashyam’, she invokes Lord Krishna with a heart filled devotion and joy. Indian sensibility is transparent in her poetry. She plays her roles of unhappy woman, unhappy wife, mistress to young men, and mother. She is a poet of love. From the woman’s point of view, she uses English as an Indian speaks, writes and perhaps understands it. Shiv K. Kumar deals with the theme of landscape and national identity in ‘Trap falls in the Sky’. In ‘Relationship’ Mahapatra creates myths out of folk-tales in Orissa. In ‘Dawn at Puri’, he shows his sense of faith and poor India immersed in superstitions.
A.K. Mehrotra says, “I am not an Indian poet, But a poet writing in a universal language of poetry, of feeling of love of hate and sex.” Dom Moraes has a love for India. Daruwalla has indianness and contemporary awareness. He knows squalor and poverty, and corruption of leaders. Kolatkar reviews his ancient Indian, heritage in Jejuri. Jussawalla lacks Indian sensibility. Therefore Indian English poetry is Indian first and everything else afterwards. Indian English poetry presents mother India’s aspirations, hopes, fulfillments, adours, achievements and oneness. It projects a consciousness of national identity. Undoubtedly, the modern Indian English poetry has successfully formed an independent poetic tradition of its own though it echoes western influences in plenty. However, Indianness is its distinctive feature which primarily expresses the multicoloured Indian life.

1.5 Check Your Progress:

Q. I. Answer the following questions in one word / phrase / sentence each.

1. Who published ‘Poems’ as the first volume in Indian English in 1827?
2. What are the classes of the pre independent Indian poets made by V. K. Gokak?
3. What is the translation of an early century Sanskrit poems by C. V. Ramswamy?
4. Who is the noteworthy first Indian English poet in Indian English?
5. Which is the only instance of family anthology in Indian English Poetry?
6. What is Toru Dutt’s posthumous publication?
7. Who led the Writers Workshop group of poets?
8. To whom does Iyengar say, ‘He is the ‘missing person’?

1.6 Answer to Check Your Progress:

Answers:

1. Henry Derozio
2. Neo-symbolist and neo- modernist
3. Vishvagundarshana
4. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio
5. The Dutt Family Album
6. Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan
7. Tagore
1.7 Exercises:

Q. I Answer the following questions in about 200-250 words each.

1. Write in detail on the origin of Indian Poetry in English with special reference to Derozio and The Dutts.
2. What are the features and themes of the pre independent poetry in English in India?
3. ‘The modern Indian poetry in English is a very Indian and experimental.’ Discuss.

Q. II Write the short notes on the following.

1. Derozio as a Pioneer of Indian Poetry in English
2. Rabindranath Tagore’s Contribution to Indian Poetry in English
3. The Present Status of Indian Poetry in English

1.8 Further Reading:

Contents

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B) Check your progress:

2.7 Key to check your progress

2.8 Exercises

2.9 Text and Books for Reference

2.0 Objective:-

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Understand the life and works of Sarojini Naidu.
- Contribution of Sarojini Naidu as a poet.
- Analysis and interpretation of Sarojini Naidu’s poems.

2.1 Introduction:-

A) Life and works:

Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949), born in Hyderabad on 13th February 1879 is known to be an Indian political activist and poet. She is the most lyrical poetess of India. She made a significant contribution to Indian English poetry. Her father, Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya was scientist, philosopher and political educator. Her mother, Varada Sundari, was a Bengali poetess. Sarojini received a British education. At the age of 17 she met Muthyala Govindarajulu Naidu and fell in love with him. After finishing her education she contracted a marriage with him. She gave birth to four children in quick succession – Jaisoorya, Padma, Leilamani and Ranadheera. However, her zeal for nationalism could not stop her to participate in political activities.
Through her friendship with Gopal Krishna Gokhale she entered in the national political life. She was elected as the first Indian women president of Indian Congress and the Governor of Uttar Pradesh state. She was a close friend of Gandhi. While working with Indian National Congress she was introduced to many eminent personalities such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru.


**B) Contribution as a poet:**

She was called as Bharat Kokila (the Nightingale of India) on account of her beautiful poems and songs. Sarojini Naidu’s poems are deliberately meant to be heard rather than to read or to study. She is primarily considered as a lyric poet with the distinct feature of melody. In her poems sound and sense combine to produce an emotion like in music. She is a versatile poet, drawing the rich traditions of several Indian languages, religions, regions in her works.

Her major themes are love, common life of Indian people, beauty of Indian scenes and sights, Indian traditions, philosophy of life and patriotic sentiments of Indians. She is primarily considered to be a love poet, and her love poetry explores the various aspects of love, such as love in union, love in separation, the pains of love, earthly love, sins of love, divine love, etc.

Sarojini Naidu’s images are stylized sophisticated. The fusion of personal emotions through Indian ethos, in a lyrical manner with vividness of imagery is major feature of her poetry.

**A) Check your progress:**

Q. 1 Where was Sarojini Naidu born?
Q. 2 What is the name of her first volume of poetry?
Q. 3 When was *The Bird of Time* published?
Q. 4. What is the name of Sarojini’s father?
Q. 5. What is the title of Jinnah’s biography written by Sarojini Naidu?
2.2 General Summary:


*The Golden Threshold* was first published in 1905, with an introduction by Arthur Symons. Sarojini was an unknown young girl at that time. This volume contains forty poems classified into three sections: “Folk Songs,” “Songs for Music” and “Poems.”

The twelve pieces grouped as “Folk Songs” are not all sung or supposed to be sung by the folk. Many of them are about the folk themselves. The folk songs of Sarojini are the most interesting among her poetical output. They breathe the spirit of India, and it is in these songs that the heart of our country is laid bare.

Sarojini, the lover of delicacy, colour and beauty, has put in her image beautiful hues through her epithets: “a golden storm of glittering sheaves, of fair and trail and fluttering leaves.” There are two poems bearing the same title “Ecstasy” - one in *The Golden Threshold* and the other in *The Bird of time*. The latter poem deals with the ecstasy which all lovers of nature feel at the beauty and freshness of the season of spring.

The poem, ‘Palanquin-Bearers’ from this volume is a significant contribution to the tradition of folk songs. The movement of the poem suggests the rhythmic march of the palanquin-bearers through the streets. The bearers sing gaily of the beauty of the lady as they carry her along in their palanquin. No fewer than seven similes emphasizes her beauty; she “sways like a flower,” “skims like a bird,” “floats like a laugh,” “hangs like a star,” “springs like a beam,” and “falls like a tear”: the bearers of her palanquin bear her along like “a pearl on a string.” J.H. Cousins remarks that “there is not thought” in this poem, yet it is meaningful.

From palanquin-bearers we can pass on to Indian minstrels. The wandering singers were called Bhats, and they roamed about from place to place, playing music and singing songs, delighting the hearts of their numerous hearers, and making an honest penny for themselves. Singing and playing on roads and streets, in villages and towns, at banquets and weddings, and on festive occasions, private as well as public, the wandering on festive occasions, private as well as public, the wandering minstrels have always presented a picturesque sight, and even these days one not infrequently comes across them.
A Man’s birth, life and death are the subject-matter of ‘Indian weavers’. This poem brings the picture of a man, clad in his typical turban and dress, and playing upon the flute beside some bush in a moonlit garden trying to capture a snake.

‘Village Song’ is set in the pastoral atmosphere of Indian country side. The folk-life with its native colors figures forth in the poem. It is a song sung by village maiden to the tune of some dialect song: “Full are my pitchers and far to carry/Lone is the way and long”.

“Corn-Grinders” brings out the idea that life cannot be divided into categories: all life is one. The life in the mouse is the same as the life in the deer, and the life in the deer is the same as the life in a human being. For Indian peasants the harvest season has paramount importance. The harvest fills their granaries with corn and their pockets with money.

Ode to H. H. the Nizam of Hyderabad – This ode was presented at the Ramzan Darbar to Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, a Prince whom Sarojini esteemed and honoured. The song of princess Zeb-un-Nissa in Praise of her own Beauty- This twelve-line song is remarkable for the picture of beauty it draws. This poem is an example of courtly poetry in the praise of king or patron.

b. **The Bird of Time**: (1912)

Sarojini Naidu’s second collection of poems *The Bird of time* appeared in 1912 with an introduction by Edmund Gosse. The title of the anthology is after its first poem. It is borrowed from Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam:

The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly- and lo! The Bird is on the Wing.

The book is a little bigger than its predecessor both in the number of pages and in the number of poems. It contains forty-six poems which are divided into four sections entitled “Songs of Love and Death,” “Songs of the Springtime,” “Indian Folk-songs” and “Songs of Life.”

‘The Bird of time’, in this poem Sarojini calls herself, figuratively, the Bird of Time. The poem is important in so far as Sarojini indicated the subject-matter of her poetry and the source wherefrom she has learnt the changing measure of her songs.
‘Dirge’, another poem from this volume deals with the widowhood of a fresh, young bride. This sonnet presents a picture of the nocturnal vigil of a wife by the side of her sinking husband. Her eyelids heavy with keeping awake night after night, her soul burdened with the grief of the coming inevitable hour, body tired with tending the invalid, and the devoted wife falls asleep.

‘The Hussain Saagar’ deals with a beautiful lake in Hyderabad. To Sarojini it has a particular appeal. Sunrise and sunset over a lake is always an irresistible sight.

‘Indian Love Song’ presents a conventional love poem with images and with masculine and feminine voices. ‘Suttee’ question about the ambiguous sense of widows and appeals aesthetically to the women’s right.

c.  **The Broken Wing**: (1917)

*The Broken Wing* came out in 1917. It was the last of Sarojini’s books published in her lifetime. It is named, like its predecessor, after its first poem. The poems including in *The Broken Wing* were called by Sarojini “Songs of Love, Death and Destiny”. The title page seems to indicate that all poems were written between 1915 and 1916.

‘The Broken Wing’- In the spring of 1914 both Gokhale and Sarojini happened to be in England. Gokhale paid a visit to Sarojini who was very ill. Gokhale, her mentor ask the question, which was replied by her. Sarojini replies that she will soar up even on a broken wing. This poem is an allegory for Sarojini’s poetic career.

‘The Imam Bara’- Lucknow, the city of palaces and parks, the seat of Shia Muslims, and next only to Allahabad a busy centre of the political activities of the Congress in those days, was visited by the poet many times. Her attachment to this place is reflected in this poem.

‘The Lotus’- Lakshmi, the lotus-born-Durga Puja synchronizes with the harvest season in this poem. In olden days it was celebrated with the women in the villages welcoming the return of the farmers from the fields.

d.  **The Feather of the Dawn (1961):**

This collection was published long after her death by her daughter, Padmaja. The title of this book of poems is taken from a dance by the Denishawn Dancers based on Hopi Indian legend. It is a legend about a feather blown into the air at dawn. It was believed that if such a feather is caught by a breeze and carried out of
sight marks the opening of an auspicious day. This collection includes the ‘poems of Krishna’ and ‘songs of Radha’. Here Sarojini turns from human to divine love. The poems in this collection seem to be mentioning lover’s complaints, pining of lovers, separation of lovers.

**2.3 Analysis of the poems:**

From *The Golden Threshold* (1905):

1. ‘Palanquin-Bearers’:

   ‘Palanquin-Bearers’ is a short poem developed in two stanzas of six lines each and has the rhyme scheme as aa, bb, cc. The poem expresses the joy and pride of palanquin bearers in carrying a bride to her husband’s house with sensing a song in rhythmic harmony and footsteps. The bearer carries the bride with care and considers her as if she is like dew or a tear drop.

   ‘Palanquin-Bearers’ begins with a typical traditional picture of palanquin bearers which deals with common sight of the whole India during the 19th and early 20th century. The poem is in romantic mood. The theme and imagery are fused artistically, which leads poem to a universal appeal. The song sung by the palanquin bearers, narrate the basic human emotions and the mind of the bride is controlled by that song. This poem reveals the Indian reality through folk characters. Palanquin Bearers are depicted as a part of Feudal system of Indian life and they glorify their tradition. The poem rightly brings out one of the facets of the Indian life-the feudal system in India and the Palanquin Bearers as the most natural part of this system. The Palanquin Bearers was one of the sanctioned customs of the contemporary Indian life. Naidu glorifies this custom in a view to reassert the sense of Indian ness and thereby, to develop pride among Indians about the rich heritage of folk culture which was vanishing due to the colonization. The folk characters in the poem glorify their tradition without the least reference to their oppression under this system; Sarojini Naidu composes a folk song out of their reality, in terms which would please the gentry.

   Naidu depicts this common scene in Hyderabad as representing the traditional Indian life. She has a high idealized sense for this life and is least concerned about the toil, sweet and oppression of the Palanquin Bearers. Naidu glorifies this custom is view to reassert the sense of Indianness.
The whole setting of the poem is romantic. We observe the Palanquin Bearers to her husband’s house. The Palanquin Bearers usually sang song in rhythmic harmony with their footsteps. A soft music leaps up in the air as the Palanquin Bearers bear the blooming beauty along. The idealized sense of duty and responsibility of the Palanquin Bearers reveals here as:

Lightly, o lightly, we bear her along,
She always likes a flower in wing of our song
She skims like bird on the foam of streams
She floats like laugh from the lips of a dream
Gaily, o gaily we glide and we sing,

We bear her along like a pearl on a string. (Naidu 1943:3)

They are shown in idealized postures, in effect, celebrating and glorifying their own oppression. Naidu is very much interested in this age-old custom which is part of Indian life and culture, where she locates Indianess with collective identity of India.

The rhythmic movement of the Palanquin Bearers footsteps corresponds with the heartbeats of the bride inside. Excited and instigated, she swings in the dreams of love “like a flower in the wind” in the song of the song of the Palanquin Bearers. The bride is leaving her familiar parental house to join her love in a new home; she is in strange emotional predicament. There is joy and excitement but, also melancholy and anxiety. The poem creates Indian women’s delicate world which is marked with love and excitement as well as pain and curiosity. The Palanquin Bearers, the song and the springy movement all are skillfully fused to create a dream like atmosphere.

In the second stanza the poem moves from the dreamy surfaces of life to its stark realities. From a passive role of a daughter, the bride moves on to the active and responsible role of a wife. The poem beautifully expresses the mixed feeling of an Indian bride who experiences both the pangs of separation as well as hops for new life and happiness. The imager are both abstract and concrete and at the same time appealing.
‘Palanquin Bearers’ is her best known poem in an intricate metrical composition, each line having four feet with three anapests, followed by a shorter iambic foot

According to Dastoor (1961:23), the poem is “a fair specimen of the true folk song.” He further observes that “it recalls a common experience in the India of a century ago, and the song of Palanquin Bearers expresses in its movement the muttered mumblings which dictated the rhythm of their march through the streets”(23)

2. Wandering Singers:

Wandering Singers is a lyric developed in three stanzas of four aa, bb, cc, ddd, ee, ff. In the first stanza wandering singers sing the song. The voice of the wind calls the wandering feet of singers through echoing forest and street with lutes in hands and singing the songs. All men are their relatives and the whole world is their home.

They sing about the cities luster who is lost, laughter and beauty of woman who is dead, sword of old battles and crowns of old kings. They just depend upon their fate. There is no love that compares them to sit in a particular place and no joy can allow them to wait. The voice of wind is the voice of their fate.

‘Wandering Singers’ is a lyric song, in the very tune of the songs of the wandering singers in India. The main theme of the poem is philosophical attitude towards death, life, birth, love, sorrow, passion. The wandering singers sing of past and present and its glory and greatness. The ‘Wandering Singers’ sing about the community life, who wander from one place to another place like wind.

With their musical instruments in their hands, they always keep on singing and wandering ‘walls’ i.e. national, provincial, racial, caste, etc. prejudices do not separate them from their fellowmen. They consider all men to be their brothers, and the entire world to be their home. They are cosmopolitan in their outlook. They believe in the oneness of all men. They are votaries of world brotherhood.

Their themes can be appreciated by all. They sing of cities which have lost the glory which they once enjoyed, for example cities like Chittor or Golconda. They sing of women who have been dead for a long time, such as Jhansi ki Rani or Zeb-ul Nissa. They sing of battles which were fought in the past and of kings and warriors who fought those battles. They are these repositories of custom and tradition who keep alive a local and traditional legend and communicate it to the people. They thus
perform a very useful social function, for it is they who make the common men conscious of their cultural heritage, of the glory and greatness of their past. Through their songs, they assert the cultural and historical continuity of the legacy of the past. Their themes are simple; sometimes they are happy and at other times sorrowful.

The wandering singers have no dream of the future and they have nothing to hope for in this respect they are like Shelley’s skylark which does not ‘look before and after and pine for what is not.’ Just as the skylark keeps on flying higher and higher, so also they wander on and on without any hopes and dreams. They live entirely in the present without any regrets for the past or hopes for the future. The urge to wander is strong in them and they are more along in obedience to the call of the wind. They have no objects of love relation, friends, wives etc. Hence, they do not stop, but wander along singing continuously like so many singing birds. They follow only the path of wind. The society of the wandering singers is an absolutely free society, as free as is possible under the limitations imposed on us by our human condition.

In the ‘face of modernity’, Naidu affirms the Indian identity through wandering singers. Wandering singers belong to the cultural heritage of India and Naidu is not ready to lose this Indian tradition under the threat of modernity.

The poem rightly reveals the search for cultural identity of the Indians. It gives expression to the distinct Indian folk personality, in order to reintegrate the Indians with their rich cultural heritage.

3. **Indian Weavers:**

The poem ‘Indian Weavers’ is developed in three stanzas, in which first stanza has eight lines, with the rhyming scheme of aa, bb, cc, dd and second stanza have, four line with the rhyming scheme of ee, ff.

Naidu portrays the Indian weavers while working. As the poem opens weavers are shown to be weaving, at the break of day, beautiful garment of blue colour for a new born child. The weavers are weaving, in night time, an attractive garment in purple and green colour like the plumes of a peacock, for the marriage veil of a Queen.

Now in the moonlight night a weaver’s attitude is changed, as they are calm and serious, weaving the cloth of white colour like feather and cloud, for the funeral
The present poem ‘Indian Weavers’ expresses major theme of human being’s life cycle in a philosophic manner. It begins with a happy or jolly tone and describes the childhood with its happy days. The second stage of human life is expressed though marriage which suggest the youth as the golden time of life, enjoyable and attractive.

The last stage of human life is old age of person which ends at the death and is serious. Thus the poem expresses universal philosophy of human life which starts from birth and ends at death. Another theme is about the life or works of weavers. It is their fate that from morning to night they have to work, though there is happiness, enjoy, seriousness around. In the poem Naidu has used various images and symbols. Naidu has used birds as an image to show different stages of human being. As in the beginning she describes the wing of a falcon bird related to the happiness of early childhood. The plumes of peacock are referred to the joy of youth, while a feather, which is of no use when it detaches from wing of bird signifies the old age leading to death. Colour imagery is used to refer the various emotions as the blue colour is referred to happiness, green colour is referred to joy and white colour is referred to serious mood.

The search for Indian identity is continued further in the poem. The weavers tradition was a part of social life of India. But due to industrialization, it was losing its colour and strength. Naidu through her poetic discourse has recreated this folk tradition with great reverence.

Weavers constitute the part of the Economic structure of the rural India and after industrialization was launched by the British, this Indian tradition was on the verge of dying. Naidu rightly captures the spirit of this Indian tradition so it naturally manifests in her poem.

Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah (1969:22) is highly impressed by the poem, “the poet here is in full possession of rare gifts – a profound awareness of her own tradition admirable poise, economy and an ear, eye for striking rhythm, image and symbol, all used to fine advantage to make the poem most evocative.”

4. ‘Indian Dancers’:

The spirit of Indianness is displayed in varied colors and contours in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu. She followed the footsteps of Toru Dutt, Aurobindo and Tagore and explored the rich ancient heritage of India and the folk culture of the rural India.
prompted her to distinguish Indian mythology, customs, manners, festivals and thereby to generate pride among colonized Indian and thus to reassert their national identity.

Sarojini Naidu’s aesthetics (Indian aesthetics) is seen clearly in the poem ‘Indian Dancers’. Every sense is reflected through over abundance of lush and over ripe imagery. The orient is painted through extravagant sensuality to create the narcotic or opiate mood. This aesthetics is supported by feudal luxury, which is declining in Naidu’s time.

5. ‘The Pardah Nashin’:

‘The Pardah Nashin’ expresses Naidu’s views about the traditional institutions that restrict the rights of woman. It is developed in three stanzas of six lines each, with the rhyme scheme of ababcc, efefgg.

The poem expresses Naidu’s sense of enchantment for the lavish mode of living of the aristocratic ‘The Pardah Nashin’ Muslim women, with whom she has been familiar. In fact she does not praise the custom of pardah, rather criticizes it.

In the first stanza Naidu talks about the life of a woman in Pardah, as is languid and isolated, fearless, because of pardah. Her girdles and fillets are shining in the pardah like sunset on sea. Her clothing is like a mourning water vapor, shot opal, gold and amethyst.

In the second stanza, Naidu describes protected life of Muslim woman. She is protected from thieving light of impure eyes, from coveting sun or wind. Her days are guarded and secure in her lattices. Her life is as if, a turbaned crest or secrets in a lover’s mind.

In the last stanza Naidu expresses sorrows of Muslim woman living in Pardah nashin. There are no horrid to unsanctioned, unveil the mysteries of her grace. Only time is there to uncover her sorrow, which is seen on her face. At the end Naidu ask questions that who will prevent subtle years of her life and who will protect her life from tears.

In the present poem Sarojini Naidu expresses sorrows and pains of Muslim woman, hidden in the pardah nashin life and which are unknown to the world. Pardah not only hides the freedom of a woman, according to Naidu but rather it binds woman in a miserable life. In the poem Naidu has used stone symbols, such opal, and
amethyst to refer to the beauty of woman hidden in the pardah. The image of mist is referred to her cloths.

The social and reformative zeal is voiced in this poem. It has been widely criticized for its alleged glorification of pardah but the close reading of this poem brings the message that Naidu does not approve the pardah, institution, the ill of contemporary society. She fought against pardah, child marriage and other customs of by-gone age. Hers is a reformative attitude against the institution of pardah. She fought for the plight and wretched condition of the women in her whole life and the spirit behind it is to build strong and progressive India.

The poem depicts living of the aristocratic ‘pardah nashin’ Muslim women with whom she has been familiar and friendly. In fact, she does not praise the custom of pardah; but expresses her anguish and indirectly criticizes it. The reformative zeal clearly asserts when she brings the relevance between the pardah system and education. She has written, ‘All my life I have lived in a Mohammedan region of a country which is regarded as a stronghold of the pardah and I realize what a calamity would follow a premature and total abolition of the system’. She believes that the education will abolish this custom. She reveals; ‘I hold that the crowning triumph of education will be the complete emancipation of Indian womanhood. In the fullness of time, like a splendid and full blown flower, she will emerge from the protecting sheath of her pardah’. The poem opens with the description of beauty and splendor of the pardah nashin. Her world is the world of courtesy and charm in which they with gem-studded ornament remain in state of perpetual relaxation. But the poet’s fascination for the pardah world cannot be taken to imply that she approves of this kind of life for Indian women. She is intensely aware of a world of inner frustration and pain. Her heart is filled with sympathy for such women who are compelled to lead an artificial life of isolation and loneliness. The poet acquaints us with a pathetic condition of such woman:

But though no hand unsanctioned dares
Unveil the mysteries of her graoe,
Time lifts the curtain unawares,
And sorrow looks into her face…
The poem shows just the poet’s fascination for the mysterious pardah world and to be fascinated is not necessarily to approve of it. Thus, Naidu’s anti-pardah attitude has a purpose to sanction freedom to women from social taboos and make them aware about the self-respect.

6. **To India:**

‘To India’ is the first among Sarojini’s patriotic poems. It is an invocation of the Mother recalling her past glory and future promise. It is addressed to mother India to rise from her slumber and open up the prospects for her children, looking at her through prophetic eyes she portrays the ageless India. She exhorts mother India to rise and regenerate from her present gloom and despondency:

> O young through all thy immemorial years!
> Rise, mother, rise regenerate from thy gloom,
> And, like a bride high-mated with the spheres,
> Beget new glories from thine ageless womb!

*(Naidu 1943:58)*

The poem wishes her counts to regain her past glory and prestige and emerge as a tremendous power and show the light of freedom not only to her own children but to the people of different nations suffering under similar conditions.

The poet is fully confident of the bright future of her country. She interprets the period of slavery through which her country is passing as a period of mother’s long slumber. The poet is quite hopeful that soon the mother, who was once a great power, will regain her last glory and be ‘crowned’ with ‘crescent honours, splendours and victories’.

7. **Indian Gipsy:**

Sarojini Naidu’s folk songs are considered as authentic representation of folk spirit of India. In the poem ‘*The Indian Gipsy*’, the spirit of wandering tribe is captured. The poem presents in its three stanzas about the colours and contours of the gipsy life in India. It races the long continuity of the primitive ways of living.

In the first stanza Naidu narrates about the gipsy girl. The tattered robes (dress) of the gipsy girl reflects the secret of glittering trace of her race through bygone colour and which is brodered to her knee. She reflects tameless and bold falcon’s agile grace and tiger’s majesty.
From *The Bird of Time* (1912):

*The Bird of Time* was published in 1912, by William Heinemann, with an introduction by Edmund Gosse. In the present collection Naidu evokes the beauty and oriental glamour. The title of the collection is taken from Omar Khayyam. The collection includes songs of life, death and the spring.

The title poem ‘*The Bird of Time*’, expresses Naidu’s philosophic attitude and sings of joys and sorrows of life that she has learnt from nature and culture. An ‘Indian Love Song’ is another poem which has rich narrative content and the depiction of inter-caste and inter-religious romance. The poem leads to the theme of love. ‘A Rajput Love Song’ is a finest example of Naidu’s love poetry. The poem presents stylized use of convention in poetry, of costume, appropriate imagery. In all these three poems poet has created masculine and feminine types with appropriate gestures, clothes, accessories and speech patterns. ‘Dirge’ is a sati poem which explores the life of widows as if dead, as they are denied to use jewellery. She depicts the pathetic and sorrowful life of widow. She is aesthetically appealing as a champion of women’s rights in this poem.

‘A Song in Spring’ is again reflection of Naidu’s interest in nature. This poem on spring appears to draw on Kalidasa and on Indian tradition of love poetry. ‘Vasant Panchami’ is about the spring festival deliberately introduced with a combination of note of grief and joy both. This is typical of Sarojini who believes that life is a balance of opposites. ‘In a Time of Flowers’ expresses Sarojini Naidu’s earth-bound passionate romanticism. The poem ‘In Praise of Gulmohur Blossoms’, sings about local flower in order to nativise Indian English poetry.

‘Village Songs’ is another folk song about Indian myths. It represents problems of Gopi from Mathura delayed on her way back from the river. ‘Hussain Sagar’ is a poem about the famous lake of Hyderabad city, which becomes an object of love. Naidu identifies her poetic allegiance with the lake which is for her a poetic inspiration. In the poem ‘To Faery Isle of Janjira’, Naidu represents exotic and remote location leading to the history.

‘The Old Woman’ is one of the finest poems by Naidu which evokes Karuna rasa. It describes the condition of an old woman. At first she was woman and mother, but in her old age she starts to beg on the street. The poem is a realistic portrayal of an old woman.
‘An Anthem of Love’ is a sincere expression of the poet’s deep love and divine duty towards her land. She experiences an intense patriotic urge and surrenders whole-heartedly to the cause of freedom she is willing to undertake any amount of strain or do any degree of sacrifice.

Two hands are we to serve thee, o our mother
To strive and succour, cherish and unite;
Two feet are to cleave the waning darkness
And again the pathways of the dawning light

Here, deep love for her motherland attains the intensity of the love of a devotee. In the last stanza, poet’s unflinching faith and unwavering devotion towards the goal of freedom is revealed. Here is an ‘undivided indivisible soul’-

Bound by one hope, one purpose, one devotion
Towards a great, divinely-destined goal

The poem is appealing with its depth of passion and sincerity of tone. Here, the urge of patriotism defines the spirit of nationalism.

From The Broken Wing:

1. ‘The Gift of India’:

‘The Gift of India’ is a noble tribute to the brave sons of India. It is highly sensitive tribute to the Indian soldiers who sacrificed their lives during the First World War. The boundless grief of Mother India for her heroic sons, who were killed in alien lands, is poignantly expressed.

Is there aught you need that my hands with hold.
Rich gifts of raiment or grain or gold?
Lo! I have flung to the Eastard west
priceless treasures torn from my breast,
And yielded the sons of my stricken womb
To the drum-beats of duty, the sabers of doom.
The poet is ever haunted by the great sacrifice India made in the first world war and wants to remind the world of the blood of the ‘Martyred sons’ of India. A strong note of protest against the imperialists is implicit in the poem.

2. ‘Lotus’:

‘Lotus’ is a sonnet dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation. If Gokhale initiated Sarojini to the path of politics, it was Mahatma Gandhi who gave her direction. The poem highlights Mahatma’s virtues and the spiritual height he attained during his lifetime. Sarojini expresses her deep admiration for him.

O mystic Lotus, sacred and sublime,
In myriad-petalled grace inviolate,
Supreme O’er transient storms of tragic Fate,
Deep-rooted in the waters of all Time.

Mahatma is being compared to ‘Lotus’ the national flower of India, which stands in Indian literature and mythology for beauty, purity and sanctity. He is a superb soul that remains unruffled by “transient storms of tragic fate.” He is lotus, in the true sense of the term, for he can withstand the pressure of the most uncongenial circumstances.

Mahatma attained ‘an ageless beauty’,
A spiritual height difficult to attain,
But who could win the secret, who attain
Thine ageless beauty bloom of Brahma’s breath,
On pluck thine immortality, who art
Coeval with the Lord’s of Life and Death?

Many poems have been written in different languages to eulogies Mahatma, but this poem stands out as unique, for it reveals beautifully the spiritual aspect of his personality.

Sarojini has been fascinated by the diversity of India’s religions and has tried to understand each of them with sympathy and love. In most of her patriotic songs which are in the form of prayers to mother India, she expressed her belief in all faith
living together and through their acts of love and sacrifice building up a new image of united India. Rajyalakshmi (1977:175) observes; “Her nationalism is not a confined, restrictive fervor” of provincial feeling, but open creative and dynamic humanism born of universal feeling.

From *The Feather of The Dawn*:

1. ‘Ghanashyam’:

Sarojini Naidu has expressed the Hindu religious ethos in all its varieties through the treatment of Radha-Krishna legend the myth of Radha-Krishna love, the milk made symbolizes the yearning for the infinite.

In ‘Ghanashyam’ the poet sings the glory of Lord Krishna, the Divine flute – player of Brindaban. His sweet music takes every human heart away from mortal grief and attachments he is worshiped in different forms. In the present poem the poet praises lord Krishana who gives the colors to mountains, laughter’s to snow-fed fountains, beauty and blackness of his hair to the storm’s unbridled tresses her prayer to Krishna is:

\[
O \text{ take my yearning soul for thine oblation} \\
\text{Life of all myriad lives that dwell in thee.}
\]

Lord Krishna gives the healing breath to the forest pines. He scatters the joy of his caresses upon the limpid air. The poet begs him to do a favour. She wishes to be lost in his waves of ecstasy. She says;

\[
\text{Let me be lost, a lamp of adoration,} \\
\text{In thine unfathomed waves of ecstasy.}
\]

The poet attempts to brings the rich tradition of Krishna poetry into Indian English. Here we find Sarojini turning from human to divine love.

2.4 Thematic Concerns of Sarojini Naidu:

Naidu, in order to counter the western influence, prompted the native Indian colors and folk culture in her poetry. She witnessed the rustic life vanishing before her eyes which the west had already lost and now pined for it. She felt compelled to capture it in poetry and song, because she probably longed for it herself. All these factors contributed to her attempt at offering to Indians a picture themselves which
they might be proud of something that salvages some of their crippled self-respect as a colonized and humiliated people. Thus Naidu, through her poetry, established the collective and all comprehensive identity of India.

The spirit of Indianness gets acute expression in her folk poetry. The folk theme is the major preoccupation in her poetry. She is able to capture all qualities of traditional folk poetry. Through her folk poetry, she portrays the common life around her, of which she had experienced at first hand, with its setting, events, people and their occupation. In this way, she identifies herself with the life of community, with folk culture and wisdom which is age-old as it has been transmitted to countless generation. Thus, the celebration of folk-life, folk-festivals, folk-culture, folk-religions and folk-characters is extensively seen in Naidu’s folk poetry. Naidu’s poems are about India whose life have been permeated through and through by the impact of others cultures.

Myths and legends also play an important role in the poetry of Naidu. Moreover, they rightly provide background to a number of Sarojini’s folk-songs. Her preoccupation with Indian myths and legends is basically to strengthen the religious and cultural continuity of the ancient past and thereby affirm the national identity of Indians. As she hails from Hyderabad, the Hyderabad landscape figures in her poetry. The local colors and subjects through the hands of Naidu become national.

Sarojini’s poems can be broadly categories based on her themes as follows:


1. Nature Poems: the poet was susceptible to lovely natural scenes and sights and bright catching colours. The spring, the fresh flowers, the hills and the mountains, the lakes and fountains, all touched her imagination. She gives her moods to Nature. She wrote many poems abounding in natural descriptions such as ‘spring,’ ‘in a time of flowers’ etc.

2. Sarojini’s love poems have the touch of her personal experiences. It reflects her varying moods and feelings. In her poems we witness separation and union of love, despair, enjoy. ‘An Indian love song,’ ‘The Temple,’ ‘A Rajput love song’ are her remarkable love poems.
3. Poems of life and death: She wrote many poems on the problems of life and death. She had experienced the ups and downs in life and wanted to get at the mystery of life and death. She was overpowered by the feelings of fear, pain and death. ‘The Bird of Time’ and ‘Dirge’ reflects these feelings.

4. Poems of the Indian Scene: Several poems of Sarojini Naidu are centred round the Indian scene. Majority of her poems are folk songs depicting Indian culture. Some of her poems are based on the common sights of India and lives of common people. ‘Palanquin Bearers,’ ‘Corn Grinders,’ ‘Village Song’ are some of the remarkable poems reflecting Indian traditions and culture.

2.5 Symbols and Images:


2.6 Glossary and Notes:

- **Minstrels**: a medieval singer or musician, especially one who sang or recited lyric or heroic poetry to a musical accompaniment for the nobility
- **Palanquin**: a covered litter for one passenger, consisting of a large box carried on two horizontal poles by four or six bearers
- **Picturesque**: visually attractive, especially in a quaint or charming way
- **Paramount**: more important than anything else; supreme
- **Nocturnal**: active at night
- **Auspicious**: conducive to success; favourable
- **Aesthetics**: a set of principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty
- **Emancipation**: the fact or process of being set free from legal, social, or political restrictions
- **Manifestation**: an event, action, or object that clearly shows or embodies something abstract or theoretical
Oppression: prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of authority
Colonialism: The term is important in defining the specific form of cultural exploitation which developed with the expansion of Europe. It is in relation to the study of economic, cultural and social hierarchies. In context of India, Britishers were the colonizers and Indians were colonized.

B) Check your progress:
Q.1 What is the rhyme scheme of ‘Palanquin Bearers’? (aa, bb, cc)
Q.2 What is the theme of ‘The Pardah Nashin’? (traditional Pardah System that restrict the rights of woman)
Q.3 What is the setting for ‘Village Song’? (Indian Country Side)
Q.4 What is the subject matter of ‘Indian Weaver’? (Man’s birth, life and death)
Q.5 What is the source of the title ‘The Feather of the Dawn’? (Dance of Denishawn Dancers)
Q.6 What does the title of ‘Broken Wing’ signify? (Sarojini’s declining poetic career)
Q.7 What is the theme of ‘Dirge’? (Widowhood)

2.7 Key to check your progress:
A) 1. In Hyderabad
   2. The Golden Threshold
   3. In 1912
   4. Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya
   5. The Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity

B) 1. aa, bb, cc
   2. traditional Pardah System that restrict the rights of woman
   3. Indian Country Side
   4. Man’s birth, life and death
   5. Dance of Denishawn Dancers
   6. Sarojini’s declining poetic career
   7. Widowhood
2.8 Exercises:
1. Write a brief note on the major themes of Sarojini Naidu’s poetry.
2. Discuss Sarojini Naidu as a lyric poet with reference to the poems which you have studied.
3. Attempt a brief note on Sarojini Naidu’s poetic achievement.
4. “Sarojini Naidu is a poet of passion.” Elaborate.
5. Attempt a brief essay on the patriotic elements in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry.

2.9 Text and Reference Books:
3.0 Objectives

In this unit you will be able to -

• Study the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore to the Indian English poetry.
• Understand aspects of Tagore’s poetic works in general.
• Comment on themes, spiritual and ethical, expressed by Tagore in his early poetry.
• Study style and technique of the poems written by Tagore.
• Examine the aspects of Indian life and culture presented by Tagore in his early poetry.

3.1 Introduction:

Friends, it is difficult to summaries this unit & the achievements of Rabindranath Tagore, whose genius wandered over all fine arts, literature being one. Winning Nobel Prize for his poetry, he brought India on the map of the world literature. In this unit, you are going to study a small volume of his early poems, the earlier than Gitanjali.
Rabindranth Tagore (1861–1941) was born on 6th May 1861, in the family of Tagores of Jorasanko in Calcutta. He was the youngest of the seven sons of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore. His father Debendranath exerted great influence on him. Devendranath was deeply religious, but at the same time he had aesthetic sensitiveness and sound judgment in practical affairs. Devendranath allowed his children freedom to develop their own talent.

Rabindranath attended four schools in Calcutta and hated all of them. Rabindranath’s elder brothers and one of his sisters supervised his training. A medical student came to teach him anatomy and physiology. Then he was given lessons in Mathematics. There were teachers to teach Bengali and Sanskrit; and English; for drawing and even gymnastics. At the fourteen, he had translated Macbeth in Bengali. His reading was extensive even at that age. He read classics of Bengali, Sanskrit and English, alone with books on History, social and natural Sciences, etc. Though Rabindranath had no formal training in school, he had excellent training at home.

3.2.1 His works:

He started writing verse composition at the age of nine. He went to visit Himalayan region along with his father. The grandeur and sublimity of Himalayas greatly influenced him. In England he was enrolled at the university, where he attended lectures of Henry Morley, who taught English literature. He greatly admired Morley and found his lectures stimulating. The only advantage of his stay in England was that he had an opportunity to study western culture. He acquired deeper insight into English poetry; and also developed interest in western music.

On coming back from England, he wrote his first play in Bengali, Bhagna Hridaya (Broken Heart), most of it was poetry with a very slender love story. He published his first poetry collection Sandhya Sangit in 1882, which was welcomed as an important literary event in Bengal. It was followed by Prabhat Sangit in 1883. Chabi O Gan (Pictures and Songs) in 1884 and Kadi O Komal in 1886 (Sharps and Flats).

The second phase of his poetic career is marked by the publication of Manasi (1890), Sonar Tari (The Golden Boat), and Citra (1896) Manasi opens with a series of love poems in continuation of Kadi O Komal; Sonar Tari poems deal with the world of dreams. In the year 1901, Tagore published a collection of religions
poems Naivedya, in which there is a poem ‘Shatrabdir Surya’ greeting the New Year. His poetic collection Chaitali (1896) has poems with Romantic imagination, extensity discontent with the present, and escape into the golden past. In 1910, Tagore published Gitanjali, and in 1912 this volume translated and published in England. Six poems out of Gitanjali collection were published in the poetry magazine of Chicago. In 1913 his Gitananjali was awarded Nobel Prize.

Rabindranath’s collections of poetry such as Chitra, Chaitali, Katha, Kahani, Kalpana deal with a great variety of themes and moods. In Chitra, there are important poems like Jivan Devata, which appeal to the In-dweller (Antaryami). There is also an urge for the involvement in practical life as well as glorification of the life on the earth, as in Swarga Haste Biday (Farewell to Heaven). Chaitali collection presents poems that celebrate nature and simple life around. In Katha and Kahani there are poems which show the poet’s interest in episodes of Hindu epics and Indian History, especially the tales of Rajput, Maratha and Sikh heroism.

In his poetic collection Kheya, (Ferrying Across), there are poems which express Rabindrnatha’s yearning for coming face to face with the Divine, and consciousness of the distance yet to be traversed. Gitanjali poems appear to be the continuation of Kheya. Most of the Gitanjali poems are about the sweet sorrow of separation, the offerings to the deity that still eludes him.

Apart from a variety of poetry collections, Rabindranath wrote plays, novels and short-stories. His first play, Chitrangada, was full of lyricism. He published more than forty plays. He and criticized for introducing all sorts of characters without any function; for ignoring logical sequence, and using mystical expressions. Dakghar, Falguni, Rakta-karabi, Chandalika, are some of his remarkable plays. He was quite a story-teller. His novels Chokher Bali and Nauka Dubi have been filmed. His greatest novel has been Gora, which deals with the theme of patriotism. In his novel, Chaturanga, he explores psychological analysis of human nature. He wrote short stories, which are realistic and close to life. Unlike his novels his short-stories avoid superfluity of characters and episodes. They are rather compact. Besides all these literary achievements, Rabindranath was an artist, a poet and a musician.

3.2 The Gardener (1913) : Paraphrase of the poems

The collection of poems, The Gardener, published in (1913), contains 85 small poems, selected by Tagore from his yet earlier works like Kshanika (1900), Kadi O
Komal (1886), Manushi (1890) and Mayor Khela (1889). According to Tagore, these poems are realistic, simple, treating mundane life, and love is the main motif in them. All these small pieces have a common name The Gardener. It would not be possible to print all these poems in this unit. However, we shall try to give you a comprehensive summary of them, arranging them theme-wise, to give you a fair impression of the lyrical genius of Ravindranath Tagore.

The title of this collection, ‘The Gardener’, does not appear to be a well-chosen title. Does it suggest a divine presence? The first poem in this collection is a dialogue between the Queen and the servant. The servant appeals to the Queen to let him be her gardener. He would keep the grass fresh, there would be flowers at her feet-eager for death under her feet. He promises to swing her in a swing. He would burn a lamp with scented oil in it and decorate the foot-stool she uses with the paste of sandal and saffron designs. For his reward, he would like her permission to put flowers strings on her wrists and put red juice of Ashoka petals on the soles of her feet. With the promise of this service the Queen retains the speaker-gardener to do his job. The relation between the Queen and the poet here is that of the devotee and the goddess. He is the KarmaYogi, whose reward is his work.

The title of this collection may, therefore, be suggested by the first poem in it.

In the second piece, the poet, gone a little grey win age, refuses to think of the afterlife. He feels that he must serve his fellow men. He would like to express passionate love of the young hearts. He would like to ‘whisper the secrets of life’ into the ears of the wanderer. There are all kinds of people who need the poet; sweet, simple people, people with sly twinkle in their eyes, some who do not hide the tears welling up in their eyes, and some who hide their tears in the darkness. The poet says, he is the youngest and the oldest in the village, and refused to think of death.

3.3 Love Poems (Poem Nos. 3, 9)

3. The speaker went to the sea and cast a net into it. He caught in the net strange and beautiful things, some brightly shining, and some glistening like tears, and some like a bride’s flushed cheeks. He placed all these offerings before his beloved. She looked at them, and remarked, what use are these strange things? The speaker bowed his head in shame. He had not fought for these things, nor did he buy them in the market, not fit to be the gifts for her. He threw all these one be one into the street. The travellers carried them way in to morning to sell them in the far off countries.
(The lady in this poem is, by convention, a cruel, naughty lady, a difficult to please. And the speaker is her real devotee, who blames himself for not working hard. The lady in the poem does not have aesthetic sense for the things be brought from the bottom of the sea. But, the travellers took them to the market in other countries.)

9. **Love – tryst:**

The speaker in the poem is a lady. When she goes to meet her lover at night, there is silence everywhere. Birds do not sing and the wind does rustle the leaves of the trees. The houses on both sides are silent. There is the sound of her own anklets, which jingle as she walks. She feels ashamed.

She says: “When I sit on the balcony and listen to his foot-steps, there is no sound of leaves rustling. The water in the river is still like the sword on the knees of a sentry fallen asleep.

Only my heart beats wildly. I do not know how to stop it”.

She describes her meeting with her love: “When my love comes and sits by my side, when my body trembles and my eyelids drop—”

The nature helps lovers in their meeting.

“‘The night darkens, the wind blows out the lamp and the clouds draw veils over the stars.” So that no one can see them. She cannot hide ‘the jewel at her breast’ that shines. This jewel is metaphorical reference to her love for him.

(Quite a few of love poems here, and even in other collections of Tagore’s poetry, are amorous poems, sometimes very boldly describes physical aspects of love.

The love in this tryst is a clandestine love. It is a secret that must be hidden. Even the sound of her anklets makes her feel ashamed and frightened because she might be discovered. There is graphic description of the effect of the lover coming to meet her. The nature also is sympathetic to the lovers.)

12. **Come to the Lake:**

In this poem, the Speaker is the man, the lover. He is inviting his beloved to his lake to fill the pitcher. Carrying water is, of course an excuse for the meeting. He says:
“The water will cling round your feet and babble its secret.” The sky is darkened by the rain clouds which are on the top of the trees, like ‘heavy hair above her eyebrows’. He is very familiar with the rhythm of her footsteps, as ‘they are beating in my heart’, he says. It mans he is eagerly waiting for her to come, his heart beating with expectation.

She can come even if she has no need to carry water. She could come and allow her pitcher to float on water. He describes that the scene is inviting.

“The grassy slope is green and the wild flowers beyond number. Your thoughts will stray out of your dark eyes like birds from their nests.” As a result her veil will drop to her feet. This invitation goes further, he invites her to dive in the water, leaving her ‘blue mantle’, her clothes on the shore, because the blue water will cover you and hide you’.

The waves enact the lover. They would stand ‘a –tiptoe’ to kiss her neck and whisper in her ears. This is what the lover would like to do. The last part of the poem is very strange. The lover says, if she is mad she could ‘leap to her death’ into his ‘fathomless lake’, which is ‘dark like a sleep that is dreamless.’ There, in the depth of the lake ‘nights and days are one and songs are silence’.

16. Record of our heart-

The speaker in the poem describes his and the lady’s love in the moonlit night of March.

“Hands cling to hands and eyes linger on eyes: thus begins the record of our hearts.”

The atmosphere is quite romantic:

“___the sweet smell of henna is in the air; my flute lies on the earth neglected, and your garland of flowers is unfinished.”

The speaker describes this love ‘simple as a song’.

This is refrain in the poem.

“Your veil of the saffron color makes my eyes drunk.

The Jasmine Wreath that you wove me thrills to my heart like paradise.
It is a game of giving and with holding, revealing and screening again; some smiles and some little shyness, and some useless struggles”

This is pure and simple the physical aspect of love. There is no mystery, no struggling to achieve something impossible. The charming love between them is without any shadow. These lovers do not indulge in wordy debates to grow into silence later. Nor do they expect things beyond hope. They are happy with ‘giving and getting’. They do not want ‘to crush the joy to the utmost’. So that it would cause pain. They wish to keep the love between them simple as a song.

This love poem appears to be an objective lesson for the lovers, who try to expect too much and come to grief.

17. Ranjana –

In this love poem, the speaker and the girl, Ranjana, live in the same village, which he says ‘our one piece of joy’. The girl is in the neighborhood. He says:

“The yellow bird sings in its tree and makes my heart dance with gladness.”

Her pair of pet lambs come to graze in the shade of his garden trees. If the lambs stray in his barely field, he takes them up in his arms, perhaps to give them back to the girl.

The names of the village, the river and the girl are in a good rhyme – Khanjana (the village), Anjana (the river) and Ranjana, the girl. There is a close relationship between their fields. Bees from his grove gather honey in her field. Flowers from the girl’s landing-stairs come floating by the stream where he bathes. The dried Kusm flowers from the girl’s garden come to his market.

The lane that goes to her house is fragrant with mango-blossom in the Spring. When the linseed crop is ripe in her field, the hemp it in bloom in his field.

The stars shine on her cottage and give ‘twinkling look’ to him and his people. In the rains, her tanks are flooded, watering his Kadam forest.

Thus there is a close relationship between the two houses or rather between the two young ones. The speaker does not give his name. It is known to all, he says.

18. Two sisters - This is not written in the first person. The narrator calls himself ‘somebody’. But, we know he is that somebody.
This poem expresses unspoken love. The two sisters go to fetch water. They know that behind the trees at one spot. Someone stands and watches them. They whisper to each other as they pass the spot. They are quite aware of the secret watcher. On the way back, their water-filled pitchers suddenly lurch at this stop spilling the water. The watcher’s heart is beating, they knew it. They look at each other and smile. They step up swiftly, and their laughter creates confusion in the mind of the secret watcher.

19. A Girl passing by with a full pitcher –

The speaker addresses the girl who passes by with the full pitcher upon her hip. This is again a poem of unspoken love of the girl in the poem. The speaker is aware of his own love for her. But she is an enigma for him, so there are questions in the poem.

The speaker asks her, ‘why did you swiftly turn your face and peep at me through your fluttering veil?’ This ‘peeping’, ‘swiftly turning’ her face and the veil ‘fluttering’ are the sings of the girl’s unspoken love for the speaker.

The speaker describes the effect of her look on him. “That gleaming look from the dark came upon me like a breeze that sends a shiver through the rippling water and sweeps away to the shadow shore."

Another image the speaker uses is that of a bird. Her gleaming look;

“----came to me like the bird of the evening that hurriedly flies across the lampless room from one open window to the other, and disappears in the night."

For him, she is ‘like a star behind the hills’, while he is just a passerby. But, there is still a question in his mind:

“But why did you stop for a moment and glance at my face through your veil while you walked by the riverside path...?"

The questions have not answer in the poem. But, the speaker is aware of the unspoken love in the mind of the girl.

20. Day after day he comes and goes away:

This is another poem of unspoken love. The girl is aware of a mysterious man, (a lover?) who comes and goes away without saying anything. But she is evidently attracted towards him. She requests her friend:
“Go, and give him a flower from my hair, my friend.” But she requests her not to tell him her name, who sent the flower. She even tells her friend:

“Spread there a seat with flowers and leaves, my friend” because he sits on the dust.

He looks sad, and this makes her heart sad too. He does not speak his mind.

The speaker ‘girl’ is disturbed. She does have feeling for the mysterious stranger, who just comes and goes away saying nothing.

21. The wandering youth

The wandering youth comes to the door of the girl. She is the speaker in the poem. Whenever she goes out and comes in she cannot help looking at him.

In the Autumn season, in July, when the sky is soft blue, there is the south wind blowing making the Spring time restless. The young man sings with fresh tunes, which influences her as she is working. Her eyes fill with the mist.

This again is the poem of unspoken love.

22. The girl jingling her bracelets -

The speaker is intrigued by the girl who comes to fill her pitcher; but- indulges in idle sport, sitting there and jingling her bracelets.

He asks her, “why do you stir the water with your hands and fitfully glance at the road for someone in mere idle sport?”

The speaker says, “fill your pitcher and come home.” The speaker here must be someone from her houses, some elderly person like the girl, the nature is also indulging in idle sport. The waves laugh and whisper to each other.

The wandering clouds gathering at the edge of the sky, also linger to look at her and smile. They too are indulging in idle sport.

But this is evidently not an idle sport for the girls. She is in love and waiting for somebody.

23. Unspoken love is difficult to express. In this poem the speaker (must be the lover) urges the girl to speak to him the secret of her heart.
He promises that his heart will hear her secret not his ears. He describes the atmosphere:

“The night is deep, the house is silent, the birds’ nests are shrouded with sleep.”

He urges her to speak to him, “through hesitating tears, through faltering smiles, through sweet shame and pain,”

All these – the hesitating tears – are the symptoms of the girl in love, who cannot open her heart on account of her mixed feelings like happiness (smile), shame (but sweet) and pain.

This is a very graphic description of the condition of a girl in love, who cannot speak out.

26. A Mendicant ---

The poem is a dialogue between a mendicant (beggar) and the girl. The mendicant is not an ordinary beggar. This is the beggar that begs for love. He says to the girl. “What comes from your willing hand I take. I beg for nothing more.”

The girl acknowledges the modesty of the mendicant. He further pushes his demand; “If there be a stray flower for me, I will wear it in my heart.” But the girl reports, “But if there be thorns?” The beggar says he would endure them.

He presses his demand and says.

“If but once you should raise your loving eyes to my face, if would make my life sweet beyond death.”

The cruel lady says, “But if there be cruel glances?” The begging lover is ready for this also. He says he would keep those glances piercing his heart.

There is a refrain at every stanza: “Yes, yes, I know modest – mendicant, you ask for all that one has.”

2.4 Nature of Love:

The speaker in 27 tries to explain what (True) love is. Love, even if it brings sorrow, you should not close your heart. The heart is to be given away. You may have to shed tears, but you have to give it away with a song. The poet contrasts pleasure and sorrow (in love). Pleasure is like a dewdrop, frail, vanishing. But sorrow
(in love) is strong and abiding. He uses another image to explain the nature of love. It is like lotus that blooms in the sight of the sun.

But the friend whom he addresses this philosophy of love cannot understand it.

In 28 also, the speaker is evidently a man. He is telling the lady:

“\textit{I have bared my life before your eyes from end to end, with nothing hidden or held back. That is why you know me not.}”

This is a paradox. He ravens the whole of his life yet she does not know him. He says, his heart is not like a gem which he ‘could break into a hundred pieces and string them into a chain’ for her neck; nor is it a ‘flower, round and small and sweet’ which he could put it in her hair. The heart has no shores and no bottom. There are no limits to the kingdom of heart. She does not know it, but she is the queen of his heart.

His love is not ‘a moment of pleasure’ which can be expressed as a smile. It is not merely a pain to be expressed in tears. But it is love, the pleasure and pain of the love is boundless. Its needs and its wealth are endless. You can never fully know it though it is near you.

\textbf{29. \textit{Speak to me, my love}}:

The speaker here is a lady who urges her lover to speak to her and confess his secrets. It is the time of dark night. Even the stars are behind the clouds. The wind is sighing through the leaves. Dark night, sighing wind, darkened sky suggest the love-lorn state of mind of the lover. The lady promises to present herself in her most enticing manner.

\textit{“I will let loose my hair. My blue cloak will cling round me like night. I will clasp your head to my bosom; and there in the sweet loneliness murmur on your heart. I will shut my eyes and listen. I will not look in your face.”}

This promise will create confidence in the lover to come out with the secret of his heart. After his confession, they would sit still without speaking. Only the trees will whisper. After the day-break, he and she will look at each other’s eyes and go on their different paths.
30. You are the evening cloud……

The speaker is a man. This poem is in praise of the lady, and claiming her to be his own. There are a number of images used in it.

The lady is ‘the evening cloud’ floating in the sky of my dreams. She is the ‘dweller in (his) endless dreams’. Her feet are rosy-red. How? The glow of his hearts desire made them rosy. The lady is ‘the gleaner of his sun-set songs’. His wine of pain has made her lips bitter-sweet. Her eyes are dark on account of his shadow of his passion. And he has covered and captured her in the net of his music.

This love-poem is the poem of possession. It is a statement rather than an appeal.

31. My Heart, the bird of wilderness----

Like the poem of No.30, this poem is also a statement of love; which turns into an appeal in the last two lines.

The speaker (the lover) uses the metaphor of bird soaring in the sky of her eyes. The metaphor of the sky is further extended. “They (the eyes) are the cradle of the morning, they are the kingdom of the starts.” His songs of love are lost in the depth of those eyes.

He then appeals to the lady to let him ‘soar in that sky’. The sky of her eyes is lonely and they are immense. ‘Lonely’ suggests that the lover has no competitor there. The ‘bird’ metaphor continues in the last line. He (the bird) would like to cut beyond the clouds and ‘spread wings in the sun-shine’ of her love.

32. Tell me if this be true---

This is a very interesting piece of a love-poem in which the poet is indirectly satirizing the exaggerations in the love poems; the lover is heaping up tall praises of his lady describing her beauty and his love for her.

The lady in this poem questions the lover if everything he, says about her is true. The lover claims that there is storm in his breast when her eyes flash like lighting. Her lips are sweet-like ‘opening buds of the first conscious love.’ When she walks, the earth ‘like a harp, shivers into songs’ at the touch of her feet. The night drops dew-drops on seeing her, and morning light is happy to wrap young her body. His love traveled through ages and all over the world in search of her. And he
experienced utter peace on finding her. That the mystery of the universe is written on her forehead.

All these tall, exaggerated praises are the conventional expressions in love-poetry. The lady in the poem is, perhaps, indirectly criticising the sincerity of the lover.

33. I love you, beloved-

In this poem there are two states of love that the poet describes. The speaker, the lover, asks the lady to forgive him for his love. He uses the simile of a bird that has lost its way and is caught (in the net of her love). His heart is necked, which he requests her, to cover with her pity.

Suppose, she does not love him, he would go to his corner, cover his face with both hands, and he asks her to forgive his pain.

Otherwise, if his love is granted, he asks her to forgive his joy. There would be an uncontrolled expression of it, which she may not like.

The last stanza is very interesting. When the love is granted, he would sit on his throne (as a husband), and rule her with the tyranny of his love. He would grant her his favour. He asks her ‘to bear’ (not to forgive) his pride.

The language of the lover changes after the lady surrenders to his love. He is then a tyrannous king. The poem No. 32 and this one appear to be satirical. In poem No.32, the poet appears to satirize conventional language of expressing love, and in 33 the last stanza is spoken by the husband not by the lover.

34. In this poem the same tyrannous husband is telling his love (wife?) not to go away without his permission. He has watched (guarded?) her all night. He is afraid he might lost her.

He evidently does not trust her. He thinks it is a dream that she is there near him. It suggests that the lady does not love him, why otherwise he should be so anxious of her leaving?’

35. The artful lady---

In this poem again, the speaker (the lover) is conscious of his lady deliberately hiding her feelings.
She flashes her smiles to hide her tears. She never speaks out what she would like to say.

He thinks, she purposefully avoids him because if she is easily around him, he would no value her. She deliberately stands aside not to be counted as one of the crowd.

The lover knows that her wings are different. Her claim (on him?) is more than anyone else’s she knows this and that is why she is silent. She playfully avoids his gifts. Thus is her style to show that she is not easy to please.

36. **Why does he not come back--?**

This is the last line of this love poem. It is a climax of he little love story, in which the lady keeps rejecting his (the lover’s) advances. And finally he goes away taking with him the garland from her neck.

Now the lady repents and weeps : why does he not come back?

37. **My heart is given to many----**

The speaker (the lover) in this poem is a regular Don Juan or Casanova, who has squandered his heart (his love) far and wide. He cannot give his heart in return, he tells the lady. She can put the wreath of her fresh flowers on his neck, but the wreath he has woven is for many. He may have seen them only in glimpses or may be they are described in songs.

His heart is no more his to be given to only one. (He is at least honest. The wreath of fresh flowers in the expression of the lady’s love for him. But the wreath he weaves is not love for any one particular).

38. **Love – compensation for the loss---**

The speaker that he as a poet, had thought of a great epic in his mind. But his epic clashed against her anklets), and it the epic) was broken into pieces, scattered at her feet. All his stories of war were tossed on the waves of laughter and sank into the sea.

Now the lover wants her to make good his loss. He seeks compensation for this ‘cargo of his songs. He had a dream of becoming immortal with the help of his songs. But this dream is shattered by her. Now he wants her to make him immortal (by her love). And he would not mourn for his loss.
39.  I try to weave a wreath——

The speaker is the lady. She is trying to weave a wreath of flowers all morning. But her lover (is he the husband? Not clear from the poem) is watching her through the corner of his eyes. This upsets her and the flowers slip and dropout. She accuses him that his eyes are planning mischief and it is their mischief.

She tries to sing a song. But he tries to hide his smile, and she fails (i.e. she cannot sing). She tells him that his smiling lips should say on oath how she lost her voice. The poet uses a beautiful simile here. She loses her smile like a bee drunk on the honey from the lotus. (Honey here is, of course, the love between them). Finally she asks him to let her sit by his side, and allow her lips to do their work in silence in the dim light of the evening stars.

40.  Love: taking leave –

Poem No.39 and this one could be a celebration of married love.

In this poem, the lover (must be the husband) takes his leave to go away. She smiles with disbelief, because she knows his ways. He would soon return. He also knows it. His excuses are that spring season comes again and again. The full moon also takes leave but comes back again. The flowers also come again. Naturally, he also comes back.

But, he entreats her to keep this illusion of his going and not laugh it away.

When he says he is leaving her forever, she should accept it as true. And she should then allow her eyes to become misty with tears. He is, of course, coming back. And then she can smile archly, as if teasing him, ‘I knew you would come back,’ she could say.

Perhaps in ‘The tears of her eyes’ he seeks confirmation of love.

41.  Love : disguising the real feeling

In this love poem, the lover is afraid of expressing his love because he is afraid that the lady may just laugh at him and would not take him seriously.

He then laughs at himself and jokes about his own love. He feels pain, but-talks lightly about it for fear that she might treat it lightly.
He longs to tell her ‘the truest words’ but he is afraid that she would not believe him. So he tells lies hiding the truth saying things which are opposite. His pain he shows to be absurd because she might call it so. He would like to use the most precious words, for her, but he is not sure she would say the same about him. He pretends to be callous, calls her by hard names. He deliberately hurts her so that she should not know any pain. He goes on talking, chattering because he is afraid that he might express what is in his heart and she may rudely treat him.

He would like to go away from her, but then she would know that he is coward so he shows himself to be brave and careless.

In brief, the lover is making a show to hide his real feelings because he is afraid of being rudely treated.

44. Two Lovers – immortals for a few hours.

The speaker tells the priest that his lessons are lost in the strong wind of the spring season. He and his lady love have made an agreement with death, that for a few fragrant hours of the spring they are two immortals. Death cannot touch them.

The lovers would tell the King’s men to go away and play their war games somewhere else.

If friendly people come, the lovers would tell them to go away because in their infinite sky, there is no room for them, because there are crowds of spring-time flowers and busy bees crowding each other. In this little heaven only they, the two immortals, live.

46. Love : Time is short.

The speaker in this poem is the lover whose lady has left him. But he refuses to mourn because time is short.

This poem is an argument against mourning for the loss of love. Youth and the spring season vanish year after year. Flowers bloom and become wane. The wise man says life is just a dew drop. How can I neglect this (the short life) just because she has left me?’ It would be foolish to spend time in mourning. Because time is short.

So the speaker invites all the seasons, rainy nights, golden autumn, and careless April (spring), come all of you, he says.
‘We are mortals,’ he says to his loves. It is not wish to break your heart because someone has taken her heart away.

It may be sweet to sit in corner in sorrow and write songs addressing the lady how she is your whole world. It may sound heroic to embrace your sorrow and not be consoled. But there is a fresh face at the door peeping at you.

The speaker says, ‘I cannot but wipe my tears and change the tune of my song.’ because time is short.

This poem is an argument against mourning for the loss of love.

47. The speaker is the lover. He would not like to disturb his lady love in any way. If she wishes, he would not sing. If his looking at her makes her heart flutter, he would take away his eyes. He would take another path, if his walking aside her startles her. He would not come in the garden, if it confuses her while making a string of flowers. He would not row his boat in the river, if she does not like the water becoming wild.

48. The lover seeking freedom from the bonds of sweetness:

The lover in this poem has too much of sweetness of his love; the wine of the kisses, the sweet, heavy incense, all smother his heart. He needs fresh air from outside, the morning light. As it is he is lost in her, love, engulfed in her embraces. He is under her magic spell from which he seeks freedom. He has become quite womanish. He would like to get back his manhood and offer his freed heart to her afresh.

49. Love: Spirit of beauty not of body:

The speaker is the lover who is in search of the spirit of beauty or love; not of body.

He tries to experience this spirit, embracing her pressing her to his breath, and kissing her sweet smile plundering it, and drinking her dark glances with his eyes.

But, what he misses is the spirit. How can blue from the blue sky be separated? In other words how to experience the spirit separate from the body? The spirit or beauty eludes him. He comes back baffled.
54. **Clandestine love (Clandestine – secret)**

The speaker in this poem is perhaps a senior member of the household.

The girl is going out with a basket in a hurry. The speaker asks her why she is going out so late in the evening. Everybody has done marketing; they are coming back home. There are voices calling for the ferry boat to go beyond the swamp. The eyes of the earth (the people in it) are being closed by sleep. (Sleep is here personified). The nests of the birds are quiet. The laborers have gone back home from the fields. Then why is this girl going out? Evidently, she is going out to meet someone.

55. **Love Poem**:

The poem is about married love. The lady has finished her work and is waiting on the balcony. He went away when it was mid-day.

There are activities like winnowing going on in the fields. Doves are cooing and bees are murmuring. The whole village is sleepy in the noon time. But she is looking at the sky spelling on the blue the letters of the name dear to her.

She has not done her hair. The breeze is playing with her hair. She repents this expression “I had forgotten to braid my hair”.

She is evidently bored with her life.

56. **Love unfulfilled – cheated in love**

The speaker is the lady. She was doing her household work like other women. She asks him: ‘Why did you single me out and bring me away from the cool shelter of our common life?’

‘Love unexpressed is sacred’. But he compels her to confess her love. “You broke through the cover of my heart”, she says, “and dragged my trembling love into the open place, destroying the shady corner where it hid its nest”.

The girl hoped she would not have to endure shame. But the young man turned away his face. He was free to go in his own way. But the poor girl was left necked before the world, her eyes staring day and night.

62. **Dreaming of love in former life** –

The speaker took the ‘dusky’ (faint) path of dream to find his love in former life.
In that dreamy landscape, her house was at the end of uninhabited street. A drowsing peacock on its perch, pigeons silent in their corner – (it was like a picture frame). She put her lamp down and stood before the speaker. She ‘mutely’ asked: ‘Are you well my friend?’ He tried to answer, but they both had forgotten their language.

He could not remember even each other’s names. There were tears in her eyes. He took her hand and stood silently. She began to weep silently. The lamp flickered and died.

In dream, words are either not spoken or spoken words may not be remembered.

65. The call of the cruel mistress –

The speaker in the poem gets a call from his mistress. He is tired and sleepy.

He was all day with her, he says, ‘Must you also rob me of my night?’ he asked his cruel mistress.

He would like to be left alone in the darkness of his room. But even here her voice is attacking him.

Is there no music of sleep at her gate? he asks. He helplessly asks if the silent-winged stars do not climb the sky above her tower. (he calls her tower ‘pitiless’). The flowers have died their silent death in her garden. But the ‘unquiet’ mistress does not leave him alone.

He at last decides to go to his mistress, leaving his loving wife waiting and weeping for him. The tired laborers are going back home in a ferryboat. But he is hastening to attend the call of his mistress.

This is an unfaithful husband, the slave of his mistress, who has left his wife weeping in the lonely house.

80. To a fair woman-

This poem is a great compliment to a fair woman.

The poet says to her – ‘with one glance you could plunder (loot) all the wealth of songs form the poet’s harps!’ But she does not have ear for their praises.
She could make humble the proudest, most powerful men in the world. But this fair woman chooses to worship and serve her loved ones at home. The poet worships her for this.

She is so beautiful, so perfect-her arms, that they would make the beautiful things in the king’s palace much more beautiful by her touch.

But this fair woman sweeps the dust and cleans her humble house with those beautiful hands. So the poet is filled with awe, he is so respectful to her.

2.5 The poems of Mysterious Longing:

4. **A house by the road**

The speaker is talking about her house by the road to the market town. People come and go. Their boats are moored near his trees. Her time passes watching them.

The speaker has sense – impressions of these people unknown to her. She invites them. They could come to house if they liked. They come with their baskets. Their feet are rosy. The speaker asks them to come her garden and gather flowers. She wonders why these people linger by garden leaving their work. They put flowers in their hair. The flowers are pale. They are playing flutes. At night, someone slowly comes to the gate. The face cannot be seen clearly. The speaker is evidently dreaming. She must be lonely, hankering after something or some me unknown.

5. **A thirst for far away things**

The poem expresses longing of the speaker for the “Great Beyond. The speaker would like to fly, but has no wings to respond to the call of the flute coming from beyond.

The Great Beyond is addressed by the speaker by mysterious names – as ‘O Far to Seek’, ‘O Farthest End’. The speaker is conscious of the breath whispering in his ears. This language is known to his heart. But he does not know the way, and he does not have a winged horse. He has a vision of this Far Beyond in the sky, and there is always this call of his flute. But he feels helpless as the gates are shut everywhere in the house where he lives alone.

6. **Tame Bird and the Free Bird**

They met. The poet says it was ‘a decree of fate.’ The free bird invites the bird in a cage, to come and fly to the woods. But the tame bird asks the free bird to come
and live in the cage. The free bird says there is no room to spread wings in the bars. And the tame bird cries, ‘I do not know where to perch in the open sky’.

The free-bird says, ‘my darling, sing the songs of the woodlands’. But the tame bird says, ‘come and sit by my side, and she would teach him the speech of the learned’.

The free bird says no, he says, ‘songs cannot be taught’. The tame bird says, she does not know the songs of woodlands.

They love each other but cannot fly together. The bars of the cage are the barriers between them. They flutter their wings, and appeal to each other to come closer. But the free-bird cries ‘I fear the closed doors of the cage’. And the tame bird is sorry that her wings are powerless. They are dead.

These two birds reflect two different attitudes. The caged bird represents artificial life of the learned who have forgotten to sing. The free-bird cannot think of life without flying in the sky. But the caged bird has forgotten flying and singing.

7. **Oh Mother, the young prince –**

The girl in the poem is excited to learn that the young prince is passing by her door. She would like to braid up her hair and put on nice garments. She knows that the prince would not even look at her, and he will pass out of sight in a matter of seconds. Yet, she is eager to stand at the door.

She tore the ruby chain from her neck and threw it in the path of the prince. It was crushed under the wheels of his chariot leaving red stain on the dust. Yet she is happy that the prince passed by her door.

The prince has always been a dream of every girl. The girl knows the dreams cannot come true. But dreams make life worth living. The mother is practical. She does not realize this.

8. **The traveller and the girl :**

The girl in this poem is the one the traveller is looking for. She is sitting by the open window with fresh flowers in her hair. The traveler comes and asks her “where is she?” But the girl is so shy, she just keeps quiet. But she knows he is looking for her.
The traveller is evidently a rich young man, a prince. He has a pearl chain on his neck. He comes in a chariot. He is also tired looking for the girl of his dreams. ‘Where is she?’ he keeps asking. And she is too shy to answer.

The quest of the young traveller is futile, like the dream of the shy girl. Like the girl in the poem No.7 this girl is also craving for something unattainable.

10. In this poem, the speaker (the elderly lady in the house) is asking the bride to receive the guest. He is ‘gently shaking the chain’ at the door. The speaker instructs the bride not to make sound of her anklets; not to show that she is over-hurrying to meet him. It is the moonlit night in the month of April. She asks the bride to draw her veil over her face, and carry the lamp to guide the guest.

She need not talk to him if she feels shy. He might ask questions; she could keep her silence if she would not like to answer.

The elderly lady has so many instructions for the bride-lighting the lamp in the cowshed, making ready the offering basket for evening service; putting the red mark (Kumkum) at the parting of the hair, and so on.

If the girl is a bride, why does the lady talk about the guest? Is he not the husband? The poem is ambiguous.

11. This poem is also the instruction to the young girl. Is she the bride or the daughter of the house? The speaker could be an elderly lady in the house. The poem is again full of imperative structure, giving instructions. The tone of the speaker reveals authority.

She is asking the girl to come out as she is, ‘come with quick steps over the grass’. She is asking her to come out without bothering about the parting of the hair, loose ribbons of the bodice, mud at her feet, the pearls dropping out of her chair.

The speaker describes the scene outside. The clouds in the sky, flocks of cranes flying up, the cattle running back to the stalls (perhaps sensing rain and storm). There is strong wind blowing. The toilet-lamp flickers and goes out. The girl’s eyes are darker than rain clouds. The speaker is urging the girl to come out without bothering about weaving the wreath, or putting on the wrist chain. It is getting late. For what? The speaker does not say.
The speaker cannot be an elderly lady. An elderly woman cannot say ‘who cares’. The atmosphere outside – stormy wind, hint of rains, cloudy sky – is a romantic atmosphere. Where are they going? There is a mystery in the poem.

13. I asked nothing –

The speaker in the poem is a mysterious man standing behind a tree at the edge of the wood, watching the scene of the morning in the village. He addresses the girl.

It is the time of dawn. The grass is damp. The speaker addresses the girl milking the cow under the banyan tree. Her hands are tender and fresh as butter. A bird sang out a nearby bush, unseen. The bees were humming over the flowering mango trees.

At Shiva’s temple near the pond, someone was offering prayers. The speaker stood there with his empty can, as the girl was milking the cow.

The gong at the temple sounded. The cattle raised the dust going for grazing; the ladies were returning with their pitchers full. The milking pot of the girl was foaming to the brim. The girl’s bangles were jingling. But the speaker did not approach her.

The speaker addresses the girl, watched her working, and stands behind a tree with an empty can in his hand. What does he want? He says he asked nothing. He does not want milk. Perhaps he has no courage to approach the girl.

14. This poem is also about the aimless wanderer, who does not know why he is walking by the road at noon. Even the Koels were tired of singing.

There is a hut by the side of (a pond) of water, under the shade of a tree. Some girl was busy working, and bangles creating music. The speaker stood before the hut, he does not know why. In fact the road, with mango trees and mustard fields on either side, leads to a market by the side of a river. Yet, the speaker stops by the hut.

He remembers, years ago, in the month of March, the mango blossoms were dropping. On the landing step of the river bank, the rippling water leapt at the brass vessel. The speaker remembers all this, but does not know why this memory comes back to him. There must be some girl who had come carrying the brass vessel. But the speaker does not talk about her.

The speaker’s memory of by-gone days has brought him here. The poem has a hunting atmosphere. The speaker is intrigued by his mental pictures of the past, but he goes back.
15. I seek what I cannot get -

In this poem again we have a wanderer who is seeking something. Like a musk-deer he runs around madly in search of something. ‘I lose my way and wander’, he says, but he cannot get what he wants. The paradox is that he gets what he does not seek. He has a dream of his desire, a vision of what he wants. He tries to catch it, but it escapes and leads him in the wrong direction.

The speaker in this poem has a spiritual problem.

25. --- why there is madness in your eyes –

This is another young man who has madness in his eyes. This young man does not know what wine he drank that has driven him mad. The speaker in the poem is asking him the reason for the madness in his eyes.

The poem is a dialogue. The young man replies that there are people; wise or foolish, watchful or careless, eyes that smile and eyes that weep. In his eyes there is madness.

He is standing under the shadow of the tree. The speaker asks him why, and he answers that his feet are tired due to the burden of his heart. What this burden is, he does not say. He again compares himself with others. Some people march on, some linger on their way, and some cannot do anything because they are bound by fetters. He stands still because of the burden of his heart.

42. This poem is again about the young man who would like to be drunk, be mad and would like to go to dogs.

The young man is the speaker. He addresses his friend. He would like to follow this friend or comrade if he performs the following mad things.

Kick open your door and play the fool among people. Spend every penny (empty your bag), and belittle prudence. (to be prudent is to be wise in one’s money matters). Walk in strange places and do useless things, not listen to anything reasonable. Break the rudder of the ship into two, though there is going to be the storm. If the friend does carry out all these things, then the speaker would follow him, and go to the dogs.

The speaker is repentant that he has wasted his days and nights in the company of wise people. In his effort to acquire knowledge, his hair has turned grey and his
eyes have become dim. Now he wants to destroy everything he has gathered; because he has now realized that to be drunken is the height of wisdom.

He wants to lose his way, all doubts and fears he wants to varnish. He would like to be swept off his established ways, his moorings. He knows in the world there are useful, clever, worthy people, the people first in the rank and people who follow them decently. He does not wish to be like them. He would like to be foolish, and futile. To be drunken and to go to the dogs is his aim of life now. He is ready to surrender his position in the society. He is no more proud of his learning, his knowledge of right and wrong. He does not even want memory of anything. He would like to be drowned into the berry-red wine. He wants to tear of the badge of being civil and being a steady gentleman. He wished to take a vow to be worthless and to be drunken.

The speaker is extremely disappointed and frustrated with the life he has lived and the life around him. He has become rebellious against the so called traditional values, morals and worldly wisdom of the successful people.

66. Madman searching for a touch-stone -

The wandering mad man is seeking a touch stone. His hair is matted, full of dust, he is like a shadow – very thin, his lips are tightly pressed, eyes are burning like glow-worm.

He is wandering over the sea-shore looking for the touch-stone. The waves of the ocean are ceaselessly talking about the treasures, and mocking the ignorance of people who do not understand their meaning.

The mad man continues his search, which has become his life. Like the ocean lifting its arms sky ward in the hopeless effort of reaching it, like the stars going in circles, trying to reach the goal that they can never reach; he goes round the shore in his search.

A village boy came and asked him, ‘where did you come at this golden chain about your waist?’

The madman was taken aback. The chain was an iron one, and it had turned gold. He was quite unaware of how and when it happened. It was his practice to pick up a pebble and touch the chain and then throw it away without bothering to see if there was a change. He found the touch-stone, but lost it also.
The mad man returned to his search. But how his strength was gone, he was bent. He was now like an uprooted tree.

68. **Keep that in mind** –

This poem is an advice to the fellow man. The advice of the poet is that life is short and one must enjoy it. You need not mourn for the dying flowers.

In music there must occur a full pause to bring perfection into it. Life, like sunset, drowns into the golden shadows. Love might also go from the stage of a play to sorrow and tears.

Our life, the poet says, is eager. We hurry to gather flowers before they are plundered by the wind. We try to snatch kisses before too much delay.

Our desires are keen. Time tolls the bell signaling the end. Beauty, knowledge are sweet and welcome to us, but beauty is fleeting and knowledge is never complete. He wants everyone to keep this in mind.

69. **Hunt for the golden stag** –

The speaker is hunting for the golden stag. He wanders through different lands, hills and dales looking for it.

The others go to market to buy things and come back home loaded with goods. But, his quest is different.

He has left all his cares and belongings far behind, and is wandering through unknown lands for the golden stag.

This desire for unattainable has been the theme of some of Tagore poems.

70. **A Childhood memory – a paper-boat**

The speaker is narrating his childhood experience in this poem. The child made a paper boat and floated it in a ditch. It was the month July. There was suddenly the storm and the rain poured heavily sinking the child’s boat. The child was bitter about it, thinking the storm came on purpose and destroyed his happiness. As if storm was purposefully malicious.

The speaker in the poem remembers all his failures of the past life; the games in which he was a loser. He was blaming his fate for all his misfortunes. It was the habit which he formed, perhaps, right from his childhood.
71. **A man returning from the fair**

The speaker in the poem is returning from the fair, his selling and buying has been done. He is happy that everything is not squandered, there is something left. The fate has not cheated him.

On the way back home, he has to pay first at the toll gate. He does not mind. He has still something left.

He has to cross the river. There is likely to be a storm. He has to pay the ferryman his fee. He has still something left.

In the darkness of night, the thief follows him to rob him. The man says, ‘- it is your desire to rob me, I will not disappoint you.’ All his earning is gone.

He reaches home at midnight. His wife is at the door, anxiously waiting for him. She runs to him; like a bird frightened, clings to him. The man is happy that much remains in his life yet, that his fate has not cheated him.

The man in this poem know how to reconcile himself with ups and downs in life. He has no complaints. He has a positive outlook towards life. He does not say ‘everything is lost’. There is still something left.

72. **A temple without doors and windows**

The speaker built a stone temple with days of hard work, the temple with walls of massive stones and no windows and doors.

Inside the temple, it was always might, only the lamps of perfumed light burned in it. He sat there looking at the stone image of the deity, chanting prayers. He carved fantastic figures on the walls, winged horses, flowers with human faces, women with limbs like serpents. Nothing could enter the temple, no singing birds, no murmuring of leaves, no hum of busy, village life.

He became ecstatic in his lone worship in the temple. Then there was thunderstorm that struck the temple. He felt pain at the heart. The lamp in the temple looked pale as if ashamed. The carvings on the wall looked meaningless. The stone image was smiling. The speaker had imprisoned night in the temple. It spread its wings and vanished.
73. **To Mother Earth** –

The poet addresses the mother earth in this poem. He knows the mother earth cannot provide enough food for her children. Her gifts are never perfect. The toys she provides are brittle. She cannot meet the hopes of her children.

But, the poet says he cannot desert her for this. The smile of the mother earth shadowed by her pain is sweet for him. Her love may not have fulfilled the demands of her children, yet she has given them life, fed them.

Mother Earth, you have been working with colour and song for ages; but your work is never complete. Your heaven is not created. You have created beauty but there is mist of tears on it.

The poet promises to power his songs into the heart of the mother Earth and merge his love into hers. He promises to labour to worship her. He has seen her tender face and he loves the mournful dust of the mother earth.

74. **Songs of the poet and the wealth of the rich man:**

In the world a simple blade of grass and the sunbeam of the stars sit together on the same carpet. In the same way, the poet says, his songs share the same universe with the music of the clouds and the forests.

However, the wealth of the rich man cannot share the simple grandeur of the sun’s golden rays and the mellow moon-shine. The rich man’s wealth does not have the blessing of the sky that covers all. When death appears, this wealth of the rich man crumbles into dust.

75. **The Ascetic’s announcement**

The would-be ascetic (s Sanyasin) declares at midnight that he would give up home and seek God. He asks, who held in this delusion of worldly life. And God softly whispers ‘I’. But the would-be ascetic has no ears for what God says.

The man looks at his sleeping wife and his baby, and says, “who are you that have fooled me so long?” The voice (of God) says again, ‘They are God’. But the man does not hear it.

The baby cries out in its dream. The mother holds it close. God commands the man, “Stop, fool. Leave not thy home”. But the man does not listen to God.
Finally God sighs and complains – why does this man wonders in my search, leaving me?

The poem suggests that, for a man, serving his family, doing his duty is finding God.

**77. A Little Girl – the tiny servant of the mother**

The workman and his wife are busy digging the soil to make bricks. The little girl, the mother’s assistant, goes to the river bank for scubbing pots and pans. Her little brother goes with her, sitting on the bank, naked and mud-covered. The little girl goes back home with the full pitcher on her head, shining brass pots in one hand, and holding her brother with other.

One day, the little boy was sitting at the bank. The girl was washing a drinking pot. A little soft-haired lamb came close to the boy and suddenly bleated aloud. The boy was frightened and began to cry. The sister came running, held her brother in one arm and the lamb in the other. And she patted both of them. Affectionately, showering her equally on the little one of both man and the beast.

**3.6 Exercises**

**A)**
1. Write a critical note on them of love?
2. What are the different aspects of Indian life and culture presented by R. Tagore in ‘The Gardiner’?
3. Discuss in detail the mysterious longing presented by Tagore in ‘The Gardener’?

**B) Write Short Notes**
1. Images in ‘The Gardener’
2. Style & Technique in ‘The Gardener’.
3.7 Reference for Further Reading


Unit-4

Hymns in Darkness: Nissim Ezekiel

Contents
4.0 Objectives
4.1 Introduction
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4.0 Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able

- To know about Nissim Ezekiel
- To learn major features of Ezekiel’s poetry
- To identify various themes in Ezekiel’s poetry

4.1 Introduction

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the prominent poets who has enriched the modern Indian English Poetry. This unit discusses the life and work of Ezekiel who has touched the various aspects of Indian society in his poetry. There is a fusion between the substance and the medium of expression. His poetry ranges from personal emotions and lyricism to complex linguistic experiments and satire. The unit aims to
throw light on various themes in Ezekiel’s poetry and different literary and linguistic aspects of his poems in *Hymns in Darkness*.

### 4.2 Life Sketch and Literary Career of Nissim Ezekiel

Nissim Ezekiel is considered to be the Father of Post Independence Indian poetry in English. He is a prolific poet, playwright, critic, broadcaster and social commentator. He was born on December 24, 1924 in a Jew family. His father was a professor of botany and mother was the Principal of her own school. Ezekiel was inclined to the poets such as T.S. Eliot, Yeats, Ezra Pound in his school days. The influence of all these literary personalities was apparent in his early works. His formal use of the English language was linked to colonialism and resulted in controversy.

His first collection of poetry *Time To Change* was published by Fortune Press (London) in 1952. His poetry has all the elements of love, loneliness, lust, and creativity. He joined The Illustrated Weekly of India as an assistant editor in 1953. *Sixty Poems* was his next book followed by *The Unfinished Man*. He started writing in formal English but with the passage of time his writing underwent a metamorphosis. As the time passed he acknowledged that 'the darkness has its own secrets which light does not know. His poem *The Night Of Scorpion* is considered to be one of the best works in Indian English poetry and is used as a study material in India and British schools.

He worked as an advertising copywriter and general manager of a picture frame company. He was the art critic of ‘The Times Of India’ (1964-66) and editor of ‘The Poetry India’ (1966-67). He was also the co-founder of the literary monthly ‘Imprint’. Ezekiel was awarded the Sahitya Akademi award in 1983. In 1988 he received another honour, ‘Padma Shri’, for his contribution to the Indian English writing. He passed away on January 9, 2004, in Mumbai after a prolonged illness.

**Major works of Nissim Ezekiel:**

* Time To Change (1952)
* Sixty Poems (1953)
* The Third (1959)
* The Unfinished Man (1960)
4.3 ANALYSIS OF HYMNS IN DARKNESS:

In *Hymns in Darkness* Nissim Ezekiel has experimented with poster and passion poems. There are memorable changes in the collection. His interests and themes are widened. He is more reflective. His religious and philosophical interests come to the fore-front. It is a series of commitments to belong to the place of his birth and the determination to give Indian English poetry “a local habitation and a name”. He has made an attempt to recreate Indian characters in their own situation so that there will be immediate participation by readers. We laugh at such characters but not at them. The idiom in which the poems are written gives a distinct colour to the Indian English Poetry. Irony becomes Ezekiel’s favourite modes in his poems. But here it is gentle and soothing, not bitter and pungent. In some of the poems, he tries to speak of love and sex in the manner of the ancient Sanskrit poets. Most of the poems in this volume bear out Ezekiel’s observation of the modern India with greater authenticity. Consisting of twenty-seven poems and dedicated to Keku and Khorshed Gandhy, ‘Hymns in Darkness’ moves along with deeper thoughts and sure techniques. On the whole, with *Hymns in Darkness* begins a new era in Ezekiel’s poetic career.

He is the most versatile poet who experiments endlessly with form and craft. *Subject of Change* is the best example of fusion of craft and insight together. The cosmos itself is caught in the narrowing concentric of a vision which is apocalyptic. The co-relation of cosmos with the eye is memorable. The poem shows that the vistas are opened before the poet for the mind to sally forth. They bring new interpretations, when the poet says,

… a flight of birds
fills the sky with a million words.
The poet presents a factual view of phenomenal reality around that is the view of Indian landscape. The poem is an intimation of change that is inevitable. In *Subject of Change*, the poet makes a beautiful use of simile, metaphor and figurative expression in barely twenty lines.

*Background, Casually* is a confessional and autobiographical poem. It shows the Poet’s commitment to India and especially to Bombay. He ponders over his failures and achievements and reveals his love for India. The poet ironically describes the feeling of religious and communal discrimination in India.

I went to Roman Catholic school,
A mugging Jew among the wolves.
They told me I had killed the Christ,
That year I won the scripture prize.
A Muslim sportsman boxed my years.

The Hindus were equally unkind. They were bullies but they terrorize the poet. He began with a sense of alienation with the world around him. His poetry has been attempted to establish some kind of recognizable order and relevance for his self in the irrational and featureless world that surrounded him. His gradual emotional disassociation from the immediate environment of the city where he was born began in the early childhood. At school he considered himself a “Mugging Jew” among the Hindu, Christian and Muslim “wolves”, perpetually a “frightened child”. His failure to get into the mainstream of Bombay’s life is symbolically expressed:

He never learnt to fly a kite
His borrowed top refused to spin. (*Background, Casually*)

Later he confesses, “I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider. Circumstances and decisions relate me to India. In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am an Indian”. The original tension in his poetry is probably born out of the agony of being a fortuitous Indian outside the pale of India’s dominant culture.

His life and poetry are, in fact, inseparable. The activity of poetry produces a solemn harmony of existence for him in a world riddled with discordant notes. Each poem is a luminous link in that chain of continuity that glorifies and ennobles the
poet’s life. He presents a comprehensive picture of the city, at once realistic and ironic. *Background, Casually* expresses the travails of an intelligent Jew boy of “meagre bone” living and growing up in a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-linguistic urban society where he was so alienated and frightened that

One noisy day I used a knife

In spite of his disgust with the futilities of the sprawling city, he early in life, made a commitment to choose Bombay as his place of residence.

I have made my commitments now
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am.

This inevitable choice to stay, however, unsettles the poet. Instead of providing an anchor for his thoughts and hopes, it launches the poet into an unending search for stability and repose. “However, Ezekiel has kept his commitment by depicting life faithfully as he finds it in the city of Bombay. He has not shown any craze for visiting foreign countries. Instead his poetry has acted as a mirror for reflecting life as it is actually lived in this backward place”. His desire to belong to the city he chose is often frustrated by the impact of the strange city’s truculent mass culture. His desire to escape from the tantaliser city of his birth is never realised because one cannot escape from oneself. The city has become his addiction.

No one escapes from the labyrinth of the Circle-like city. The city of “slums and skyscrapers” has seduced the poet to a gradual bitter resignation. In *Island* he wrote,

I cannot leave the island
I was born here and belong.

As a “good native” he is ready to reconcile with the “ways of the island”. However, the poem has ominous undertones of frustration and sadness expressed through contrasting images like “slums and skyscrapers”, “dragons claiming to be human”, “echoes and voice”, “past and future” and “calm and clamour”.

*Island* is a beautiful lyric consists of five stanzas of five lines each. It deals with his favourite urban theme –the city of Bombay with all squalor and dirt, noise and
violence, poverty and human misery. It became a part of poet’s consciousness; he could not live without it. Bombay is described as an island of “slums and sky-scrappers” The poverty and dirt symbolized through the slums. The radiance symbolized through the sky-scrappers. Bombay with its paradoxical growth and contracts reflects the uneven and paradoxical growth of poets mind. The city has bright and tempting breezes which separate past from future. The air becomes calm and the poet sleeps-“the sleep of ignorance”. The city dweller cannot escape from reality.

The Couple is a poem about a love between husband and wife. A woman is shown as indolent and arrogant in her will. She is a wonderful woman with infidelity. Yet a man has to love her. She is beautiful and lovable but difficult to win. Flattery and advances are necessary. Her false love became infused with truest love only in making love. She is a typical pagan woman:

Her false love became infused
With truest love
Only making love.

The poet speaks of freely about her indolence and arrogance, about her deception, passion and possession. The poem is ironical in nature. It is about self – deception. The poet holds his views on love, sex and sensuality in daring manners.

The Railway Clerk is a satire on the corruption and dishonesty in India. Honest, sincere and hard-working persons are humiliated. The railway clerk is the speaker who expresses his feeling of discontentment and unhappiness over his sad predicament. Despite his honesty and dedication to work, he has to face difficulties and problems at every step. He sincerely carries out the orders but nobody appreciates his work:

I am never neglecting my responsibility
I am discharging it properly,
I am doing my duty,
But who is appreciating
Nobody I am telling you.
The poor railway clerk finds it difficult to make both ends meet. Because his duties are searched as no one offers him bribe. His colleagues get bribe. His wife demands money to meet household expenses. But he doesn’t know how to earn extra money. He has no prospect for getting any promotion because he is not a graduate. He has to face many difficulties at the work place. His leave application is rejected twice in a year. He is over burdened but not paid for his over-time work. Even he doesn’t get any facilities at the work-place. He goes to see a movie once in a week; He meets his friends occasionally and discusses problems of the country. The poem is remarkable for the combination of humour, pathos and irony which are interwoven together. It is a monologue in which the speaker speaks aloud to himself.

*The Truth About The Floods* is based on a newspaper report published in ‘The Indian Express’. Some parts of the districts of Balasore, Mayurbhang and Katak in Orrissa and North Bihar were flooded. The flood created havoc there. A relief party came with five students with a transistor/ a teen of biscuits/ a camera. When the villagers approached them, they asked the villagers to keep quiet and make a circle. The poet says,

Don’t make noise  
Said the students  
Sit down in a circle  

……..film songs .

The poet talks of the hatred the people of Panjab against the Govt. servants or officials. he writes,

I arrived at Arda  
But the villegers wouldn’t talk to me  
Till I told them I wasn’t a government officials.

The poem brings two important things to light- 1. The callousness of the students who have undertaken relief work. 2. The lack of understanding between the administration and the people. The poet comes to term with everyday reality that we encounter in our country. The poem puts the both on the mat for their insincerity and hypocrisy in helping the flood victims. The subject of the poem is occasional but the
poet has imparted universality to it by describing the great human agony. The official indifference and apathy for the victims of the flood and the craze for the publicity of the relief party are highlighted with a touch of satire.

Misery and poverty are very common and rampant. It is only a source of festive diversion for a group of students. It is a fit peg to hang the hat of publicity and entertainment. The poem is equally authentic.

_Bellasis Road_ exposes the snobbery and false sense of respectability of the so called venerable persons. The middle-class gentlemen keep on remembering the image of the prostitute on Bellasis Road. The poet describes agony of the prostitute who is waiting for the customer. He presents a vivid picture of a waiting lady.

I see her first
As colour only,
Poised against the faded
Red of a post box:
Purple saree, yellow blouse,
green bangles, orange flowers in her hair.

The poet tries to strike roots in the reality which is the meaningful centre of India. The poet is indifferent to her. He can’t do anything for her.

I cannot even say I care or do not care,
Perhaps it is a kind of despair.

The poem, _Good-bye Party For Miss Pushpa T. S._ is a very Indian poem in Indian English. The poet parodies the craze for “foreign”, modern among the westernized ladies and their typical way of speaking English. It reflects the mental vacuity of the young ladies who are full of affectations and pretentions and have no ideals and ideas. It is a piece of social satire. It is in the form of a fare-well speech. A party is arranged in to bid fare-well to Miss Pushpa who will soon go to a foreign country to improve her prospects. It highlights the personality of Miss Pushpa T. S. The speaker showers praise on her. It reminds of any fare-well scene in India. Flattery becomes the norm of such conventional fare-wells. The typical Indian thought processes are expressed.
Miss Pushpa is coming
From a very high family
Her father was a renowned advocate
In Balsar or Surat
I’m not remembering now which place.
Surat? Ah, yes.

The poem is typically Indian in presentation that is the speaker showers praise in superlatives on Miss Pushpa. This is the vivid reproduction of Indian way of speaking English. The language is simple and colloquial as the poet has employed Indianisms in the poem. It is the Indian way of speaking where the speaker makes digression form the main topics it. After much digression the speaker again describes the qualities of Miss Pushpa. She is very popular both with men and women. She is very obliging. She never says no. She is always willing to help her friends. She is always friendly to all. The speaker praises her good spirit. He informs quite late that she is going to foreign to improve prospectus He wishes her a bon voyage. He asks the other speakers to speak and in the end Miss Pushpa “will do summing up.” The poet points out insincerity of the speaker. The height of hilarious nonsense is scaled in Miss Pushpa’s description. The poem is typically Indian in its laxity and shallowness. The entire poem is a biting satirical comment on the way Indians speak.

_Guru_ is a portrait of a saint. It is the personification of the hypocrisy the poems and exploitation. In it the poet draws our attention to hypocritical attitude of the fake gurus who are very much materialistic in their approach to life. The Fake godmen are a curse to India. The guru in the poem possesses all the vices that a saint or guru must never be guilty of. He is faithless, obstinate and ungrateful. He is merciless to the servants and the poor: discourteous to disciples. He is rude to visitors except the foreigners. He is money-minded and unrestrained in fleshly enjoyments. He is a walking museum of vices. After these exhaustive cataloguing the guru’s vices the poem butts onto a very direct, prosy rhetorical conclusion.

If saints are like this,
What hope is there then for us?
The poem rhetorically concludes that as long as the fake fakirs and greedy godmen are there in India, there is hardly any hope for India herself.

The poem, *Distance* is a passion poem. The central motif of the poem is consummation of love. It portrays love relation between men and women. Love and sex are no longer the taboos in our society. The poet has given a daring portrayal of love. He creates a new vocabulary and idioms with reference to love and sex in his poetry.

The closer you come, the further you move.
I can only observe the hallucination.

........................................
I try to make it simpler, more direct.
You are preached upon your fear like a bird.

His language is paradoxical. Sex and sensuality are part of life. In order to accept art one has to affirm the sensuality. The poet describes intimate scene between man and woman in a calm and cool manner.

The poem *Entertainment* shows an equally authentic Indianness. It is a faithful description of a monkey show which one can witness in any street corner in India. The reactions of the audience are noted briefly but tellingly. They have an intuitive fore-knowledge of the time to pay. It is ironical and characteristic of the Indian scene that some men watch the entertainment but don’t pay for it.

Anticipating time for payment,
The crowd dissolves,
Some, in shame, part
With the smallest coin they have,
The show moves on.

The show has to move on because if it does not, the monkey and its master will have to starve to death. This road-side diversion provides the poet with an opportunity to offer his reflections on the Indian social life at its meanest. India is a country where everything free of cost is coveted—even a road-side monkey show. Corruption, bribery, exploitation, social deceptions are the order of the day in India.
For Satish Gujaral is a poem about a deaf artist who has never heard a human voice but articulated his own language of choice. The poet pays tribute to the deaf artists.

It is the task
Of love
And imagination
To hear what can’t be heard
When everybody speaks.

The poem, Poem of Separation is a beautiful love lyric. It describes the deep feeling of irreparable loss the poet-lover sustained after separation from the beloved. The theme of love is characterized by the typical pathos on the loss of love. It dwells on the nature of love which the poet had so dearly preserved but cannot hold to now. The first three stanzas deal with the intensity of their love. He recalls how his love blossomed when bombs blasted in Kashmir.

To judge by memory alone,
Our love was happy
When the bomb burst in Kashmir
My life had burst and merged in ours.

The last four stanzas describe the intense pathos caused by separation. The poet-lover wanted to love her forever. But the beloved was fully satiated with their relationship. Reality shatters the dream-world of romance. The beloved swept “ahead to hear another music”. The lady ultimately decides to leave him and go to some remote place, “ten thousand miles away”. The sweet perfume of beloved’s body wants him at night. In her company he learnt to live happily in the squalid, crude city of his birth and rebirth. Separation from her is unbearable. He wants her back with all her usual sweetness and happiness. But she refuses to come back. The poet-lover plunges into a great grief. In her latest letter she writes that their relationship must come to an end. She can love him no more. The end of the poem conveys the sense of profound loss the lover has sustained due to separation. The note of sadness is permeated in the entire poem. The language of the poem, Poem of Separation is simple, clear and
colloquial. The rhythm is of everyday speech. Images and symbols are suggestive and meaningful.

*Rural Suite* is a derived poem from a personal letter. It is about suffering of an Indian villager. It presents an equally harrowing version of exploitation. It tells how Bhikshuks plunder the poor and the ignorant. (They are prototypes of government officials). There summer vacation means begging for profit among the ignorants, superstitious and gullible villagers. The raid is repeated annually and the Bhikshuks

Carry away huge quantities of rice,
chilles, fruits and nuts.

The poet comments as—It is a shameless exploitation of the people’s ignorance. This exploitation goes on indefinitely:

Nothing changes here: nor
even the cliché that nothing changes here.

The poem is a picture of fake Fakirs and greedy godmen in India. There is hardly any hope for India herself.

The poem, *London* throws light on the conditions of basement room. The basement room is a metaphor of poet’s relentless struggle for artistic creations and introspection at the cost of personal health. He talks about a self-destruction. Actually he tries about his prospect and career but it is difficult to achieve it for him. He states—

the basement room remains a true place
In my chronology.
Cold and bare, it held
Real turbulence
In check for growth.

*How The English Lessons Ended* throws light on orthodoxy and mutual distrust. It is about a girl of nineteen who is not yet matriculate. The girl belongs to Muslim community; she has to wear a *burkha* while going to school which is only a hundred yards away. The atmosphere at home is very suffocating. Even an innocent hearty free and frank giggle is not possible there. Her parents tried to get her married off but
couldn’t. Ironically the girl fails in English in three successive years. Every time her father rails, mother faints, fasts and abuses. So they thought to send her to learn English from the poet who lives just to next door. But the girl has no interest in learning. She is not familiar to frank and liberal atmosphere in the poet’s home. So suddenly she stops learning English. The parents conclude that the teacher must have made advances. The mother foresees a serious danger “the girl will never get a husband!” Thus the orthodox attitude ruins the girl’s life. Soon the girl gets married and the problem of learning English ends.

The poem, *Ganga* is the portrait of a maid servant. The poet describes how the maid servant is treated by her mistress. Apart from her wages she is given something extra like a cup of tea, left-over food and old saree and blouse as a mark of the mistress’ generosity. The poet writes,

She always gets a cup of tea,
--------------------------------
Sari and blouse.

The poet keenly presents the details of the maid servant- who is not only unclean but smells foul.

She brings a smell with her
and leaves it behind her.

There is a smell of areca-nut, lime, tobacco etc. to the maid servant.

*Tone Poem* is a love poem. The poet compares the visible things with the invisible things. It is rich in linguistic features. The poet uses metaphors and similes to express the love relationship.

Your breasts are small
tender,
like your feelings.

The poet has compared the tenderness of a woman’s- the beloved’s breasts with the tenderness of her feelings. While breasts are tangible, visible feelings are not. He has tried to explore the universe of quality and to chart non-measurable world. His greatness finds in combining two faculties – of the visible and the invisible, of the world of direct sensuous perception and the non-measurable world.
Adil Jussawalla says that “Nissim Ezekiel’s poems are the records of the moral aches and pains of a modern Indian in one of his own cities”. Nissim Ezekiel who has gone through the travails of the city finds no alternate tabernacle of hope. He discovers a new spirit of hope and declares his intention to walk the streets of Bombay “Cezanne slung around my neck”. Only the artist can create a new and orderly world out of the ruins of the old. Advice to a Painter is the poets’ advice to the artist, who is his student,

Do not be satisfied with the world
that God created, create your own.

The poet tells him to paint seriously to express his feelings in colour. Painting is the presentation of facts and feelings. He suggests buying lots of paints, to plan a trip abroad like other artists. Also he must plan for publicity. He must be voracious with his eyes and appetites. He must have will to see the passion in the act of love or learning that lead to brighter prospects.

Tribute To The Upanishdas is a philosophical poem. The poet realizes that one who gets nearer to his true self and also gets nearer to his fellowmen. He identifies himself shrinking to the nothingness within the seed. He shivers there but soon realizes the truth and finds light in the darkness. After his realization of self he is able to understand the others. He goes nearer to his fellowmen. Ezekiel states the realization as-

I shrink to the nothingness
Within the seed.
At first it is cold-
-------------------
Later comes a touch of truth
-----------------------------
Finally a teasing light.

This philosophical poem owes to Upanishads where the realization of truth, spiritual greatness of human life visualize.

The poem The Room is Ezekiel’s another philosophical poem. The quest for knowledge and religious belief found in it. The poet is conscious of the fact that it is
always possible to convey his spiritual dilemma through poetry. The religious cum philosophical quest creates a room for him. That room is a spiritual parallel to his own physical room of study where he writes poetry. This philosophical dilemma finds when he writes :

The door
Is always open
But I cannot leave
I mock myself here
As if my very existence
Is presumption.

He tells the room is the place without a fever or exaggeration and it is his ready cash of doctrine and deliberation. The room has become a symbol of place of refugee, a shelter from the distracting external world, a place where he can reflect and create a thing in fresh perceptive.

The poem Mind is another philosophical poem. Which is about the dilemma between the external world and the internal. The poet swings between the two. He has to carry the burden of worldly things. He calls mind to come to him because it is time to demonstrate the growth and to discard the burden. The mind is flexible. Its way is to oblivion. Many a times it is misled by norms. It waits for the light of reason. But it crumbles when the tough mad creators press forward in creating.

In Poster Poems the poet holds the view that love needs boldness. He says ;

Straight in the eye
Is the way of love
Hate, respect, contempt.

The half truths look away remote as horizons.

Poster Poems displays set’s wit and technique. The diction, epigramatic expression, use of free verse make the poem significant. Each of the poster poem has its own beauty and reality. He ironically says :

Subconsciously
we all pray
that what is great in others
may be great in us.

His wit finds in various expressions such as “crocodile tears are unknown to crocodiles,” “Life is not as simple as morality”, “straight in the eye is the way of love” etc.

In Egoist Prayer the poet identifies himself with the egoist. It is an academic exercise in poetic technique. There is the handling of free verse and fusion of wit and irony. The poem is interesting to read. He talks about the people who are reserve and egoist.

The egoist prays God;
Let me be, O Lord
the Camel Of Higher Income Group.
Who passes smoothly through
The eye of that needle.

The egoist wants to be safe from any difficulties and misfortunes. He wants to be wise. Many a times he is selfish He knows the price of wisdom is too high but folly is also expensive. Further he says he doesn’t want to go abroad and he will find his world where he is born.

Passion Poems romantic. Which are written in the tradition of Sanskrit love poetry and in precise, suggestive and picturesque manner. There are nine poems. In poems like A Marriage and The Loss Ezekiel uses the myth of Radha and Krishna and Shiv and Parvati respectively. He is indebted to the Sanskrit poets when he says:

They are my poetic ancestors
Why am I so indebted.

The leela of Radha Krishna is unique in the whole range of Indian tradition. It is the relationship that goes beyond the physical self and unites the two souls in the cosmos. It is the marriage of true souls
The Passion Poems project different kind of pictures from surrendering to quarrelling between the lovers. *Summer and Mansoon* are the times of love making. Sanskrit poets have given beautiful description of the Mansoon to awakened the passions in the heart of lovers.

The Passion Poems show the movement of lovers. The woman comes, hesitates as she is shy then clings to the lover and merges with him physically. The lover losses his reason and ponders:

Did I create this woman,

Untameable and yet

Willing to be tamed?

Then comes the quarrel and soon the good sense prevails and the quarrel stops. The poems are short but suggestive and image oriented in nature. They arise out of the moments of perception and passion in all its immediacy.

*Hymns in Darkness* shows the philosophical and symbolic dilemmas in the present context. City has become an integral part of modern poetics. This poem (i.e., “Hymns in Darkness”) is about a middle-aged city-dweller, who, in a faithless environment, is unaware of reality, but in his unconscious mind (or buried self), searches after it. The poem is in sixteen sections. The first section begins with a touch of irony and paradox. The middle-aged city-dweller speaks of humanity but he himself is devoid of it. He is a self-centred person and has no knowledge of the other world. He is a confused man without any vision of life. Thus the poet says,

The noise of the city is matched

by the noise in his spirit.

The second section speaks of him as a man of the world full of desires and devices, and he approaches truth through falsehood. So when he believes that he succeeds in the affairs of the world, actually he is self-deceived. The problems for him is ‘how to be undeceived?’ and in fact that is the central problem in the poem.

The third section raises a very pertinent question as to what could be the aim of the city-dweller. He has no definite goal in life, as there is no limit to human desire for ‘it multiplies like a candle in the eyes of a drunkard.’ But the first line of the poem- He has seen the signs but not been faithful to them –speaks of the clue to
spiritual vision which he had glimpsed but unfortunately missed. He is unable to comprehend truth because he in his illusion of reality looks at 'the nakedness of truth in the spirit of a peeping Tom' and it is here, he is any man, hence naming him is of no use.

The fourth section speaks of the city-dweller as he plays different roles in the drama of modern social existence. He is a disciple and also a guru. He is a father and also a husband. Above all, he believes in destiny like any other man of society. In a word, he is a domestic man, who is the interpretater of his own life.

The key-note in the fifth section of the poem is irony. The city-dweller is grovelling in spiritual darkness and his social life is a mere misnomer. Thus the poet says:

So much light in total darkness;
So much courage given, beside the abyss:

Even in his darkness, he was helped and forgiven which makes the poet ask 'why'? Then the poet hastens to say:

He has lost faith in himself
and found faith at last.

The paradoxical close of the section brings home the basic insight into spiritual understanding. This is also the message of the Gita. That God is realized through absolute surrender to HIM, not in abstract reasoning.

The sixth section deals with the crucial question relating to the possible gateway to HIM. The directions suggested by the earlier as well as recent men of wisdom are now outside the city-dwellers’ reach. So the poet says:

'To hell with all directions, old and new.'

And urges him to take a decision in spite of his follies which are now accepted like old friends. As we know, faith is individual and there are as many paths to HIM as there are individuals.

The seventh section speaks of himself as a modern city-dweller. He lives like a common man using the common road and encountering the familiar scenes and as a
family man he has also a good acquaintance of female anatomy. In a word, he is an earthly man.

The next section is important. His self-love stands in the way of his spiritual realization. He is a victim of the `self’, and thus he prays for material accomplishment. The poet ironically tells us that his prayers are answered because ’the gods are kind’. In fact, he becomes a slave to his desires. His looking out of the window and contemplating the sources of his life may suggest the expression of his unbounded desires and he means to attain them. This in itself is a great hindrance to spiritual union. The real task is to transcend one’s self and merge it with the divine. Another hindrance to the divine realization is indulgence in sex. This has been nicely told in the ninth section. The woman although she pretends not to make a sex-play, ´connives all the same’ to force the man to sexual union. The poet ridicules Blake for calling the nakedness of woman, a work of God. He believes that a man could never be peaceful on the earth. So he ironically tells us that a man could be happy in hell which is ´a pretty lively place’.

In the following section, the poet talks of man as man. The rest is important. Age, physical appearance, marital status, profession, social position—all is no pointers to understand the nature of man. His speech is important. In other words, the realization of the divine is independent of man’s position, age, etc.

In the eleventh section, God is imagined as enemy of man because he is not subject to change. All human activities are transitory. Social evils like caste, community feelings and political parties are stable and they torture the man. God is enemy to a man in the sense that He is for the ´selfless’. ´Self’ stands in the way of reaching Him.

The next section describes ignorance and knowledge in terms of familiar symbols – darkness and light. But the paradox in this section is overplayed. Darkness is said to have a kind of perfection, which light does not have. The poet says:

The darkness has its secrets
which light does not know

The implication of this passage may be that it is easier to get a spiritual vision in ignorance than in knowledge, for knowledge is prone to reason.
In Section 13, the poet comes into the picture, and compares himself with the middle-aged city-dweller, of whom he has told us in earlier sections. The poet wonders even in his defeat (which the city-dweller has accepted as ‘a twin-brother’), yet he is cheerful. He sees ‘no hope for him’ but himself looks grim. ‘Universal darkness’ and ‘little light’ are two key phrases in the section. The city-dweller in his complete ignorance of reality (which is suggested by ‘universal darkness’) is cheerful, but the poet in his little awareness of reality (which is suggested by ‘little light’) is full of melancholy.

In the following section, the city-dweller tells his day’s experience to the poet. He listens to a dozen of film songs, sees a score of beggars, and smells dirt everyday and his five senses are conditioned to these things.

In section 15, the poet tells us how he would have proceeded at the time of creation. If destruction in our lifetime is a fact of being, then any way is good enough. ‘Mushroom cloud’ may mean overwhelming confusion in us and this may even suggest ‘total darkness’, which the poet ironically calls ‘more aesthetic’ because that hastens destruction.

The last section is the culmination of ideas expressed in earlier sections. The familiar paradox there’s only death here/only life’ reminds us of T. S. Eliot in his Rock Choruses and Four Quartets. In fact, death is the beginning of life. When one enters into a spiritual life, one dies a physical death. One can never be master of death and much less of life. What is important is not belief but an awareness of reality. It is this sense of reality which unveils the secrets of life.

What the poet attempts to do in this long poem is to make us conscious of reality. He chooses a character (to be precise, a modern middle aged man) who lives in a city which is in a high degree hostile to spiritual life. He is an individual as well as a type. Then the poet comes into the picture and we pass on from ‘he’ to ‘I’. Finally, the poet comes to ‘you’ – which means the universal man. Through a series of paradoxes (and at times ironies), the poet arrives at the truth, that is, all we can do in this world is to be aware of the sense of reality.

4.4 Summary:

Nissim Ezekiel is a dedicated person to the rhyme, the extremes and pitfalls. No other Indian-English poet has today shown the ability to organize his experience into
words as competently as Ezekiel. The remarkable aspect of his poetry is his sincerity and individuality. His poems generalize his own felt experience. It is neither repetitive nor shocking. But they are simple, introspective and analytical. He treats poetry as a first-hand record of the growth of his mind. He loves simplicity.

He is a poet of many a theme and one finds wider range of subjects and variety in his poetry. His poetry is not born out of dogma and he does not confine himself to a particular type, theme or technique in his poetry. He has an open mind and therefore he changes the subject matter of his poetry from time to time. He never postulates a truth but works out, in terms of irony, an answer which is purely tentative. In effect, even in regard to ostensibly philosophic issues, the residue of significance lies not in the validity of the speculation but in the ironic stance of the contemplation. He has succeeded in creating a new Indian English idiom to a great extent and accepts the established linguistic framework but his art lies in so changing a unit of expression as to make it expressive of a state of mind. He is capable of turning words into a metaphor, image or symbols as the situation demands. It is only rarely that we come across poetic counters of expression but there is a strong undercurrent of poetry in the seemingly prosaic words. This is his characteristic mode which demonstrates his command over language and saves his poetry from degenerating into bare statement. He is fond of using paradoxical language in his poetry for greater poetic effect and considers metre, metaphor, image, symbol, structure, texture and tension as means of poetry but not its ends. He is a conscious poet ‘looking before and after’. To him poetry is not a gift to be adorned but a craft to be studied seriously. A poet like a woman ‘must labour to be beautiful’. His clarity of thought, clinical precision of words and phrases and employment of imagery make his poetry distinctly Indian. The poet in Nissim Ezekiel is too self-conscious of artistic excellence while the man in him strives to explore the real meaning of existence through art. His poetry is centred on a study of his conscious craftsmanship, his mastery of rhythm and diction and his treatment of the modern urban life and the existential questions it generates. C.D.Narasimhaiah compliments him in the following words “But to the extent he has availed himself of the composite culture of India to which he belongs he must be said to be an important poet not merely in the Indian context, but in a consideration of those that are writing poetry anywhere in English”. Ezekiel is deeply rooted in the Indian soil. In him one
discerns a certainty of touch that seems to reflect a confidence in the direction and purpose of his writing as well as integrity of image of India, style and subject-matter.

The anthology *Hymns In Darkness* consists of twenty-seven poems dealing with various themes. As Nissim Ezekiel is a septic who reads about several religions of the world in his efforts to soothe his restless mind and comes to terms with his disillusioned self. Hence in *Hymns In Darkness* there is a series of commitments. Some of the poems in the anthology are the recreation of Indian characters in their own situation so there is immediate participation by the readers. The diction of the poems is simple, vivid. The mode of these poems is irony which is both gentle and soothing. Some of the poems are about love and sex in the manner of ancient Sanskrit poets. Thus the poems about love passions persons and places and the Indian social reality are present here. In short, the poet appears more reflective about his subjects and themes so that his religious and philosophical interest comes to the fore-front.

4.5 Glossary

**Hymns**: a song of praise.

**Hypocrisy**: pretence

**Egoist**: self-centred person

**Bon-voyage**: farewell, best wishes for journey

**Confiscate**: to take possession by authority

**Ancestors**: forefathers

4.6 Check Your Progress

A. Complete the following sentences choosing the correct alternatives.

1. *Hymns in Darkness* was first published in ----------.

2. The poem ---------- was commissioned by the Commonwealth Arts Festival Committee in 1965.
   a. *The Railway Clerk* b. *Entertainment*
   c. *Hymns in Darkness* d. *Background Casually*
3. Nissim Ezekiel is a poet of the city--------.

4. *Good-bye Party to Miss Pushpa T S* is written in the form of----------.
   a. farewell speech  b. welcome speech
   c. inaugural speech  d. none of these

5. The poem, *Hymns in Darkness* consist of--------- sections.
   a. 12           b. 14        c. 16         d. 18

B. **Answer in one sentence each.**
   1. What are Ezekiel’s religious and philosophical poems?
   2. Which poem is a confessional and autobiographical in *Hymns in Darkness*?
   3. What does the basement room symbolize?
   4. What is the theme of the poem, *Bellasis Road*?
   5. What is the subject matter of *The Railway Clerk*?

4.7 **Exercises**
A 1. Consider Nissim Ezekiel as a city poet?
   2. Write a critical appreciation of *Background, Casually*.
   3. What are the remarkable features of Nissim Ezekiel’s *Hymns in Darkness*?
   4. Comment critically on the major themes in his poems.
   5. Write a note on linguistic features in *Hymns in Darkness*.

4.8 **Keys to check your progress**
A 1. b. 2. d. 3. a 4. a 5. c

B 1. Tribute to Upanishada,
   2. *Background, Casually* is a confessional and autobiographical poem.
   3. The basement room symbolizes the place of refuge, a shelter from the external world.
4. *Bellasis Road* exposes the snobbery and false sense of respectability of the so called venerable persons. It describes agony of the prostitute who is waiting for the customer.

5. The subject matter of *The Railway Clerk* is exploitation of honest, sincere and hard-working person.

4.9 Books for Further Reading

Unit-5
Selected Poems : A. K. Ramanujan

Contents
5.0 Objectives
5.1 Introduction
5.2 Selected Poems
5.3 Ramanujan’s Critical Revisiting of the past
5.4 Socio-cultural ethos in Ramanujan’s Poetry
5.5 Images
5.6 Tone of Irony
5.7 Summary
5.8 Key to Check Your Progress
4.9 Reference for Further Reading

5.0 Objectives

The unit acquaints you with:

• Ramanujan’s life and work
• Aspects of his poetry
• Central themes in Ramanujan’s poetry as reflected in Selected Poems
• Use of images in his poetry
• Ironic tone present in his poetry.
Contents
The Striders
Snakes
Breaded Fish
Still Life
Still Another for Mother
Looking for a Cousin on a Swing
Self-Portrait
Which Reminds Me
Anxiety
Conventions of Despair
A River
Epitaph on a Street Dog
A Hindu to his Body
Warning
Lac into Seal
Still Another View of Greece
It does not Follow, but when in the Street.
Of Mothers, among other things
The Hindoo: he doesn't Hurt a Fly, or a Spider either
Love Poem for a Wife 1
Routine Day Sonnet
Poona Train Window
Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day
Love Poem for a Wife 2
5.1 Introduction

A. K. Ramanujan was born in 1929 in Mysore and was educated in Mysore and Pune. He was a Fulbright Scholar at Indiana University from 1960 to 1962. He worked as a lecturer in English nearly for eight years in India, and later on joined University of Chicago as a professor of Dravidian Studies and Linguistics. He settled down in U. S.

He has written 15 books that include verses in English and Kannada. He translated classical Tamil poetry into English. His translations include *Fifteen Poems from Classical Tamil Anthology* (1965), *No Lotus in the Navel* (1969), *Speaking of Siva* (1972), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981), and *Poems of Love and War* (1985). He also translated U. R. Anantha Murthi’s famous Kannada novel, *Samskara* into English. His poetic works in English include *The Striders* (1966), *Relations* (1971), *Selected Poems* (1976), and *Second Sight* (1986). *The Black Hen* was published posthumously. His contribution in the area of poetry and translation received recognition in getting various awards. He was honoured with Padmashri Award in 1976. He also received Mac Arthur Prize Fellowship and was rewarded with the gold medal of the Tamil Writer’s Association for *The Interior Landscape* in 1969. The most honoured Sahitya Academi Award in the literary world of India was conferred on him posthumously. With his translations, poetry and scholarly research in the
field of Linguistics he has occupied a significant place in the scenario of world literature. Ramanujan died in 1993.

5.1.1 Literary Background

The works of Ramanujan emerged in the period of the 1960s. This period is generally considered as the modern period in the literary history of Indian English poetry. After India’s independence, the nation underwent the process of modernization. The modern outlook was apparent in different fields. Simultaneously, the literary modernism was also in quite vogue. Several contemporaries of Ramanujan exhibit the modernistic attitude in the forms and themes of their poems. As you have seen in the case of Arun Kolatkar, the aesthetics of modernism as advocated and popularised by Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot was one of the influencing factors in the writings of many modern Indian English poets of the period. Ramanujan shares this literary ethos, through which emerges his poetic world.

Along with the influence of Pound and Eliot, Ramanujan’s poetry reflects the impact of American poets like Wallace Stevens and William carlos Williams. His stay in America and his inherent Indian tradition coalesce in shaping his poetic sensibility. His poetic art exemplifies a typical modern ethos of India in a typical modernistic way. By this time, you would have acquainted with the typical features of modernism. Generally, all the major modern Indian poets share certain features of modernism in their works. As we know, the post-Independence period in Indian English poetry manifests the rejection of the romantic world, de-glorification of the past and the denial of the conventional poetic forms. Instead, they prefer to the sceptical, rationalistic view towards the surrounding world. There is a dominant sense of self-ridicule and self-criticism. Naturally, the poetry of this period expresses the ironic tone. There is also a disregard for the metrical structure of poetry. Quite often, such metrical, conventional form is substituted by free verse. A. K. Ramanujan’s poetic works evolve through the same aesthetics, but in his unique, distinct way.

5.1.2 Check your progress

1. What are the salient features of the modernism?
2. Who are the major proponents of the modernism in England and America?
5.2 Selected Poems

Now, let us consider the collection *Selected Poems*. It was published in 1976. It is a collection of 30 poems selected from his two early published works, namely, *The Striders* and *Relations*. There are 14 poems from *The Striders* and 16 poems from *Relations*. Written in the early phase of his career, the poems of this collection encompass the intense personal world of childhood life, memories of several relationships, family life, its nuances and pressures. The poems also depict the voice of an exile, which contemplates over his native past and foreign present. His stay in an alien country and the sceptical view drawn from education and science reveal his critical, rationalistic point of view in interpreting Indian myths, legends and history. In a typical modernistic stance, he depicts Indian society, its degrading social, moral values and cultural degeneration at large. He broods over his inescapable Hindu, Indian identity and his fatal inheritance of two cultures. At many levels, his poetry underlines the dilemma of a man trapped in this double identity, double vision. However, his poems rarely bring a sentimental preaching tone about this reality. Instead, in an ironic, ridiculing tone he projects the multi-coloured world of his personal and cultural life. To illustrate these facts of his poetry, let us now discuss some of his poems from this collection.

5.2.1 “Snakes”

The poem “Snakes” is selected from his first collection *The Striders*. It presents the speaker’s memory of his childhood life where the sight of snakes has made everlasting imprints. At the very beginning of the poem, he tells us that he recalls the sight of snakes while walking not through jungle but through the museum of quartzes or aisles of book stacks. Though uncurved and opaque, ‘golden / yellow colour’ of the book spine reminds him of

The twirls of their hisses
rise like the tiny dust cones on slow-noon roads
winding through the farmer’s feet.

These snakes appear to him ridiculous and alien like some terrible aunt.
He also recalls an Indian ritual where cobras are worshipped as gods. He remembers his mother who gives milk in saucers to the snakes. She bears the black – line design etched on the brass of the saucer by the snakes. He recalls awesome writhing of snakes around snake - man’s neck who tolerates this for his father’s ‘smiling money’.

The image of ‘snake’ reminds him his sister’s braid that gleams with new hairpins. The licking, writhing, slushing sucking hissing snakes appear as a water – bleached lotus - stalk. They have green white belly. Fear for them looms large, and he wishes to escape from them.

At the end of the poem, it appears that in the moments of much fear and anxiety his click shod heel strikes and slushes on snake, and the poet finds the harmless dead body of snakes as a sausage rope on which frogs hop. Drained out of the fear of snakes, the poet feels that now ‘I can walk through the woods’.

The poem appears to be autobiographical in nature. Through the image of ‘snakes’ the poet connects the past and the present time. It is the poet’s childhood ‘recollected’. Naturally, there are the images associated with memory in the poem. We know that memory plays an important role in human life. It is mysterious storage of things past. It is a part of the unconscious world. So it signifies a reaction against the things ‘present’ which suggest the conscious.

In the poem, the images of ‘museum’ and ‘library’ indicate the present time of the poet that stand in contrast to the image of his past life. These are the images of native, rural culture. The stay of the poet in foreign land is intervened by these memories.

Apparently, the poem talks about the feelings of terror caused by the sight of snakes. It also celebrates liberation from such fear in the act of killing the snake. However, metaphorically the snakes refer to the memories. Though the poet left India and settled in America i.e. he shifted from the land of woods to the opaque fine built land of buildings, his past like a hood of snake keeps him tormenting. He wants to keep him away from the land, the family, but memory does not allow him to do so. His attempt of killing this snake that twirls in his mind seems an unsuccessful enterprise. Though he tells at the end, that now there is no fear of snakes and he can
go safely through the woods, he is not safe in his well-built, transparent, opaque buildings of ‘present’. In another poem from this collection, he states:

….. as a hood
of memory like a coil on a health
opened in my eyes. (“Breaded Fish”)

It suggests how his attempt to escape from memories is futile, and how he is not actually liberated from his past. Rather, like snake - man’s neck he is withered by the memories of his past. These memories will never be separated from him. Through the image of twirling snakes the poet underlines the reality that though you can shrug off your past physically, mentally you are never free and separate from it. Naturally, retreat to the past appears a major force of Ramanujan’s poetry, and memory of personal world becomes a recurring element in his poetry.

5.2.2 Check your progress

Q. Say true or false.
   1. The poem “Snake” is selected from Relations.
   2. The poet saw the snakes when he was walking through a jungle.
   3. The sight of the snakes reminds the poet his mother and sister.
   4. The images of ‘museum’ and ‘library’ are associated with the poet’s present time.
   5. The poet is hypnotised by looking at the beauty of the snake.

5.2.3 “Still another for Mother”

The poem “Still another for Mother” comments on how the memories of past time cause restlessness, and how their existence is inevitable in human life. By using the private world of experiences, especially the inner world of memories, Ramanujan explores the dimensions of human relationships. The poem depicts an event that took place at Hyde Park. The poet finds that even the casual events have the potential to cause disturbance to the human mind. He states:
And that woman
beside the wreckage van
on Hyde Park street: she will not let me rest
as I slowly cease to be the town’s brown stranger and guest.

The word ‘slowly’ suggests that after much trouble and struggle, his Indian identity as ‘town’s brown stranger and guest’ has been accepted by the natives. Slowly he has ceased to be a foreigner. However, very soon the poet realizes that what he thought was the deceptive reality. He is not mentally settled in the foreign land. The sight of the woman reminds him of his mother.

He sees the buxom, large woman and handsome, short – limbed man who have perhaps fought with each other. He is not sure about it, but he can speculate it from their appearance. The poet knows that the man’s straight walk away from a woman, his proceeding forward without a pause even at signal, woman’s fumbling at keys, her despair, all these events hurt him. He can’t ignore them easily though he attempts to walk on as if ‘nothing has happened’. The events make him aware of his own case, where he had left his own land and mother, and came to live in a foreign land. His memory peeps into the past and he expresses:

Something opened
in the past and I heard something shut
in the future, quietly,
like the heavy door
of my mother’s black - pillared, nineteenth – century
silent house, given on her marriage day
to my father, for a dowry.

He becomes restless by the knowledge that the same feeling of rejection and despair must have been shared by his mother when he left the house. The awareness of this feeling brings discomfiture to his otherwise quiet stay in the foreign land.

In this way, both the poems, namely, “Snake” and “Still another for Mother” reveal Ramanujan’s intense personal world engrossed in his native past. It confirms
Ramanujan’s view that “The past never passes. Either the individual past or historical past or cultural past. It is with us…”

5.2.4 Check your progress.

Q. Fill in the blanks.

1. The incident narrated by the poet took place at ….
2. The poet admits that he slowly ceased to be …
3. The sight of a woman reminds him …
4. The nineteenth century house was given to the mother by …
5. The poet compares the unexplored past and the unknown future of his life with ….of his mother’s house.

5.3 Ramanujan’s critical revisiting of the past

As Ramanujan’s poetry reveals his recalling of a personal world, it also presents his interpretation of the native culture, which is full of its myths and legends. In a sceptical way, Ramanujan revisits the Indian culture. Religion, ideas of morality and ethics, the concept of the cycle of rebirth are the major constituents of Indian culture. Religious identity is an important factor that nurtures the mental make up of the Indian persona. Religion gives birth to several beliefs. Ramanujan reviews and assesses these beliefs and concepts through many poems. The poems like “Conventions of Despair”, “Hindu to his Body”, “The Hindoo: he doesn’t hurt a fly or a spider either”, or “Old Indian Belief” are a critique of the Indian culture. Some of these poems also reveal Ramanujan’s insider – outsider dilemma. His connection with the old Indian heritage and the associations with modern, western lifestyle cause severe mental crisis. Torn in between these two ways of life, Ramanujan faces the identity crisis. Several poems of this collection point out his crisis very intensely. Let us discuss some of his poems in the light of this discussion.

5.3.1 “The Hindoo: he does not hurt a fly or a spider either”

The poem is an ironic comment on the Indian belief of rebirth. In his satirical tone the poet highlights Indian way of relating the deeds of the present life with the next birth. It is deeply rooted in the psyche of common Indian man that the righteous,
moral and ethical behaviour leads to the state of ‘moksha’, whereas unethical, immoral ways of life have to face the cycle of rebirth. It is considered that human birth is very precious in comparison with other species. If your deeds are wrong, you are punished by getting a birth of insect or trivial species in your next life. Unless you have completed this cycle of rebirth you can not achieve moksha. This belief is present in its most subtle irony in this poem. At the very beginning of the poem, the poet provides the reason for being compassionate with the insects like fly or spider. He says that perhaps both a fly and spider might be his ancestors who have taken rebirth. He thinks, it’s quite possible that the fly of the present birth

….. may be it’s once again my
great swinging grandmother,
and that other (playing at
patience centred in his web)
my one true ancestor

Ironically, he brings out the past tale of his grandmother and her lover, who was a fisherman. He also imagines that like his grandmother and her lover, his grandfather has taken birth in his body, and at the present moment perhaps, he inherits his grandfather’s spirit. His prediction,

for who can tell who’s who?
or
(And) who can say I do not bear
as I do his name, the spirit
of Great Grandfather,

communicates how Hindu man restrains himself from killing others. It is not out of the feeling of ‘compassion’, but out of the belief that the spirit takes rebirth, he stops himself from killing it.

By referring to the love affair of his great grandmother and her lover, the poet highlights the relationship between the consequence of deeds and its relevance with the rebirth. And he comments ironically that perhaps, due to their immoral love,
grandmother and her fisherman lover received the birth of trivial insects like a spider or fly.

5.3.2 “Conventions of Despair”

In the preceding section we read the poet’s ironic statement about Indian belief of rebirth. Being sceptical, he can’t believe this idea completely. But, it is not possible for him to detach himself from this traditional heritage of India. He illustrates the impossibility of the inseparation between himself and his Indian identity in the poem, “Conventions of Despair”. The poem was included in the first collection of his anthology, *The striders*. The poet presents his inner conflict very intensely in this poem. The poem begins like this:

Yes, I know all that. I should be modern
Marry again. See strippers at the Tease.
Touch Africa. Go to the movies.

He is aware of the demands of the modern times that ask the person to forsake the traditional old Hindu values of living in favour of modernity. But he is also aware of his strong ties and pulls towards the ancient past. Hence, he confesses,

But, sorry. I cannot unlearn
conventions of despair.
They have their pride.
I must seek and will find
my particular hell only in my Hindu mind.

He feels that modern India has turned into ‘the waste land’. He has to blister and roast himself for certain lives to come. He has to bear a sight where his teenaged grandchild may be sold to pimp. He feels that a belief that particular ‘karma’ leads to particular ‘birth’ is always at the heart of every doing, and though he criticizes this belief, he is not completely free from it. All that is identified as Indian culture is inseparable and he has to live through it. He can’t unlearn what has been learnt through his racial memory. He realizes the inevitability of the unconscious world which he inherits. He admits that the modern waste land, though unbearable is the
reality, and only through connecting himself to the ancient past in the act of translation he can sustain his Indian identity. He urges:

It’s not obsolete yet to live
in this many – lived lair
of fears, this flesh.

5.3.3 Check your progress.
1. Why the poet is compassionate to spider or fly?
2. What might be a reason that the grandmother took rebirth in the form of a trivial insect?
3. According to the poet, being a modern what should one do?
4. What does the poet want to seek?
5. According to the poet, how can he sustain his Indian identity?

5.4 Socio – cultural ethos in Ramanujan’s poetry

If Ramanujan’s poetry depicts the personal familial world and the aspects of Indian culture, it also depicts the socio – cultural ethos of contemporary India in a typical modernist stance. Though proud of, Ramanujan never glorifies India’s social set up, and many of the poems in this selection bring out his approach towards the social ethos of modern India. For instance, let us consider his often quoted and discussed poems, “A River” and “Small-scale reflections on a Great House”.

5.4.1 “A River”

The poem “A River” brings out a bizarre picture of a river Vaikai which flows through the city Madurai. Once, Madurai was a holy city and a religious centre. We know that even today, Madurai is a place famous for its temples and is an important centre of Tamil culture. The poet mentions the old and the new poets celebrating the river in their poetry. However, immediately the poet describes the river in the summer season. During summer, the river dries to a trickle. It is full of dirt and rubbish. It is now no more a traditionally known holy water but a symbol of modern polluted city where in every summer:
A river dries to a trickle in the sand,
barring the sand-ribs,
straw and women’s hair
clogging the watergates at the rusty bars

Even the bridge over the river is damaged. It is full of patches and in a desperate need of repair. Even then the ‘old and new poets’ sing about the flooded river. We know that flood is actually a destructive element. It is a great loss for human civilisation. However, the poets of any age express no concern for this calamity. Rather they romanticize the image of flooded river. They describe the grandeur and wonder of the river, but

….. no one spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned, with perhaps twins in her kicking at blank walls
even before birth.

The third stanza brings out the horror and destructive result of the flooded river. The flood wipes out houses, kills animals and drowns men and women. Instead of being sacred, purifying water, the river becomes a cause of destruction. The image of ‘a pregnant woman’ is repeated in the last stanza. There is also a reference to twins. If traditionally the twins were distinguished with moles on their body, in the altered modern times, there are

….. no moles on their bodies, but
….. different – coloured diapers
to tell them apart.

In this way, through the image of ‘river’ the poet suggests the decadence and destruction of the modern world. It is decadence of a holy city and also of Indian
religion and culture. It presents a gradual collapse of the modern culture. In contrast to the romantic glorification of Indian culture, the poem criticises the blind religious faith. He criticizes Indian orthodoxy in an ironic tone. The mood of ridicule is dominant throughout the poem. It is a typical modernist stance of the modern Indian poet.

5.4.2 Check your progress.

Q. Fill in the blanks.

1. The name of the river referred in the poem is …
2. During the summer, the river…
3. … clog the Watergates at rusty bars.
4. The usual names of cows which are drowned in the flood are …
5. The images of straws, women’s hair, rusty bars suggest …

5.4.3 “Small – scale Reflections on a Great House”

The poem was first published in the collection *The Relations*. It is a long poem with a consistent structure. The poem is divided into seven parts. Each part consists of 13 lines which are divided into three-lines in each stanza followed by a single line. It brings forth a picture of old Hindu house that is occupied by several generations. Stanza after stanza the poet presents the vivid picture of its household, the family members, their life style and numerous events that take place in that ‘great house’. He says,

Sometimes I think that nothing
that ever comes into this house
goes out. Things come in every day
to lose themselves among other things
lost long ago among
other things lost long ago.

The lines reveal the recapturing of the past time into memory. The house has been accommodating for years and ages the numerous things like unread library books, neighbours’ dishes, servants, phonographs etc. Like these non–living things the
house also gives shelter to servants, cows, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law. The poet ironically comments on the fact that if sometimes things go out, they come back to the house once again. The letters return to the house, which are redirected for many times to wrong addresses; cotton bales return processed and often with ‘long bills attached’. Even the ideas like rumours come back and stay in the house like prodigies. Daughters who are married to short – lived idiots return, and sons, who had run away, also come back.

In this way, nothing that goes out of this great house stays out. The image that the house is sustaining and preserving all things forever becomes darker at the end where the poet mentions:

recently only twice:
once in nineteen-forty-three
from as far away as the Sahara,
half – gnawed by desert foxes
and lately from somewhere
in the north, a nephew with stripes
on his shoulder was called
an incident on the border
and was brought back in plane
and train and military truck

It refers to the death of a person who had gone at war frontier. The household witness the moments of happiness and sorrow and keep preserving its traditional and age–long identity of great ancient house.

After reading the poem along with its subtle irony and witty expressions, we realize that the poem is not simply a recollection of a house with its age-long tradition. Metaphorically, it refers to ‘India’ and its great but degrading tradition. At one level, it presents an ironic picture of a large Hindu family of several generations. It portrays the myths, customs, rituals or superstitions. It highlights the fate of its family members; especially of those who can’t find their own identity and existence, and are assimilated without complain in this large household. Their children then
serve the elders. By providing a large number of concrete details the poem does not simply present any individual family saga, but manifest the socio– economical transition of India and its impact on the Indian people.

5.4.4 Check your progress.

1. Discuss the structure of the poem “Small-scale Reflections on Great House”.
2. Which things live in the great house forever?
3. How do the letters and cotton bales return to the house?
4. How does a nephew return home?
5. What are the metaphorical implications of the ‘great house’?

5.5 Images in Ramanujan’s poetry

“I prefer the classical. A typical “Sangam” poem has well-defined, well-wrought complex form. It has an articulate body of convention behind it. The image is not flaunted here but is sharp and pointed”, argues Ramanujan at one place.

When we consider the poetic art of any poet, generally, we refer to his use of images in it. Like several modern poems in post–Independence era, Ramanujan’s poetry also reveals certain principles in governing his imagery. Like Arun Kolatkar or A. K. Mehrotra, Ramanujan’s use of imagery reveals his liking for precision and concreteness. We know that Ramanujan’s poetic career evolved around the period when the Indian poetry was influenced by the Eliot – Pound aesthetics. Eliot and Pound had advocated the principles of concreteness of imagery and economy of language. For Pound image was ‘an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time’. It called for the infusion of emotional intuitiveness and intellectual craftsmanship. We can see that even the classical Tamil poetry that Ramanujan translated into English, underlines the ‘sharp’, ‘pointed’ image as the basis of poetry. This fusion of the western and the eastern aesthetics was at the heart of the modern Indian poetic art. Ramanujan’s poetic craft and especially, the imagery illustrate this point very clearly. Let us discuss some of the images that explain this point further.
At first, read the poem “The Snakes”. We can see in this poem how Ramanujan tries to render the visual image of ‘snake’ through the precise and concrete details of its movements. Or read the following lines:

A basketful of ritual cobras
comes into the tame little house,
their brown wheat glisten ringed with ripples.

The aptness of image marks Ramanujan’s poetry. For instance see the following image of a ‘water bug’ with its vivid and apt description in the poem “The striders”:

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

See, how both the images of ‘snakes’ and ‘striders’ in its compact, yet, well – described framework provide several sets of associations, which is the very characteristic of a good image.

In several other poems of this collection we can perceive his conscious eye for images. The exactness of the concrete details makes his images ‘visual stills’ in words. Read, for instance, the following lines from “Of Mother among other things”:

….. Her sarees
do not cling: they hang, loose
feather of a onetime wing.
My cold parchment tongue licks bark
in the mouth when I see her four
still sensible fingers slowly flex
to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor.
The image of a ‘woman’ with hanging sari and her four sensible fingers communicates in its exactness of the words, the sense of ‘motherhood’. Or see the following image of ‘house’ that expresses the decadence and degeneration when he describes it as:

a house that leaned
slowly through our growing
years on a bent coconut
tree in the yard.

5.5.1 Check your progress.

Q. Comment on the imagery in the poetry of A. K. Ramanujan as reflected in Selected Poems.

5.6 Tone of irony in Ramanujan’s poetry

The poems we have discussed in the early sections exemplify Ramanujan’s subtle use of irony. We know that modern, sceptical point of view always highlights the paradox of human life. The realization of such paradox results in an ironic vision of life. As we have discussed earlier, the ‘irony’ is understood as the major tone of the modern poets. Right from Nissim Ezekiel, the various modern Indian poets have exploited this ironic vision to highlight the discrepancies of the human world. In your last year’s Poetry paper, you have read Arun Kolatkar’s ironic vision as exemplified in his Kala Ghoda Poems. In Ramanujan’s works also we find the extensive use of ironic tone. Besides the poems we have discussed earlier, let us consider some more examples of his ironic vision from the other poems of this collection.

In the poem “Entries for a Catalogue of Fears” the poet brings out the irony of a human being who knows but seldom lives the ascetic ways of life at his early age, and when he is at the threshold of his old age, starts talking of God and his teachings:

Sixty, and one glass eye,
even I talk now and then of God
find reasons to be fair
everywhere
to the even and to the odd,
see Karma
in the fall of tubercular sparrow.

His irony is very explicit in the poems such as “The Last of the Princes” or “History”. We can see this ironic tone of the poet in the beginning of the poem “The Last of the Princes”:

They took their time to die, this dynasty
falling in slow motion from Aurangzeb’s time:
some of bone TB,
other of a London Fog that went to their heads,
some of current trends, imported wine and women,
one or two heroic in war or poverty,
with ballads
to their name

The poet highlights the pathetic condition of the dynasty whose posterity, Honey and Bunny ‘goes to school on half fees’ or works as trainee in telegraphy, and telegraphs frequently ‘for money’.

Or read the following lines from the poem “History “where the poet ridicules the human relations that sometimes affect even at the most tragic moments of death. He depicts a picture of an aunt who at the time of death of the mother:

alternately picked the(ir) mother’s body clean
before it was cold
or the eyes were shut,
of diamond ear – rings
bangles, ankles, the pin
in her hair

At certain places his irony very subtly brings out the dilemma of a modern man who is torn between the deep rooted sense of morality and the equally deep rooted
perception of desire. Go through the following lines from the poem “Still Another view of Greece”:

Bred Brahmin among singers of shivering hymns
I shudder to the bone at hungers that roam the street
beyond the constable’s beat. But there she stood
…………………………………………………………
and gave me a look. Commandments crumbled
in my Father’s past ..... 
..... I shook a little
and took her, behind the laws of my land.

All these examples reveal Ramanujan’s ironic vision towards the complexities of human life.

5.6.1 Check your progress.
Q. Comment on the tone of irony in the poetry of A. K. Ramanujan with specific reference to Selected Poems.

5.7 Summary

The collection Selected Poems presents before us the wide range of subjects treated by Ramanujan in his poetry. His concern for family relations and cultural, historical past becomes a dominant feature of his poetry. He presents the kaleidoscopic vision of human life with all its nuances and intricacies. Through the moments of memory he tries to connect the time past and time future. His typical modern sensibility is depicted in both the point of view and artistic handling of the poems. In a typical modernistic sensibility he comments on man’s weaknesses and fallacies in a satirical, ironic tone. He uses very concrete details and opts for the precision and exactness of images to express his thoughts. His poetic art reveals an artistic fusion of the Sangam poetic tradition and the western imagistic principles. His poetry is in one sense controlled critique of the complex notions of nation, culture, tradition and relations.
5.7.1 Check your progress.

Q. Discuss the central themes in A. K. Ramanujan’s poetry as they are reflected in Selected Poems.

5.8 Keys to check your progress

5.1.2

1. (i) Rejection of the romantic world, de-glorification of the past and the denial of the conventional poetic forms.
   (ii) The sceptical, rationalistic view towards the surrounding world
   (iii) Disregard for the metrical structure of poetry
   (iv) The ironic tone
   (v) A dominant sense of self – ridicule and self – criticism

   America - William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens

5.2.2

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. False

5.2.4

1. Hyde Park
2. the town’s brown stranger and guest
3. his mother
4. her father
5. the heavy door
5.3.3
1. He believes that his grandmother has taken a rebirth in the form of spider or fly.
2. Her immoral love relationship with the fisherman.
3. Marry again, see strip tease, touch Africa, and go to movies.
4. His particular hell in the Hindu mind.
5. By connecting himself to the ancient past.

5.4.2
1. Vaikai
2. dries to a trickle
3. Straws and women’s hair
4. Gopi and Brinda
5. the decaying human civilization

5.4.4
1. The poem is divided into seven parts. Each part consists of 13 lines which are divided into three-lines in each stanza followed by a single line.
2. Servants, cows, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, unread library books, neighbours’ dishes, servants, phonographs, etc.
3. The letters return the house, which are redirected for many times to wrong addresses, and cotton bales return processed and often with ‘long bills attached’.
4. Half – gnawed by desert foxes with stripes on his shoulder.
5. In a wider context, the ‘great house’ becomes a metaphor of India as a nation where nothing goes out, once it enters the ‘house’.
5.9 References for Further Reading:


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6.6 Key to check your progress

6.7 Exercise

6.8 Reference for Further Reading
6.0 Objective

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- Understand R. Parthasarathy’s poetic personality
- Explain the impact of the West on India in terms of foreign settings & the poet’s personal development.
- Know his search for and discovery of Indianness
- Study ‘The self’ in the poetry of R. Parthasarathy.
- Understand R. Parthasarathy’s major concerns as manifested in ‘Rough Passage’

6.1 Introduction

Autobiographical poems are not rare in Indo-English poetry. We have Nissim Ezekiel’s ‘Background Casually’, A.K. Ramanujan’s ‘Self-Portrait’ etc. Similarly we have R. Parthasarathy’s ‘Rough Passage’, the longest autobiographical poem in Indo-English Literature. R. Parthasarathy is one of the modern Indian poets in English.

A) About the poet

Rajagopal Parthasarathy was born at Tirupparaiturai near Tiruchirappalli in 1934 and was educated at Don Bosco High school and Siddharth College, Bombay and Leeds University, where he was a British Council scholar in 1963-64. He was a Lecturer in English Literature in Bombay for ten years before he jointed Oxford University Press in 1971 as a Regional Editor in Madras. He moved to New Delhi in 1978.

His works include ‘Poetry from Leeds’ (1968), which he edited with J.J. Healy, ‘Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets’ (1976) and ‘Rough Passage’ (1977), which was a runner-up for the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1977. He has had poems published in Encounter, London Magazine, Poetry India, Quest, The Times Literary Supplement, Many People, Many Voices (Hutchinson, 1978) and The Shell and the Rain (Alen and Unwin, 1973).

He was awarded the Ulka Poetry Prize of Poetry India in 1966. During 1978-79, he was a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters, New Delhi.
B) About ‘Rough Passage’

R. Parthasarathy published ‘Rough Passage’ at the age of forty three to immediate acclaim. ‘Rough Passage’ is a unique book of verse with three parts; ‘Exile’, ‘Trial’ and ‘Homecoming’. Rough Passage’, a long poem written over a period of fifteen years between 1961 and 1975 in which he dwells upon the question of language and identity and upon the inner conflict that arises from being brought up in two cultures. ‘Exile’, the first part was written between 1963 and 1967, opposes the culture of Europe with that of India, and examines the consequences of British rule on an Indian, especially the loss of identity with his own culture and therefore the need for roots. ‘Trial’ the second part was written between 1961 and 1974, celebrates love as a reality here and now. ‘Homecoming’, the third and final part of ‘Rough Passage’ was written between 1971-1978, explores the phenomenon of returning to one’s home. On the other hand, in ‘Rough Passage’ he writes about the traumatic experience of visiting England and his search for and discovery of Indianness, his Tamil past, and discoveries of love.

★ Check your progress-1

Fill in the blanks

1) R. Parthasarathy’s ‘Rough Passage is the longest ------------------ poem in Indo-English Literature.

2) ‘Rough Passage’ was runner-up for the Commonwealth poetry prize in ----------

3) R. Parthasarathy published ‘Rough Passage’ at the age of ---------------------

4) ‘Rough Passage’ is a unique book of verse with --------------------- parts.

5) ‘Homecoming’ the third & final part of ‘Rough Passage’ was written between -- ----------

6.2 Subject Matter

Now study the poem by R. Parthasarathy in detail:

6.2.1 Exile :

In the first part with eight poems of ‘Exile’, he explores the impact of the West on India in terms of foreign settings and the his personal development. Here, he
remembers the thirty years of his past life, recalls the mistakes he has committed, and remembers the experiences he has gathered. He makes an introspective study:

“As a man approaches thirty
take stock of himself”. (Exile-1)

These opening lines indicate that the poetic self’s aim is stock taking. Now all seem to be pointless as is likely to commit the same mistakes again and remembers the lost woman. Thus he tells,

“Experience doesn’t always make for knowledge
You make the same mistakes -----------------------
You never married. “ (Exile-1)

‘You in the poem is slightly confusing. It stands for the poet’s past life. Poet’s persona in ‘Exile-1’ is a man in a self-introspective mood crossing the border of adolescent youth on the way of maturity. ‘Exile’ also dwells upon the question of language and identity and upon the need for roots.

“He had spent his youth whoring
After English goods.
There is something to be said for exile
You learn roots are deep”. (Exile-2)

The stock taking that began with Exile-1 leads the poetic self to the realisation of personal crisis in ‘Exile-2’. This realization stems from his sense of linguistic organismic, that language, like a plant, is an organic growth and can’t grow in a soil which is alien to that language. The poet is conscious of the hoarseness of the branches in foreign lands. He feels very lonely and strange in a foreign land. The confidence he enjoyed with his Tamil language is gone. A sense of disappointment overwhelms him and ultimately that leads to self questioning.

“What have I come
Here for from a thousand miles?
The sky is no different
Beggars are the same everywhere
The clubs are there, complete with bar and golf-links.” (Exile-7)

He returned home after getting disillusioned with the English language and the country, England.

“---------- I return
To the city I had quarreled with
A euphoric archipelago,
----------------------------------------
affections, uneventful but welcome.” (Exile-4)

He has presented skillfully the cultural gap between the East and the West. He talks of Westminster bridge, the Thames, the unwashed English children, who would no longer stimulate the poet. Even Victoria, the prime impulse, in a sense, behind this exile, for all her invincible locks remains ‘an old hag’. Being conscious of the loss of half of his life, the poet is determined to ‘give quality to the other half’ and thinks that his life has come full circle.

The opening lines cited above and the closing lines of the same section reveal this dilemma:

“The ashes are all that’s left
of the flesh and brightness of youth.
My life has come full circle.----------
innocence in my scramble to be man.” (Exile-9)

The lines show the poet’s spiritual and psychological tensions arising out of his pre-occupation with exile.

‘Exile-3’ presents the poetic self’s intercontinental journey during which he gets himself accustomed to the city walls in Istanbul and Jerusalem and to the deserts in Syria & Iran. ‘Exile-4’ records the poetic self’s journey from England to India, “to the city I had quarrelled with”, to the city which is the symbol of intellectual alertness and emotional passivity with its “traffic of regulated affection.” His return to the city to his roots is only a frustrating experience, where, what he encounters is only the impact of the West which he wanted to run away from. In ‘Exile-5’, he fails
to establish any valid reference or communication with the collective consciousness of the city:

“I am through with the city
No better then ghettos, the suburbs.
There, language is noise,
and streets unwind like cobras
from a basket.” (Exile-5)

The 6th section of the 'Exile" finds the poetic self continuing its journey in quest of selfhood in the direction of Goa. In "Exile-7", the voyager reaches his ancestral home, Madras. But here also he is far from being at home. There is overall decline around. It the final section of 'Exile' the poetic self finds itself on the banks of the Hooghly in the city of Calcutta which is another major bastion of the British Raj and culture in the Eastern India. Thus, the poetic self’s carving to embrace freedom lost in an alien land remains unfulfilled even in his own native soil, be it Bombay, Madras or Calcutta. His efforts for a tense and passionate relationship with his old love-his won land, people and language – hurt him.

★ Check your progress-2

Answer in one word/ phrase/ sentence only.

1) How many poems are in 'Exile', the first part of 'Rough Passage'?
2) What does the poet explore in the first part, 'Exile'?
3) Name the native cities which are presented by the poet in 'Exile'?
4) What type of study does the poet make in 'Exile'?

6.2.2 :- 'Trial', the second part of 'Rough Passage' comprising sixteen poems was written over a period of 17 Years (1961-1978). In the words the poet 'Trial' celebrates love as a reality here and now. 'Trial' is much more than a mere celebration of love. The poem remembers his beloved and recalls his association with her right from the day of his seeing her photograph, 'over the family album' and in a way, sharing 'your childhood till the day', we live our lives for ever taking leave'. In a way, his love relationship with the beloved is revealed.

The very first poem of this section emphasizes the sense of mortality:
"Mortal as I am, I face the end
with unspeakable relief,
knowing how I should feel……
where I to clutch at the air….."    (Trial-1)

Even the touch of love makes the protagonist aware of his limitations and the circular movement of the 'night':

"Love, I haven't the key
to unlock His gates.
Night curves,
I grasp your hand."    (Trail-1)

While recreating the childhood of his beloved for the purpose of rejuvenating the self, the poet persona looks at the family album. He is reminded of transience:

"……How your face
bronzed, as flesh and bone struck
a touchwood day."    (Trial-2)

The image of death intervenes while ‘passion burns' quicker than candles,'smoking the glass of our bodies':

Evening disfigures vision;
stone of the day turn phantoms."    (Trial-3)

Here the youthful passion for the beloved makes their union urgent. He recalls his love affairs in different sections of 'Trial'. The pleasure achieved from touching the beloved's breast is 'Elliptic' and 'wholesome':

"I am all fingers when it comes
to touching them. Their fullness
keeps the eyes peeled
with excitement…….."    (Trail-5)

But the pleasure is overtaken by the 'night':
"………O night,
darker then ever in our arms." (Trial-6)

The lover in 'Trial-7' is content with the experience of 'lucid exclusiveness' offered by the night. He recalls his love-affair in different section of 'Trail'. In the very next poem, 'Trial-8' he finds that

"our bodies scrape home
for passions, older than stones of Konark."

The 'aching joys' are no more and all its 'dizzy raptures' are things of the past. Thus the poem says,

"I have put aside the past
in a corner, an umbrella
now poor in the ribs." (Trial-9)

He feels that love is real and he could put aside the past in a corner. He compares his beloved's hand, in an image of rare beauty and passion:

"………your hand was a galaxy
I could reach, even touch
in the sand with my half-inch telescopic
fingers." (Trial-10)

Then with an unnerving sense of futility of expression, the poetic self finds itself choked by the tyranny of words:

"Our world, love, moves within
the familiar poles of eye, hand,
is eclipsed by the word." (Trail-11)

In the mood of self-mockery, he calls himself 'a disused attic' whose walls were brightened by 'the skylight of your face' (Trail-12). The clock - the symbol of transience - is an unromantic counterpart of the moon. The images of body, touch, flesh, bone, hand, arm, forehead, eyes - area led towards the images of death and decay:
"Sleep becomes impossible
the eyes shut in apology……..
as I hob-and-nob with death." (Trial-13)

In such a predicament, the self can only caress the wounds of the past and is unable to evolve a perception of the present:

"My past in an unperfect stone
the flaws shown. I polish
the stone, sharpen the lustre to a point." (Trail-15)

This idea embodied in these lines is that though the attempt to redeem the past by love has remained unsuccessful but the attempt still continues. This idea is further developed in the next section, "Homecoming."

★ Check your progress - 3

1) What is the central theme of 'Trail'?
2) How many poems are in 'Trial'?
3) What does the very first poem of 'Trail' emphasize?
4) Where does the protagonist see his beloved's photograph?
5) What is the mood of the poet in 'Trail-12'?

6.2.3 Homecoming

'Homecoming' is the last part of 'Rough Passage' published in 1977 & comprised fourteen poems. Most of these poems were written in Tamil Nadu between 1971 & 1978. 'Homecoming' is an effort not only to enact the journey of the self but to preserve it in the midst of the dislocation of identity. Time, in 'Homecoming' becomes a means of recognition and perception. Death of his father isolates him.

In the first poem of 'Homecoming' the poetic self is the one which, having gone through the continuous trail of dislodging and isolation, has arrived at a new place of understanding. His attempt to relearn the classical form of his mother tongue fails as he finds that Tamil has been debased by films:
"…..hooked on celluloid, you reel
dawn plush corridors." (Homecoming-1)

The poet is conscious of the hiatus between the soil of the language he used and his own roots. Tamil has become a tired language and the poet's search for a native mode for creative fulfillment is frustrated at the outset. His choice of Tamil is not a happy one, for the language,

"the bull, Namalvar took by the horns,
Is today an unrecognizable carcass
quick with the fleas of Kodambakkam." (Homecoming-2)

This aesthetic dilemma renders the poetic self preoccupied with the primacy of experience. Thus once again he goes to probe into the experience at a family reunion and he finds -

"Sunari, who had squirrelled up & down
forbidden tamarind trees in her long skirt
.............like safe planets near her." (Homecoming-3)

His reflection on relationship lands him at the burning ghat of his father where 'relations stood like exclamation points.' He is shocked. It was the moment for him to realize that one has to make oneself 'an expert in farewells':

".............An unexpected November
Shut the door in my face
I crashed, a glass house
hit by the stone at father's death." (Homecoming-4)

The 'self has no independent identity expect in relation to other. According to him, one's relationship is the silver at the back of the mirror in which one's image is reflected:

"Now that all silver
at the back of faces I have loved
has worn off." (Homecoming-6)
Like Ramanujan, the poet tries to evoke his Tamil past and his poem on Vaikai river (Homecoming-8) has been influenced by Ramanujan's 'A River'. In the city the poetic self has to

"Pick up
my glasses and look for myself
in every nook and corner
of the night." (Homecoming-10)

Every moment he is submerged in his literary pursuits is a moment kept away from the everyday reality of life:

"A pariah dog
slams an alley in my face…………
I shouldn't complain," (Homecoming-10)

The poet asks the most significant question: “What's it like to be a poet?” (Homecoming-12),

While fattening himself on the flesh of dead poets, betrayal and remorse are the chief sentiments that attend the poetic self when he reflects on his urban existence:

"However, there is no end
to the deception I practice on my self." (Homecoming-13)

The experimental flux of the poetic self in the city is so intense that he recommends newspaper - the instrument that vocalizes the movements of the city for scriptures:

"……….For scriptures
I therefore recommend
the humble newspaper : I find
my prayers occasionally
answered there." (Homecoming-14)
Check your progress - 4

Fill in the blanks with appropriate words.

1) 'Homecoming' is the last part of 'Rough Passage' published in --------------

2) --------------in 'Homecoming' becomes a means of recognition and perception.

3) According to the poet, one's relationship is the ---------------at the back of the mirror.

4) Like ---------------Parthasarathy tries to evoke his Tamil Past.

5) A------------------- slams an alley in my face.

6.3 Summary

R. Parthasarathy's 'Rough Passage' articulates his personal predicament as the poet as well as the linguistic, cultural and historical dilemmas of his environment. 'Rough Passage' unfolds a three-fold structure and a corresponding pattern of experience. The first part, 'Exile' expresses the poet's anguish emanating from a sense of non-belonging, the exasperating experience of 'whoring after English gods'. The entire section may be described as the odyssey of the self in quest of identity with the several phases of the journey traced with a corresponding intensity of emotion. His voyage of self-discovery leads him to Madras, the capital of Tamil Nadu, his ancestral home. His responses to the city of Madras are articulated in select phrases of unique sensibility. However, he continues his journey from Madras to Calcutta, another major bastion of the British Raj and culture in the Eastern India. The first part of 'Rough Passage' ends on a note of disenchantment though it begins on the promise of renewal for the exile. It depicts the traumatic experience of exile.

'Trial', the second part of 'Rough Passage' represents his attempts to know and understand love between man and woman. A note of regret is sounded in the very first lines of 'Trial'. The poet's delicate sensitivity in and through an experience of love is associated with a sense of darkness, despair and inevitable gloom. The poet's sense of 'trail' finds subtle expression in his conflicting passions, the transitoriness of bodily fulfillment and the everlasting spiritual joy of love. The crystal-clear purity of sweet water is rendered as a felt poetic experience of love. The wryness and self-mockery of the poet's mood is reflected in calling himself a 'disused attic', whose
walls attained colour and brighten through love. The poet uses the visual image of
the clock as an unromantic counterpart of the moon. The images of the touch, of
flesh & bones, hands & arms, forehead & eyes seem to be part of a recurrent pattern
of metaphoric language in his poetry. The poet, here, can't escape from his obtrusive
past, which he visualizes as an imperfect stone.

'Homecoming', the last part of 'Rough Passage' is written on his return to Madras
from Bombay. It constitutes poetic overtures to the land of his birth & family. He
tries to re-establish his cultural link with Tamil. The apparent degeneration of
civilization in Tamil land is thus sharply focused by him by using images of nature
and visual setting. The use of the Vaikai river to suggest this downward drift is
specially meaningful because civilization in India has almost flourished on the banks
of rivers. The thematic motif of general cultural decline is presented with events. It
suggests a sense of decline and death on the personal level. He weaves into words the
frail chain of his consciousness and the continuity of the family tradition. In short
'Rough Passage' symbolizes the poet's rough passage in England and a rough
comeback to India, where he faced the problem of cultural re-adjustment.

6.4 Rough Passage: General Observations

6.4.1 Themes:

In the preceding section, we have discussed three parts from this collection.
With the help of this discussion we can make the following observations on ‘Rough
Passage’.

In the poems discussed earlier, we find that the poet presents his search for and
discovery of Indianness, his Tamil past. He realized that in England and in the
language, he would always be a foreigner. In ‘Exile’, he places his Tamil past by the
side of his stay in England and perceives the contract between the two cultures. He
explores the impact of the West on India in terms of foreign settings and the his
personal development. He recalls thirty years of his past life, the mistakes he has
committed, remembers the experiences he has gathered and the lost woman. Thus he
tells:

"Experience doesn't always make for knowledge
You make the same mistakes
do the same thing overagain."
The woman you may have loved
You never married. (Exile-1)

He feels like a fish out of water in a foreign land and a sense of loneliness overwhelms him. The cultural gap between the East and the West seems impossible to be bridged.

In the second part 'Trial' he remembers the beloved and recalls his association with her right from the day of his seeing her photograph in the family album. In a way, his love relationship with the beloved is revealed. He recalls his love affairs in different sectors of ‘Trial’. His thought about the past love necessarily brings a note of melancholy and regret to his life which made him confess. He realizes that the thought that has guided his love affairs has been the chill promise of a home. His attempt to redeem the past by love has remained unsuccessful. But, the attempt still continues.

In ‘Homecoming’ his attempt to relearn the classical form of his mother tongue fails. He has the horror of bodyline and his obsession with the refinement of speech forever troubles him. He is conscious of the hiatus between the soil of the language he uses and his own roots. Life has mellowed for him. He is now at peace with himself. And now wants to be simple and wants his poems to ‘become familiar as prayer’. He wants to be himself and needs ‘the blessing of simplicity.’

5.4.2 Images:

R. Parthasarathy has the gift of using exact and apt images. He often revises and drops certain lines in order to make his poetry more suggestive and significant. His three lines stanza gives a sense of continuity to such a long poem like ‘Rough Passage’. Even it integrates the different parts of the poem. His important images are 'wall', 'tree', snow, stone, glass and city. The wall is a cultural wall, which he wanted to pull down but failed. The failure is suggested in the image of 'lamp' burning in the 'fog' but could not illumine it. His exile is brought out in the following images:

"All night your hand has rested
on her left breast
In the morning when she is gone
You will be alone like the stone benches"
in the park, and would have forgotten
her whispers in the noises of the city." (Exile-1)

The image of the ‘hand’ rested on her left breast brings into mind the childmother relationship. This also bears a resemblance to the lover-beloved relationship. The other image is ‘the stone benches in the park', which are used by lovers in the evening in their intimate moment. But, it is empty in the morning. On the other hand, the ‘stone benches in the park’ in the morning stand for ‘loneliness’. Two contrasting images are there. It shows that the poet has lost the assurance of his mother tongue and instead he is essentially lonely in his ‘exile’.

The image 'tree' suggests either home or the mother. He recollects ‘turmeric days'. The next image 'snow' awakens us to a sense of failure. In other words, it becomes the symbol of redemption:

"Across the seas a new knowledge,
sudden and unobtrusive as first snow
transforming the landscape,
rinse speech, affirms the brown skin." (Exile-3)

His outlook has undergone a sea change in a foreign land. This thought has been presented by the following images:

"The hourglass of the Tamil mind
is replaced by the exact chronometer
of Europe". (Exile-7)

Another recurrent image in ‘Rough passage’ is 'glass'. It stands for transience. The body of the beloved is likened to 'glass', suggesting its impermanence. He says:

"The body sputters: your flesh
was the glass that cupped its hands
over me." (Trial – 4)

If 'glass' stands for transience, ‘stone’ another image stands for permanence Stone symbolizes erotic passion in the following lines:

"Our bodies scrape home
for passions, older
than the stones of Konark." (Trial-8)

‘City’ stands for an impersonal world of non-relationship. The poet finds the European 'city' inhospitable and also on return the Indian cities like Bombay, Calcutta & Madras are equally alien to him. He feels like an ‘alien insiders’:

"Like a hand at rest, the pelagic city,
is immobile. Between us there is
no commerce ". (Exile - 3)

He says that between Bombay and him ‘there is no commerce’. Since ‘commerce’ is the main concern of Bombay, lack of it suggests total alienation.

In ‘Homecoming-4’ the poet employs two images such as palmistry and compass:

"The lines on any hands
had the fine compass of his going
I shall follow.” (Homecoming - 4)

These two images are juxtaposed for both of them suggest the direction to travel in.

6.5 Glossary & Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>explore</td>
<td>to search out</td>
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<tr>
<td>phenomenon</td>
<td>something extraordinary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>introspective</td>
<td>based on self-examination</td>
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<tr>
<td>traumatic</td>
<td>unpleasant</td>
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<tr>
<td>hoarseness</td>
<td>having a rough voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transience</td>
<td>extremely great, supreme</td>
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<tr>
<td>rejuvenate</td>
<td>to make young again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intervene</td>
<td>to come between</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telescopic</td>
<td>about a telescope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
predicament - an unpleasant situation
hiatus - empty space, gap
submerge - to sink
Konarak - The temple of the sun built in the 13th century, is known for its erotic sculptures.
Job Charnock - Agent of East India company’s station at Hooghly and founder of Calcutta
degeneration - growing worse.
frail - weak, fragile
Kural - Tamil classic of the third or fourth century A. D. by Valluvar.
readjustment - an adjustment made again
transitoriness - of short duration.

6.6 Key to check your progress

1. 1. autobiographical
   2. 1977
   3. 43
   4. Three
   5. 1971-78

2. 1. Eight
   2. The impact of the west on India in terms of foreign settings and the poet’s personal development.
   4. introspective

3. 1. Celebration of love
   2. Sixteen
3. The Sense of mortality
4. In family album
5. Self-mockery

4. 1. 1977
2. Time
3. Silver
4. A. K. Ramanujan
5. Pariah dog.

6.7 Exercises

A) Long answer type questions :-
1. Discuss R. Parthasarathy's 'Rough Passage' as the longest autobiographical poem.
2. Explain the major themes handled by Parthasarathy in 'Rough Passage'.
3. Write a note on 'R. Parthasarathy's search for his Tamil past in 'Rough Passage'.

B) Write short notes on the following-
1. Images in 'Rough Passage'.
2. The poet's love affair in different sections of 'Trial'
3. Parthasarathy's attempt to relearn the classical form of mother tongue in 'Homecoming'.
4. Search for identity in 'Rough Passage'.
6.8 Reference for Further Reading

7.0 Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able to -

- acquaint with Shiv K Kumar’s poetry.
- enable to know Shiv K Kumar as a Postcolonial Poet
- acquaint with autobiographical elements in his poetry.
- inculcate different aspects of Shiv K Kumar’s poetry, such as themes, images, idioms, postcoloniality and technical accomplishments.
7.1 Introduction

Shiv K Kumar is a multi-faceted Postcolonial writer in Indian English Literature. The term ‘Postcolonial’ came after the term ‘colonial’ which was based on the theory of the superiority of European culture or Imperial culture and the rightness of the Empire. Colonial literature means the literature written by the native people including the writings by creoles and indigenous writers during the colonial times. Postcolonial literature means the literature written after the withdrawal of the imperial power from the territory of the native people. Having got the freedom from the colonial rule, the Postcolonial people thought of having their identity. So they raised their voice against the past exploitations and oppressions and attempted at establishing their identity. The question of identity whether it is of a writer or of a poet, of a nation or of a religion, and of the national or regional literature is important for each. Thus, this new term ‘Postcolonial’ literature is coined to suggest de-centering of colonial literature.

The origin of Postcolonial theory has become an enigmatic riddle that occupies the mind of the critics round the globe but no clear cut solution has yet come. Regarding to its origin Rajnath has stated: “The origins of postcolonial theory are rather complex. Did it emerge out of the ruins of post-structuralism? Was it a version of Marxism? Was it a reaction against formalism? … In fact, the postcolonial discourse means “to get connected with what is important for the lives of ordinary people, their culture, or on the other, “to show how people are being constructed and manipulated by cultural forms.”

In the postcolonial era the lives of ordinary people and their culture have been widely discussed in both Indian English Fiction and Indian English Poetry by the different perceptions of different writers and poets of different cultures. In Indian English Fiction, representation of colonialism, offers an unbiased common man’s and common sense perspective on colonialism in India. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and A.S.P. Ayyer whose lives, views and languages stem from Indian perceptive have discussed Indian landscapes and culture in their writings on the wide scale.

Postcolonial themes and techniques appear in Shiv K Kumar’s valuable writings. Shiv K Kumar himself underlines the favourite theme- East –West fusion of Postcolonial Indian English Poetry and also states, “ Another recurring theme in most
contemporary Indian Poetry in English is East-West cultural encounter. This perhaps relates to the fact that several of our poets have had their education abroad at Oxford, Cambridge, Leeds or some American University. So they often tend to write like expatriates or exiles while living in the West and look back nostalgically on their western experience when they return home.” His poem *A Letter from New York* included in his poetic volume *Subterfuges* is the best example of the dichotomy between the East and the West and also reveals his great longing for returning to India. He says: “Here I live in a garbage can and pile grows bigger each week with the broken homes splinted all round and further makes the contrast between the two cultures of East & West and points out that nothing is there but emptiness: Incidentally, there are no beggars at Grand Central or Broadway, no cripples on wheel barrows no lepers with patches of scraped skin. Only eyes, eyes, eyes staring at lamp-post.”

Postcoloniality emphasizes a contemporary state and therefore, the poet as a postcolonial poet writes poems of contemporary interest. He is well-versed with the new Postcolonial terms like ‘hybridity’ and ‘diaspora’ and his poetry is a living example of these terms in action and operation. As Leela Gandhi who considers Postcoloniality is another name for globalization, has rightly pointed out: “Postcolonialism pursues a post national reading of the colonial encounter by focusing on the global amalgam of cultures and identities consolidated by imperialism. To this end, it deploys a variety of conceptual terms and categories of analysis which examine the mutual contagion and subtle intimacies between colonizer and colonized. In this regard, the term ‘hybridity’ and ‘diaspora’, in particular stand out for their analytic versatility and theoretical resilience.”

Apart from the themes, one important ingredient of postcolonial literature is the language in which it is written. It was the conspiracy of the colonial rule to introduce English with the intention of converting the colonized into mimic men, but this tool proved to be the nail in their coffin as the Indians learnt how to pay them in the same coin. But today it is not the problem because English has become a global language, and has become a medium to represent the East to the West in an emphatic manner.

The writings of the Indian writers are purely postcolonial in texture and structure as their writings deal with notional and transnational themes. Poverty, superstition, injustice, hypocrisy, double dealing, East-West encounter and suffering and typical Indianness in the contemporary society are seen in Postcolonial writings
of Indian writers. Through technique the poets succeed in their mission of preserving the rich Indian heritage. Pandey says, “The poet is rooted to the traditions and cultures he lives by and that his vision is one of preserving the values which lie embedded in such traditions and cultures.”

7.2 Life-Sketch and Literary Career of Shiv K Kumar

Shiv K Kumar is an Indian poet, a playwright, a novelist and a short story writer. was born in Lahore in 1921, and was educated at Dayanand Anglo-Vedic High School and Forman Christian College, Lahore and Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. He had taught English Literature at Osmania University and the University of Hyderabad. Besides he was a Visiting Professor at various British and American Universities. In 1978, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (London) during his stay in England as Commonwealth Visiting Professor of English at the University of Kent at Canterbury. He received the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1987 for his collection of poems Trapfalls in the Sky. He lives in Hyderabad and is married to Madhu: they have two children. His published works include:


2. A Play: The Last Wedding Anniversary in 1975


Shiv K Kumar has contributed substantially to the expansion and enrichment of Indo-English verse during the last decade. The reviewer of the World Literature Written in English finds that Kumar “has really succeeded in organizing his material into dramatic tensions of life’s many contraries.” Critics have expressed admiration for the finished form, the tense diction and the arresting imagery of his poetry. His poetry signals his authenticity, individuality and resourcefulness. Most of the readers are struck by the irony and wit of his poems which impress them by an original, a
unique blend of the qualities to head and heart. His poems are classified on the seven segments which are the central emotion or theme of his poetry: 1. Love and Compassion 2. Sex, companionship, betrayal, and frustration. 3. Existential concern, pain and suffering. 4. Faith, conflict and self-search. 5. Decay, death and resurrection 6. Beauty, joy and eternity.7. Other themes. He treats various themes: love, sex, marriage, family, death as an alternative to unfulfilled desire. Sex and religion seem to fuse as substitute for traditional religious morality. Kumar has a Western rationalist outlook reliant on contrast. The three aspects which deserve special mention in his poetry are his Indianness, irony and imagery.

7.3 About Subterfuges:
Shiv K Kumar begins his poetic career with a desire to express his personal loss, pain and sorrow in the form of an art. The language, the rhetoric, the imagery, the mode of expression, collocation of new words and use of symbols and myths go together to build the technique in poetry. He broadened his poetic base by writing his poems including these features.

Subterfuges is his third book of verse. Which contains 26 poems and is his Magnum opus. It is here he has discovered his voice and ‘words obey his call’. The poems in Subterfuges fall chiefly into three divisions: religious, amatory and autobiographical. The choice of words, the use of imagery, the fondness for metaphor and similes and wit all go together in his poetry. With the extension of thematic range, came the technical accomplishment and he became a major voice in postcolonial Indian English Poetry.

He made an attempt to write a long autobiographical poem in order to make a fuller expression of the self. In some of the poems of Subterfuges such as Broken Columns, A Letter from New York, and Walking Down the Avenue of the Americas- Kumar’s exploration of self is more direct and deliberate, though the self he studies is not a disembodied self. The historical and cultural context in which the self-discovery takes place is vividly evoked. His poems explore the human condition rather than the isolated individual self.

East-West encounter, assertion of national identity by re-creating indigenous imagery, the subject of growing old and consciousness of loosing physical strength, love and sex, marriage, family relations, cultural interaction and above all the awareness of death are the dominant themes of his poetry. Death seems to be viewed
as an alternative to unrequited love and unfulfilled desire. Futility and frustration are more conspicuous than facile cheerfulness and optimism.

The voice of the poet among the modern poets is distinguished by his individual style. There is directness about his speaking voice and a familiarity that confronts the subterfuges of life and art. His voice constantly speaks in irony and rebellion and with cutting humour. His poetry is not confined to a specific dimension but to life in general, covering the axis of existence, of birth, relationships and death. His poetry takes us to the internal landscape of the mind where thoughts and emotions are no longer private but bared in their raw immediacy and intensity. ‘I write the way I experience life (Mukherjee 2000:232) is his uncomplicated explanation. His influences, both Indian and foreign, have given him a unique perspective and he calls it a ‘Comprehensive Perspective’ which comes from living in a multicultural environment.

Irony is the sharpest tool by which he can express his perspective on life and on lived experience. His ‘passionately confessional mode’ and his ‘mordent irony’ subvert the illusory nature of existence. In some of the poems irony undermines hallowed objects of desire or reverence by demystification. The image of woman is pulled down from the pedestal. In *My Mother’s Lover*, a six year old boy speaks on behalf of the betrayed. Here even a mother is capable of cheating ‘when father is away’.

Imagery is an integral part of a poet’s technique of writing poetry. The image of native land is poet’s important ingredient of his poetry. The theme of landscape and national identity occur in many of his poems. He grapples with ideas and abstractions, images of men and women on several plains with love, sex, companionship and problems relating to his own art. In *Indian Woman, A Mango Vendor, Rickshaw-wallah*, and *Aftermath* the images of India are handled with skill and keenness of intellect. He includes the stereotypical images of man and woman to show the other side of reality. It is notable that in many of his poems on man-woman relationships, the male psyche has been presented with sensitivity. He is essentially a poet of contemporary reality and seeker of innocence in the world that has been bedeviled with corruption, violence and hypocrisy.
7.4 Paraphrase

*Broken columns*, Shiv K Kumar’s autobiographical poem, is in seven sections and later five more sections are added to it. The first version of the poem is included in *Subterfuges*. The poem certainly has some elements of his life but it is not strictly an autobiographical poem. The poem begins when the poet was of four years of age and continues to develop with the growing of his child into manhood and maturity. The poem shows the conflict and tension between an individual who wants to grow with his innocence and simplicity on the one hand and the subterfuges of the society which tend to destroy the Pre-lapsarian innocence of the individual on the other. The opening lines of the poem make the poet’s attitude towards his parents crystal clear. It is his love for his mother and emotional attachment to her that bring out the ‘poet’ in the man into open. The father takes a back seat. Thus, he writes:

‘You’re now four:
you may drink in
all the glaciers,
nibble at raw pebbles
but not suck away’.

Father’s barb fell blunted
against Mother’s smile.(section1)

The father’s advice and attitude to life and his philosophy was beyond the comprehension of a boy of seven. The killing of goats and butcher’s cruel act of separating ‘heads intestines, thighs and shoulders’ disturbs the poet’s father who explodes:

‘Karma will run its cycle when these
maimed animals rise
to gobble down these shoppers!’ (Section II)

If butcher’s cruelty hurts a child of seven years of age, ‘a beggar’s sunken belly’ across the pavement brings to his mind the poverty of India in unmistakable terms. At the advent of puberty, the boy gets disturbed both at school and in the evening prayer at home. As the poet puts it:
‘At ten I play hide and seek
down the school-lane in a shop
stacked with teak and deodar
and suddenly Sheila’s chequered
skirt blows into life.’ (Section III)

In the evening when all the members of the family begin their prayer with chants from the Gita, the adolescent boy visualizes the girl in the following way:

‘A puff of deodar rustles
through a girl’s skirt
and two tender legs
gyrating the air into fuzzy yearnings’. (Section IV)

As the poetic persona grows in years, at fourteen he encounters in the history classroom the ruins of the Mughal Empire and sees the nakedness of British imperialism—both political and cultural. So, Indians realize the waste and lament:

‘We pant on the dunes
of the relentless Sahara.’ (Section V)

The poet describes the passion in life at twenty. The Biblical image befits the situation as the passion in him grows and demands consumption.

‘At twenty
I see a girl’s bodice shimmer
in the water’s eye. I am
the Adam who has just founded
a new city
named all its streets.’ (Section VI)

The physical passion reigns supreme the first love making underlines ‘no commitment to the stars, she knew/ only a beetle’s mating drone’. This love relationship needs a legal sanction. The father sniffing ‘danger in scraps / of scented
pink paper / blown from my pockets’ sends the son to the temple priest for advice. The irony undertone the poem when he writes:

‘In the meditation-room
of the shiva temple
the high priest communes with Brahma
wrapped in saffron loin- cloth
he lets his long, grey hair
cascade down to life’s quiddity
As he becons me into the dark chamber
I pull myself out of the earth’s orbit
into blank space
But as I emerge from the netherworld
an aroma of deodar wells up
and a cluster of mynas hurls defiance at the truth.

No doubt, the poem ends with autobiographical note.

In An Encounter With Death the speaker acknowledges a spiritual presence which can be understood only by intuition and not by reason or the senses. The mysteries of love and life lie beyond the scope of his reason. The theme of death is an emotive source that gives intensity to his poetry. This autobiographical poem reveals the impact of death on the poet. Death is a mystery. It is a major theme in his poetry. His poetic career began with a poem on death (i.e. An Encounter With Death) written after the death of his mother. In this poem he not only describes the last moments of his mother’s life but affirms his faith in the beliefs of the Hindus. He writes:

‘… my mother’s hand was on her heart. Was she delicately poised on that thin ‘border line between existence and extinction, where eternity unfolds all her riddles? But before my arm could reach out to her, she slumped into oblivion.

‘I was undone: in my flush
I heard the snapping of some
mysterious bonds';
it was now and not at my birth
that the umbilical cord lay sundered
… Immanence is an attribute of God '

Death continues to haunt him. In My Mother’s Death Anniversary, he seems to say that the time passes on as the pain continues to haunt our minds and the dead is remembered once a year by way of our performing the rituals. What remains is only a sad memory of our dear ones who have been taken away by the death. He says:

‘The cock-beat leaps
beyond the ECG’s longitudes,
and far across the street
a pariah dog’s wail
climbs up to the seedy moon
Each year a day chooses me
to feed the dead’.

The reality of death lies on the other extreme of life. This paradox of the coordinate existence is the underlying tension that initiated the poet’s reflections.

The religious poems have a tone of inquiry about the glorified image of deities. With an uncanny insight the poet seizes upon the reverse aspect of deities (Kali and The Sun Temple, Konark), sees sanctity in sex (To A Prostitute) and sex encroaching upon devotion (Wife at Prayer).

Kali is not a hymn but a discovery of polarities on three levels: divine, human and animal. Kali is creative and destructive, and the two contending aspects are the embodiment of one principle—the divine cosmic energy, of the human beings the hunger for life has the implications of life and death and the animal world where the strongest feed on the weakest. This vulnerability of life is conveyed through the life-annihilating symbols—dog, serpent, hyena, the ravenous deity and the famished woman and the life-sustaining animals—child, lamb, mother and these are symbols have partners in both the groups. Blood is also symbolic of energy and creation and also destruction. ‘If the way to create/ is the way to kill / I have hoarded enough
blood/ in my throat/ for all the hyenas to suck from’. The hunger for life and its duality is reflected in the imagery of life and death. The poet could share the blind beliefs of the masses. *Kali* and *An Encounter with Death* are sarcastic poems on the rituals in India. He describes the shocking things like animal sacrifices in a detached and dispassionate manner:

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‘Beyond the priest’s monotone
a lamb bleats for the knife-edge.
…but your nectar is the blood
that jets from fresh arteries.
If the way to create
is the way to kill,
I have hoarded enough blood
in my throat
for all the hyenas to suck from’.
(Kali)
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He makes use of irony as a mode of perception to expose the hollowness of rituals and religious practices. In *Kali*, there is a heavy irony. He depicts the scene of his mother’s death and the rituals that haunt him:

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‘For thirteen days, say the Hindus, the departed
soul hovers round its earthly habitat, and
so for thirteen days I have communed with the
spirit—whenever a door-handle rattles, a
ripping wind howls, the dog whines or
blue-bells clang. I feel her presence within me.’
(An Encounter with Death)
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In *Kali*, the speaker stands confounded in front of the goddess, trying to grasp the paradox of the cycle of regeneration and death.
'If the way to create
is the way to kill,
I have hoarded enough blood
in my throat
for all the hyenas to suck from'

The poet’s amatory poems reveal love and sex. The theme of sexual desire is another recurring feature of his poetry. Like death it imbues life with intensity and has tremendous energy to impact life. He celebrates sexuality in *The Sun Temple, Konark*. In *To a Young Wife*, the husband speaks his fear of sexual failure. The poem *Aftermath* shows an unflattering picture of ‘a pneumatic about love / lashing our diabetic bodies into a semblance of organism’. ‘She stirs again/ but I see a cockroach/ creeping up the bedpost.’

*Subterfuges* contains a number of love poems. Here the poet sees woman not an object of beauty but sees the ugliness, dirt and disease associated with life. It is a negative vision running counter to the romantic glorification of woman. The portrait of a *Cabaret Dancer* brings home not only the beauty of the woman but also the ugliness hidden underneath as the dancer kisses even the lepers ‘on their flushed cheeks’. Woman— a paragon of beauty and virtue, a constant concern of the amorous poetry is demythicised by the poet. In *Cabaret Dancer* he uses subtle images to suggest the arousal of sexual desire seeing a cabaret dancer performing on the stage. He writes:

‘A frenzied moan curls up
from Hades and all
the animals are unleashed
A scramble for a closer
scrutiny of the deity’

The poet speaks sensuality as an act not unknown to Gods for they are also engaged in physical act for pleasure. Thus he writes:

‘These stones have wings
and darkness here flaps
into phosphorescence.
Washed by the semen
of primeval gods
playing under candid moonlight
they froze into sculpture
as the Sun broke in.’

(The Sun Temple, Konark)

In A Mango Vender a young youthful woman sells mangoes, while attracting customers (including old men) by her beauty and charm. The poem is evocative of the bazaar scene in our country. The sensual imagery recreates the characters in their own situation. Thus the poet puts:

‘She squats
on the dust-broomed pavement
behind a pyramid of mangoes
washed with her youth’s milk
tinctured with the pink rose in her hair.
Through the slits
of her patched blouse
one bare shoulder
two white moons
pull all horses
off the track’. (A Mango Vender)

The poet moves from early narcissism to “troubled maturity” (An Indian Mango Vendor), figuring a quest for fulfilling love faced by its death or perversion in modern life. Marriage and infidelity alike fail to provide the ideal. Despite their darkness, the poems echo “a deeply Indo-English religious nostalgia”. The poet’s struggling fusion of cynicism and celebration, religion and sexuality (attaining a typical tranquility in The Sun Temple at Konarak) is read against the alienated
‘native intellectual’ and ‘agnostic piety’. Women are reduced to elemental sexuality and divinized, “abolishing the need for reciprocity in human relationships” and prompting then deadening sexual drive.

The poet’s originality lies in the uniqueness of his imaginative world. He grapples with abstractions and ideas, images of men and women on the social scene, the complex of emotions centering round human varieties like sex, love, companionship and problems relating to art. Through powerfully evoked images the past is relevance. *My Co-Respondent* is a fine example of how he achieves an integrative of idea and image, statement and drama to provide a wholly satisfying experience. The opening line ‘Not my rival but co-sharer’ sets the tone of the poem. The speaker is confident of his power and is not deterred by his rival’s advances. He knows that ‘often when she made the gesture/ you were the prime mover’.

Therefore, the speaker in this poem feels assured of acknowledge he earned and turns to the painful past and explores the nature of the difference between his situation and that of the co-sharer. The speaker sacrifices the woman to the co-sharer and leaves for ‘pastures anew’. He says:

‘Now that I give you the rose to keep
let me pass through the turnstile
into the open fields
where riderless horses whinny
under the red moon’.

The irony in the poem is implicit. The rival in love is termed ‘co-sharer’ and the tone is mocking. The competition in love ends with the speaker deciding to go away into the open fields, leaving the woman to the ‘co-sharer’. The poet new coinage of love vocabulary, ‘co-sharer’ indicates the rival in love.

The love poems are built on failures, betrayals and frustrations in life caused by the lack of consistancy on the part of the woman. Hence his love poetry is associated with pain and suffering.

In *Wife at Prayer* he has pointed the bewilderment of a husband who fails to understand why ‘musk roses’ do not intoxicate the senses of his wife who prefers a stone god to her living husband. He believes that the ‘hieroglyphics’ of his
clamorous libido are inexplicable for her stone God. ‘Her gods cannot gloss/ my hieroglyphics; / for have they ever drunk/ from buttercups’. The awareness increases his dilemma. When his wife’s hand weaves ‘halos’ with ‘joss sticks’, his passion gets activated and he feels aroused to break the ‘truce’ reached between them. This clash between physical desire and ritualistic devotion creates a tension. ‘… This is not the moment/ to caress the velvet/ crests of chrysanths.’ The poet handled such a tension between living passion and dead ritual with both tenderness and graceful bitterness.

The purity and piety of love is of paramount importance in his poetry. In My Grandfather’s Love Letters, he has denounced through contrast the outrageous sexuality of man in society. The grandfather’s love letters carry purity of feeling and reverence for the fair sex as opposed to the lascivious attitude of the modern day lovers who ‘ go whoring/ down the narrow lanes of Calvary/ asking for the arse’s wound/ to be pricked again and again’. The words in the letters of the grand old lovers have a grace, tenderness and sense of sacrifice instilled in them. Love overrides passion. That is why there is more stability and moral soundness in their relationship. The poet thus hints at the lost ethic of love and the need to redefine masculinity.

The poet denounces the habit of reducing the purity of sex to profaneness. In ‘To A prostitutes’, he has condemned the unjust and diseased way of looking at the prostitutes in the society. To him, ‘A whore is ‘more sinned against than sinning’.’ This high moral seriousness in his creative empathy with sinness is Dostoevskian. The Prostitute is a symbol of soul’s magnanimity. She is a true ‘given’ a selfless being offering joy to the customers. She is holy mother, prostitute and wife rolled into one:

‘For my son will ferment
the same yeast
as my father’s father,
and what you offer me now
was also my mother’s gift
to a stranger.

My wife awaits me round the corner
to reclaim what’s left of me.’

The erotic in this poem has been dressed up in religious terms like ‘congregation’, ‘shrine’ etc. The poet has also exposed hypocrisy of sexual life through the poem.

The ancient art is brought alive in his poetry when he depicts the spirit of Kamasutra in verse:

‘Rhythm and fire—
this riotous sea of navals. Breasts
and lips will never break
into prevarication
for the perfect logos
is the act
of affirmation’

(The Sun Temple, Konark)

The three poems on Western art (Cabaret Dancer, Nude Model in Art Exhibition, At A Psychedelic Art Exhibition) seem to reveal the his disenchantment with it. A repulsive animal imagery is unleashed in Cabaret Dancer:

‘She wiggles, rolls, unfurls,
spilling her sap all
over the earth’s span.
Then she slithers through
wineglasses, kisses all
the lepers on their flushed cheeks.’

The whole poem seems to engulf and devour the much vaunted modern civilization. The poems on art also bring out the aimlessness of Western life—‘Dancing around a vacuity’ behind which ‘the crocodiles are meditating’. This disturbing Psychedelic Art is placed in contrast to tranquility of the Buddha:

‘On the front wall
the Buddha’s eyes
shaken out of potty quietude
blink hysterically
under the throbbing neon-lights
and the percussive music
that lead us down the snake-pit.’

In *Nude Model in Art Exhibition*, man’s leering at nudity through his explication of beauty has been exposed with precision:

‘Limb by limb
the word peels off its pretence
till the fox’s eye has seen all’.

The images of ‘bird’, ‘red blotch’, ‘flaxon hair’, ‘horizon’s waistline’, ‘dark shore’—all reflect the sensual charm of the model as though she were a perfection of Greek Art. There is a Keatsian delight in the beauty of this female form.

Impersonalization of conjugal disharmony and extension of lovelessness involving the whole contemporary civilization in a western backdrop are discernible in *At A Psychedelic Art Exhibition* where ‘the centre expands to devour the ambit’. The viewers find on the wall Buddha’s eyes blinking at the lovelessness of this fragmented world and resolve:

‘Let us walk through this canvas/
to the room’s end
where the crocodiles
are meditating’

*The Invaders* is a ‘tautly controlled’ lyric with piercing pain at heart. Intense suffering caused by brutal sexual assault weaves the pattern of agony in *The Invaders*. Irony of fate plays the crucial role. The poet’s bitter irony is directed against the collapse of moral values. The parents in the poem are left in deep anguish for the invaders have raped their daughters and left them with gifts of ‘blood’, semen and mineral water.’.
‘Shadows scaled the rampart
on ropes of darkness and sank
between our daughters’ thighs
while the gods swung drunkenly
by the church bells’.

The image of gods drunkenly is a painful expression of ironic anger. The irony is still more pronounced in ‘the muezzin croons every night in sleep/ Let their people go!’

*A Mango Vender* depicts a young woman, poor and pitiful. She is harassed by ‘This old man’s leery eyes/ idle birds/ pecking at the mango- nipples’. In *Broken Columns*, the speaker’s developing sexuality is pitied against the teachings of his parents, school and inherited tradition. The stumping irony to this whole re-education process is, when the boy is sent to the high priest of the Shiva temple to cure him of his libidinous interest in women. He feels,

‘A clod jasmine –braceleted hand
caresse my nape
my nerves tingle like a horse’s flanks
on a frigid morning.’

The violation of trust, the infringement on privacy, and the outrage of decency is explained even more acutely in sexual matters. The poet utilizes this intensity of negative emotion to denote his anger and outrage at the violation of the fundamental norms of existence.

The poet’s social poems reveal his awareness and concern for his environment. There are poignant pictures of the ordinary person in poem like *Rickshaw-wallah*, ‘pulling his cross/ on a bellyful of questions’. *Rickshaw-wallah, Indian Women, A Mango Vender, To A Young Wife* are some of his best lyrics. *Rickshaw-wallah* depicts poverty as faced by countless millions of poor people. For a handful of coins, the Rickshaw-wallah pulls passengers, ‘On the cushioned seat behind’ beyond the ‘municipal precints’, which is compared with ‘the mother-hen gagging her chicks, full throated cries/ for a few grains of rice/ their last supper.'
The poet draws attention to the victimized Indian women in several of the poems with a social perspective. In a description of *Indian Women* who live ‘in this triple-baked continent’. It is said that

‘Patiently they sit
like empty pitchers
on the mouth of the village well
pleating hope in each braid
of their mississippi-long hair’.

The poem captures the plight of Indian women passively waiting in expectation in a male-dominated society. The patience of Indian women waiting for their men’s return is expressed through indigenous images. And in between ‘they guard their tattooed thighs’ and resist ‘the moisture in their eyes’. This is a typical image of Indian village women who are mostly devoted to their husbands. The poet describes the Indian women who while making a queue near a well for water wait for their men’s return who have gone ‘beyond the hills’. Here he wishes to draw the image of rural and tribal India. Woman is considered merely a commodity to be exploited.

In some of his poems he captures the restlessness, the alienation and the sterility of modern life. They provide a picture of the vulgarity, fragmentation, crashness, squalor, sterility and the stress of modern life, especially in the West. *A Letter From New York, Walking Down the Avenue of the Americas* exemplify the modern landscape and attitude. However a particular concern of the poet is ‘cultural interaction’, like for instance, ‘of a brown Indian from the land of Gandhi’ among the New Yorkers. In these poems he harks on the point of cultural alienation and identity crisis. While walking down the Avenue of the Americas, he feels alienated as he fails to identify himself with the natives. Being haunted by a sense of distrusts he writes:

‘Every passerby in Polaroid’s
is my wife’s seducer
my child’s kidnapper.
My reflection in every shop-window
is a portrait
of my ashes middle-age.
harassed by pavements
hurling stones at me.’

_The Last Stop_ characterizes the life in the cities. The speaker’s decision to ‘stick in here under the last seat’ and be the last passenger ‘to disembark’ from his cabin is a symbolic way of conveying the modern man’s inner craving for a moment of thoughtful calm.

In _Returning Home_, the poet speaks of a warring couple who finally reconcile to each other. ‘Home’ is the place where one listens to the counsel of others and makes amends. he writes:

‘Here in the open privacies
the old gods counsel compromise’

_Coromandel Beach_ is cast into a symbolic pattern to reflect a view of life as transient phenomenon heading towards disintegrating just as winking bubbles on the sea have a short span of life. This is a vision analogous to one in which poet discerns early mortality in life and to one which envisages the idea of arrival and exit on the stage.

The _Coromandel Beach_ is the symbolic of life, the brevity and frailty of which freeze into a reel of short crystallizing into palpable images of emaciation (myopic eyes, frozen legs), of disintegration (split, blow, berserk, torso, kill), of inconsistency (mercurial, sand, courtesan, strumpet), of turbulence (dashing enemy and surging sea) and sharp images with clear contrast between light and shade, hide and reveal, beast and man, crimson and black, sun and glow-worm. The fiery enemy is on a move to relegate the coastal town to ashes. The town has no guard except a tubectomised woman and an invalid crow. The crow, by its association with doom, beckons to the coming devastation and emerges as a desert prophet, a master conception of contradictory qualities. The crow as a desert prophet in conjunction with the courtesan strumpet, symbolic of prohibited barrenness, reaches climax in sand. Sand is associated with courtesan, strumpet, prophet, beach, pebbles and dunes: and precludes the growth and fits with the image of crimson turning into dark and with the stimulating image of jaded sun waning at the appearance of the swarming
glow-worms and the woman who has lost the power of procreation through operation.

In *A Letter from New York* the poet brings the dichotomy between the East and the West and finally longs for returning home. As he puts it:

‘Here I live in a garbage can
‘and the pile grows bigger each week
with the broken homes
splintered all around’

Then comes the contrast between the two:

‘They wouldn’t believe it here
that the Ganges’ water can work
miracles like Lourdes,’
in spite of the cartloads of dead men’s ashes.
And bones and the pundits’ shit-
daily offerings to the Mother River!’

The poets has no desire to glorify the West. He notes that ‘the white of the negro maid’s eyebells is the only clean thing here’ and asserts, ‘but my soul is still my own’ He knows that he can never be an American and longs to return home. He says,

‘But the brown of my skin defies
all bleachers.
How long will the eclipse last?’

He sees the ugliness and deprivation in the foreign society. In the West, one lives in an ‘inverted manhole’ or ‘a garbage can’ with ‘broken homes/ splintered all around.’ He seeks to unveil the *Subterfuges* of life by his over searching ironic vision. The cliché of stereotypes and mystification by romance is undercut by his desire to present a sharp picture of reality. The image of woman: the myths of the past: the hold of the sacred: and the pride in reason, are perspectives of reality.
The prominent themes in Shiv K Kumar’s poetry are those issues that intensely affect life. Death is representative of the inevitable of life and is shrouded in mystery and fear. To confront it is affirming reality. Sexual desire connotes energy and life. By using negative sexual analogy the poet effectively draws attention to the loss of vitality due to festering hypocrisy in society. This realist poet also reflects a humanist perspective. The poems on social concern focus on the victimized, the marginalized and the alienated. The truth of their experiences is highlighted with poignant imagery.

7.5 Glossary and Notes

- **glaciers** - mass of ice, formed by snow on mountains.
- **gyrate** - move round in circles or spirals; revolve
- **swig off** - take drinks of.
- **wedge** - fix tightly; packing into a crack.
- **abjure** - promise; swear solemnly on oath.
- **squat** - sit on one’s heels; settle on land without permission
- **perdition** - complete ruin; everlasting damnation
- **piss** - pass urine
- **diffidence** - being lacked in self-confidence; shyness
- **congregation** - gathering of people.
- **prevarication** - instance of untrue statements.
- **hieroglyphics** - of unintelligible written symbols.
- **chrysanthemums** - (flower of) garden plant blooming in autumn and early winter.
- **stalagmite** - similarly shaped growth mounting upwards from the floor of a cave as water containing lime drips from the roof.
- **anoint** - apply oil or ointment to (especially as a religious ceremony)
- **leviathan** - sea animal of enormous size; anything of very great size and power
promontory - head-land; high point of land standing out from the coastline.

muezzin - man who proclaims the hours of prayers from the minaret of a mosque.

croon - hum or sing gently in a narrow range of notes

halcyon - calm and peaceful.

7.6 Check Your Progress

A. Complete the following sentences by choosing correct alternatives:

1. Shiv K Kumar’s Subterfuges contains ——— poems.
   a. 20    b. 22    c. 24    d. 26

2. The poems in Subterfuges fall chiefly into three divisions: religious, amatory and ———.
   a. autobiographical  b. social    c. political    d. natural

3. In Subterfuges, ——— is a long autobiographical poem of Shiv K Kumar.
   a. Rickshaw-wallah    b. A Mango Vender
   c. Broken Columns    d. Indian Woman

4. The poem, An Encounter with Death describes the death of Shiv K Kumar’s———.
   a. father        b. grandfather      c. friend          d. mother

5. The poem, ——— exposes the hollowness of rituals and religious practices.
   a. The Invaders    b. Kali    c. The Last Stop    d. Returning Home

B. Answer the following questions in one word or sentence each:

1. Which poems in Subterfuges deal with the Western Art and aimlessness of Western life?

2. What is the central idea of My Grandfather’s Love Letter?

3. Who is a desert prophet in Coromandel Beach?
4. In ‘To A Prostitutes’ what does the prostitute symbolize? Why?
5. Which poems in Subterfuges reveal Shiv K Kumar’s social concern and awareness?

7.7 Keys to check your progress:

A.  
   1. d  
   2. a  
   3. c  
   4. d  
   5. b

B.  
   1. ‘Cabaret Dancer’, ‘Nude Model in Art Exhibition’, and ‘At A Psychedelic Art Exhibition’ deal with Western Art and aimlessness of Western life.
   2. The central idea of My Grandfather’s Love Letter is the purity and piety of love.
   3. The crow is a desert prophet in conjunction with the courtesan strumpet as it symbolizes prohibited barrenness.
   4. In ‘To A Prostitutes’, the prostitute symbolizes the soul’s magnanimity as she is a true ‘given’ a selfless being offering joy to the customers.
   5. Rickshaw-wallah, Indian Women, A Mango Vender, To A Young Wife are some of the lyrics in Subterfuges reveal Shiv K Kumar’s social concern and awareness.

7.8 Exercises

A. Answer the following questions in 250-300 words.
   1. Shiv K. Kumar as a Postcolonial Poet.
   3. The use of imagery in Shiv K Kumar’s poetry.
   4. Major themes depicted in Shiv K Kumar’s Subterfuges.

B. Write short notes on:
   1. East-West encounter in Subterfuges.
   2. The Indianness in Shiv K Kumar’s poetry
   3. The theme of love and sex in Subterfuges.
   4. Shiv K Kumar’s treatment to the image of woman.
   5. The theme of death in Subterfuges.
7.9 Books for Further Reading


8.0 Objectives

- To acquaint the learner with Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry.
- To enable the learner to know Jayanta Mahapatra as a Poet
- To acquaint the learner with autobiographical elements in his poetry.
- To make the learner familiar with different aspects of Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry, such as themes, images, idioms, and technical accomplishments and his vision.

8.1 Introduction

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the most esteemed names in the domain of contemporary Indo-Anglican poetry. He is usually regarded as a post-modern experimental poet. An important aspect of the new poetry or modernist poetry pioneered by Ezekiel and Daruwalla has been a constant encounter with the personal
and immediate perception in relation to the outer reality or the external world. In the sixties, Indian poetry in English entered a very exciting phase of creativity in the form of arrival of fresh talents; such Shiv K Kumar, R Parathasarathy, A K Ramanujan, Dilip Chitre, Arun Kolatkar, A K Mehrotra, and Jayanta Mahapatra. Of them, Jayanta Mahapatra enjoys a unique privilege and shares it with A K Mehrotra. In fact both of them view poetry as a structure of images and deal with their obsessions, memories, doubts and other personal experiences.

Mahapatra is usually described as a significant poet of Oriyan sensibility. Mahapatra’s poems deal with intricacies of human relationships, social problems of post-independence phase, personal themes of love, sex, sensuality, marriage and philosophical or cultural issues as well. In addition to these, Mahapatra has a special interest in the predicament of man vis-à-vis Nature, Time and rush of history. He is an academic poet but his poetry is highly personal, allusive, ironic and even confidential.

To Mahapatra, Writing poetry is a passing phase, a thrilling experience. To quote Mahapatra:

“Poetry makes me write poems with a bad heart. I don’t know what
That exactly means, but it is the heart that makes one turn secretly into
Someone—a leader or loser perhaps—passing one to choose values,
Attitudes, and to do the not so—obvious; this heart, as it keeps on
Trying to hide the wounded walls of its house and at the same time
asking itself for a meaning to our lives.” (Many Indians)

Mahapatra is a reflective poet with ironic stance. It is a poetry of exploration where the need for survival with dignity in the midst disease, corruption and decay seems to be basic preoccupation. He is a master of many rhythms and harmonies. He is at times satirical but at other times he is confessional but never lapses into mysticism or solipsism. Even in his early poetry, one can notice poet’s struggle with words and phrases as an attempt to come to terms with the hard reality. The title of his volumes of poetry shows the theme and matter of his poetry. Most of them imply tragic vision of life to which the poet is predominately and essentially committed. They connote bleak, barren, loneliness, silence, frustration and repentance.
The richness and sophistication of language, the softness and delicacy of the words chosen, systematized orchestration of authenticated experiences through the exact palpability of images, the sincerity of harping on the ‘feel’ of the experiences rather than on their ‘thought’, the sweetness of music emerging from a fountain-like flow of the verse-form contribute to the greatness and ingenuity of Mohapatra’s poetry.

8.2 Life-sketch and literary career of Jayanta Mahapatra

Jayanta Mahapatra, born on 22 October 1923 in Cuttack, belongs to a lower middle-class family. He had his early education (from Kindergarten to Cambridge classes) in English medium at Stewart school, Cuttack. After his Master’s Degree in Physics, he joined as a teacher in 1949 and served in different Government college of Orissa. He got his superannuation in 1986 when he was in Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. Mahapatra comes from a Christian family. His grandfather could be called ‘Rice Christian’ because in the time of famine and starvation he sought refuge from a Christian mission and in the process adopted a new faith for himself and his family.

Jayanta Mahapatra began writing poems rather late in comparison with his contemporaries. But this late beginning does not in any way distort his achievement. His poems have appeared in most of the reputed journals of the world. He received the prestigious Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award (Chicago) in 1975. He is the first Indian poet in English to have received the Central Sahitya Academy Award (1981) for his Relationship. He has got an honorary Doctorate by Ravenshaw University, Cuttack (02 May 09) and ‘Padma Shree Award’ from the President of India (26 Jan 09)

His early poems were born of love, of love’s selfishness. They celebrate not only passion, the body’s spacious business, but consistently evoke a melancholic atmosphere rent with absences, fears, foreboding and sufferings. But slowly and steadily the poet released himself from this lonesome citadel of love, and learnt involving himself with other men, living or dead with many other succulent chambers of living. Fear of ageing, fear of death, and love for life and memory, love for the golden past an inquisitiveness to live amid contraries of life, and a complete absorption in and identification with culture and tradition of Orissa—all these run simultaneously, as it were, the poet is sincerely trying to uphold the lost dimension of blood and the living. Death is a new beginning for the poet, and life a ‘telegraph key
tapping away in the dark’. Childhood memories occupy a considerable space in his poetry. His commitment to and identification with Orissa becomes complete when he exhorts the dark daughters engraved on the body of the Sun Temple at Konark. His early poetry bears resemblance to various modernist and post-modernist movements in poetic styles and theories of craft (e.g. collage, Montage, Beat movement). In the next phase, this kind of abstractionism or surrealistic word-play is assimilated within a proper structure. In the last phase, there is greater clarity by means of the poet’s wrestling with location, myth, ritual and cultural background.

Showering the praise on the use of imagery in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra, J O Perry says:

“They come as a rain of fragments, as they strike our earth of awareness some may too easily disappear in the dust and confusion, if erratic rivulets emerge and form a puddle here and there, we may vainly expect and seek a coalescing, or a dominating image, a concrete show stopper. But all the while pattern continues and tolerates our ignorances, defies our determinations and tests them by the pressure of its seriousness not to be overtaken by its own needs, its own limited ways of seeing and speaking. So we are presented with a repeated pattern, an endless process that cannot be harnessed as energy.”

His Works:

Close the sky, Ten by Ten (1971)  
Swayamvara & 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 & Fruit (1988)  
Temple (1989)
Prose:


2. *Door of Paper: Essay and Memoirs*

   His translations (from Oriya to English) bear the stamp of his originality too. Mahapatra also published a collection of short stories in English and a collection of original poetry in Oriya. From 1979 to 1985 he edited a creative journal, *Chandrabhaga*. He was also the founding editor of *Kavvy Bharati*.

   Mahapatra’s works present various themes, ideologies and techniques. His *Close the sky, Ten by Ten* (1971) consisting of forty nine short lyrics opine loneliness, love, silence. In *Swayamvara and other poems* (1971) he shows his frequency and the facilities of English language and his shortcomings in vernacular language. In *A Father’s Hours* (1976) he articulates despising notes for the political-leader of India and how they are responsible for the loss of value culture and social consciousness. His *A Rain of Rites* (1976) deals with the past heritage of India, the relation of the poet to the natural world as mystery and aspects of eternity. His *Waiting* (1979) expresses the poet’s relationship with tradition and culture and historical past of Orissa. Rites, rituals, charity, festivals, legends and heritage are the part of poet’s own self, *The False start*, stresses on the time consciousness of duration and space. The poet opines that life is a false start and it should be renewed again. In *Relationship* he again touches myths, culture, and tradition of Orissa. He shows his relation with Orissa faith, hope, dreams, and memories. *Life Signs* deals with hunger and famine— the causes of man’s moral disorder. Words are his world, his people are like God. *Dispossessed Nests* (1986) recounts the wailings of the country. *Burden of waves of Fruit* is the amalgamation of hunger, pain, death, time and hypocrisy. His *Temple* (1989) deals with the myths whereas *Whiteness of Bone* (1992) stresses on Landscape, time and contemporary reality. *Shadow Space* (1977) gives the ideas of helplessness, skepticism, super consciousness, nostalgia, present reality, violence, etc. His *Random Descent* gives the smell of Wordsworth’s “The still, sad music of humanity” as expressed by Pradip Kumar Patra. It is a portrait of mental journey into the spiritual silence. In Mahapatra’s poetry, there are the glimpses of Orissa its culture, its lost glory and the contours of Oriya life.
Mahapatra is a fine artist. He is an excellent man with finer physic sensibility. Orissa is his paradise. He has great fascination and pride for his root Orissa and the language. There are many Indies, but Orissa is unique. To quote Mahapatra:

“I don’t think this is one India. There are many different Indias -
Orissa, is one India, Bengal is another, Maharashtra, Kerala, Kasmir -
These are all different Indias. It’s easier to relate yourself to a particular region than to talk about the whole of Indias as construct. The culture Of Orissa is different from the culture of Bengal or the culture of Bihar.
The worship of the god Jagannanth is not to be found anywhere outside Orissa. The whole oriya culture, the oriya race is built around this god.
The oriya religion is very different from religion in other parts of India. India comes second, Orissa, come first. (Many Indians)

Konarak, Bhubaneswar, Chilka, Cuttack add the beauty to it. Legends, mystery, myth, culture, historical background, form the nucleus of his poetry. Poems like Dawn at Puri, and Main Temple Street, Puri, Indian Summer poem, Evening in an Orissa village, The Orissa poems, The Indian poem, The Indian Way reveal his Indian sensibility and his quest for root. His feelings, emotions, impulses are the saucy framework of his landscape. Orissa becomes the part for whole of India’s cultural and religious past running into present and forming the ‘Presentness of Past’ (Eliot’s phrase ) of the rootlessness, emptiness in modern existence. Love, sex, relationship, feelings, affairs make his super thematic overview of his poetic grandeur.

8.3 About A Rain of Rites

About the book A Rain of Rites of Mahapatra, Vernon Young says:

“The manner of apprehension in his wonderful, senate poems inevitably brings to tongue the word, ‘sophistication’. His psychology is at once more historical, more anxious, more involutes than that of any Chinese poet, old or modern, known to me.”

A Rain Of Rites, the poem from which Mahapatra’s 1976 volume derives its title, can be considered a turning point in Mahapatra’s poetic career. His early poems are all written in a modernistic manner and are more extrovert poems. With A Rain of
Rites he starts speaking of his existence as a poet more emphatically, and his poetry starts becoming a metaphor for itself. The images start revealing perceptions related to the process of creation itself. In poetry which is communion and not communication language becomes a loosely connected set of evocative signs rather than a system and discourse. Every word becomes a shifting metaphor and every sentence challenges neat interpretation. It is not that such poetry is necessarily meaningless. At its best it can have a great power to convey a highly complex experience and can acquire haunting beauty. Poems about father and ancestors are almost a subgenre in Indian-English poetry. Appreciating the poetry of Mahapatra, Ravindra K Swain says:

“Despite the apparently unparaphrasable nature of his poetry, Jayanta Mahapatra continues to be read and discussed widely both in India and abroad and his influence on the younger poets writing today is distinctly perceptible.”

A Rain of Rites form the middle phase of his poetic growth. Here he meditates on the tragic vision which emerges out of his surroundings where the stone made monuments crumble and crack. Many personal and other moments or events drag the persona into moods of despair. Hinting at the themes of the poems in A Rain of Rites, the blurb of the book contains the comments. “This is a collection of poems out of India by a voice authentic enough to survive from a land where everything endures while everything changes. Many of the poems deal either the deeper inner world of mysterious symbols, of people who settle down peacefully into a deep rooted underground tradition of their ancestors. Others are about life renewing itself in an endlessly recurring cycle. There are poems about year’s first rain that enters people’s lives like happy ritual and poems about rivers and villagers that are charged with a quite, sacred, and content. In the poems of the book runs a graceful sense of motion, of prospective and of time is revealed. The impact of time against timeless, of sharply located present against the past, of waking against dream is depicted. And behind the poem, a search for wholeness and identity which takes poetry into the realm of vision can be sensed.”

On the theme of the poetry of Mahapatra, Ravindra K Swain says:

“Mahapatra, like the other poets of his generation—Pritish Nandy, K N Daruwalla and A K Mehrotra—explores the world of the irrational. He becomes increasingly involved with the relationship of the outer world with the inner world of
hurt, silence, memory and sexuality. Apart from preoccupations with childhood, history and tradition of his people and their rites and rituals, he becomes deeply concerned with his contemporary social reality.”

8.4 Paraphrase

Mahapatra is poet of ‘Time and moment’, ‘of hunger’, ‘of earth’ and ‘of homesickness’. He is the poet who captured sincerely the scenes and sights of Orissa. Mahapatra is oriya to the core. He, a child of the Sun and the Sea, delights in invoking the God of Fire and the God of Water in poems like *Sunbrust, Indian Summer Poem* etc. The poem *Myth* depicts Jayanta Mahapatra’s Christian psyche and how he received a terrible blow of humiliation on one occasion when he tried to enter the famous Hindu Temple with a genuine desire to worship the deity. This incident symbolically reveals the great humiliations he must have experienced in his life. The poem reveals only the tip of the iceberg of the agony, humiliation, anger, anguish, frustration, a feeling of rootlessness in his own land—a feeling that finally turns his mind to the past and reveals to him the sacrifices made by his brown ancestors, nameless as stones. He must have remained satisfied with an illusion that the glory of Orissa’s cultural heritage belonged to him as much as it belonged to any other person in Orissa. But ‘The saffron-robed bearded Hindoo’ Priest gave his psyche a death blow. And from this moment he began to ask his motherland Orissa i.e, ‘Kalinga’ a pertinent question— Who am I?

The stairs seem endless, lifelong,
and those peaks too, Annapurna, Dhaulagiri;
uncertain, impressive as gods.
I dare not go into the dark, dank sanctum
where the myth shifts swiftly from hand to hand, eye to eye.
The dried, sacrificed flowers smile at me.
I have become; a diamond in my eye.
Vague grieving years pit against the distant peaks
like a dying butterfly as a bearded, saffron-robed
man asks me, firmly:
Are you a Hindoo? (Myth)

On his own Muse Mahapatra writes: ‘These poems are just attempts of mine to hold a handful of earth to my face and let it speak- perhaps this signifies to my roots so that they reveal Who I am?’

There is no other poet to have written as many rain poems as Mahapatra. He took rain as a metaphor to contemplate on physical union in man and woman. Rain has been described in varieties of mood *In a Night of Rain, The Rain Falling, A Day of Rain, A rain, After the Rain, Four Rain Poems, Rains in Orissa, Another Day in Rain, This is the season of Old Rain and Again the Rain Falls.*

Sometimes a rain comes
slowly across the sky, that turns
upon its grey cloud, breaking away into light
before it reaches its objective.

He noticed agriculture has been a major occupation of most of Indians; he collected overpowering rituals centering round the lives of people in Orissa in *A Rain of Rites*. To him, rain is a motif influencing the lives of Indians especially in rural India.

Who was the last man on earth,
to whom the cold cloud brought the blood to his face?
Numbly I climb to the mountain-tops of ours
where my own soul quivers on the edge of answers.

It is a powerful regenerative force which associates him with images of “unfulfilment”, “unhappy memories”, “deprivation”, “thwarted sexuality” and “repetitive rituals observed by people”. The stark realities of India touch his heart and the writes about – hunger, myths, rituals, sexuality, love, anger, loneliness, the self and eternity, quest for rooting with geographical, social, cultural sources.

Woman is the substance of Mahapatra’s *A Rain Of Rites* The Indian womanhood has been a synonym for subjugation and suffering at all stages. The very first poem in *A Rain Of Rites, Dawn* talks about the passivity of the accursed womanhood.

There is a dawn which travels alone,
Without the effort of creation, without puzzle,
It stands simply, framed in the door, white in the air,
An Indian woman, piled up to her silences,
Waiting for what the world will only let her do.

This dawn does not break into the sweet chirping of birds heralding a new day in the life of woman. It is dull, uninteresting and ‘limp with dew’-the limpness is suggestive of women’s inability to stand on their own.

“Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetic world is doubtless scattered singularly with various images of wives, beloveds, whores, seductresses, village women, city women and adolescent girls, having deeply significant metaphoric evocations and spotlighting his tragic vision of life to which he is essentially committed. Demonstrating his vital poetic strategy and dimensionalising his deep humanism as well as his overriding thematic obsessions, Mahapatra’s images of women indubitably form a tonal chord central to the mood of his poems”.

Mahapatra has a great reverence and veneration for women who are primordial symbol of suffering and sacrifice. He also confides in mythical saying, “Wherever Women are revered Gods dwell there.” He views:

Our minds were tied to the myth
That womanhood was pure, one
With the repose of the gods.

But, at the same time, he is profoundly perplexed at perpetual and perennial problem pertaining to women. He discloses his disappointment and disgruntlement in this way:

“Perhaps, the status of the Indian Women in our society today has gone down. It is pathetic indeed to read accounts of the degradation our women subjected to in the daily newspapers. Cases of rape, murder, mutilation continue to fill the pages, and one sits helplessly, feeling this pain one is not able to do anything about…..I can see the pain in the eyes of women as they pass by the road every day; their seems to say: we are the beast of the burden, like cattle. It is about this pain I would like to write because I can’t do anything else”. 
Mahapatra presents pen portrait of position of Indian women:

Surrounded by the rough noose
of ownership, to feel
A sort of dutifulness
in the quiet bait of blood;
frightened, frail of paper
like an origami crane in the wind.
While the man says:
it’s the same story. The same one
we’ve heard a thousand times.

Women are acute sufferer of gender biasing. They are neglected and marginalized at both cultural and biological levels. Mahapatra succinctly sums up deploring and muted state of Indian women in the poem *Dawn*. Mahapatra presents pulchritudinous portrait of women struggling for their identity. They lead a meaningless and futile life. There is nothing but darkness all around them. The life is a living hell for them and they are bound to survive amidst sorrows and difficulties. They are mired in the mud of this mundane mayhem:

In the darkened room
a woman
cannot find her reflection in the mirror
waiting as usual
at the edge of sleep
In her hands she holds
the oil lamp
whose drunken yellow flames
know where her lonely body hides.
Above listed lines are possibly maiden of Mahapatra poetic career and he gave them title of *A Missing Person*. It is autographical in tone and temperament. To his own confession:

“And the picture of my mother, swathed in sari, holding on to the oil lamp in the shadows, the sooty flame swaying in the breeze, seemed to establish itself firmly in my mind.

The word ‘women’ is considered as a metaphor of sacrifice and suffering. Their desire and fate is destined by men. They are compelled to surrender against willful and stubborn desire of men. Mahapatra observes:

And the women
not answering to their names any more
and usually lying like unexpected lakes
deep within the wooded hills
break their calm surfaces
like wild water snakes
let loose from the yearly floods

Mahapatra writes widows woes thus:

Silent white walls of forbearance sit up
And begin to climb the stairs
Of her long inauspicious loneliness

The poet further delineates how a sex hungry man adds a woe to the worries of a widow:

Like jackals, malicious women around her,
sniffing the smell of the left over death,
feed on her scandalous intestines
through rain and summer, the spectacle or order,
through unreality and beguiling concern.
A fisherman who is poor and penniless, doesn’t hesitate to bargain the flesh of fifteen years old daughter. The poet wants to emphasize that numerous such incidents take place in our society where innocent and adolescent girls are dumped into this trade. It exposes stark reality of our contemporary society and independent India:

I heard him say: my daughter, she’s just turned fifteen………
feel her. I’ll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.
the sky fell on me, and a father’s exhausted wile.
long and lean: her years were cold as rubber.
she opened her wormy legs wide. Felt the hunger there,
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.

Mahapatra has depicted both the prostitute and client in professional and commercial way. On the one hand the prostitute is in the hot haste to attend another customer because, firstly, this is only means of her sustenance. Whatever amount she gets, only a small part of that remains with her and a great chunk is devoured and extorted by the touts and the pimps. Secondly, she might have fed up with monotonous and wearisome sex, so she doesn’t show curiosity and involvement with the clients. On the other hand, the client, tired and fatigued with the jobs of the day or not in good terms with his wife or miles away from home, family, wife and children to earn bread and butter, visits and pays the whore to have a kind of enlightenment and refreshment; a play and foreplay before the final play. In the poem *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street*, the poet describes:

You fall back against her in the dumb light,
trying to learn something more about women—-
while she does what she thinks proper to please you,
the sweet, the little things, the imagined;
until the statute of the man within

and her lonely breath thrashed against your kind.
One of his poems that earned a lot of fame is *Hunger*. The poem presents two kinds of hunger – one (physical) leading to the fulfillment of other (sexual). The theme is quite obvious. The poem primarily has two structures of images: flesh related and poverty related; hunger emanating from the flesh and that from poverty. What makes the poem impressive is the way these images entangle one another, some abstract, all building the irony of the two urges. The vivid images build a word portrait of the place, graphically relating the manners of the three characters.

The fisherman, the father who pimps his daughter, is careless in his offer of the girl: “as though his words sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself”. The utter hopelessness in the life of the fisherman and his daughter is such that it words like sanctity would be meaningless there. The values have no ‘purchase’ in so utterly degraded a human plight.

The image of wound is prepared to by such images as ‘the bone thrashing in his eyes’, ‘mind thumping in the flesh’s sling’, ‘burning the house’ ‘body clawing’. The actions indicated in these images portray the human effort that is rather desperate, fruitless and hurting.

I followed him across the sprawling sands,
my mind thumping in the flesh’s sling.
Hope lay perhaps in burning the house I lived in.
Silence gripped my sleeves; his body clawed at the froth
his old nets had only dragged up from the seas.

The wound image gathers them all together. It must be borne in mind that the tourist searching for sexual gratification implicitly holds the place of the audience as the reader is a voyeur like the tourist.

In the flickering dark his lean-to opened like a wound.
The wind was I, and the days and nights before.
Palm fronds scratched my skin. Inside the shack
an oil lamp splayed the hours bunched to those walls.
Over and over the sticky soot crossed the space of my mind.

The soot image, a customary suggestion of sin. It alerts how the blackness of the predicament of the father pimpling his daughter is a condemnation not of the father but of the society where such a tragedy comes to pass. The soot covers the shack of the fisherman, but it is the tourist’s mind on which the poem sees the soot. Thus, like
Blake who said the presence of a whore in society is a curse of the marriage system, this poem questions the justness in society from which sanctity has disappeared. Like the tourist in the poem, the reader is an outsider and a sort of voyeur. So the shame of the plight of the pimping father falls on the reader – not on the individual reader.

_Hunger_ is one of the well-structured poems with an integrated, specific content, quite exceptional in Mahapatra’s canon. On the origin of the poem, Mahapatra says, “The poem is based on a true incident; it could easily have happened to me on the poverty-ridden sands of Gopalpur-on-sea... The landscape of Gopalpur chose me and my poem to face perhaps my inner self, to see my own debasement, to realize my utter helplessness against the stubborn starvation light of my country.”

The scene depicted with a peculiar concentration of relevant details, instead of the usual Mahapatra assemblages of images, comes out as a frozen shot “where the desires of the flesh and of the mind are contrasted to the social costs of their satisfaction”. _The Whore House in a Calcutta Street_ can be read as a companion poem.

In Mahapatra’s setting Indian Landscape manifests the destiny of Indians, his seismogram recording the tremors of an ancient land, felt in the body of his private experience, ever wrought in his sensible mind. The stars, the sky, the wind, the waves, the rains, the fields, the trees invite his finer sensibilities to open his mind palpable to the wings of poesy. Divine showers with Indian rosy landscape empowers his glorious thoughts and seeks blessings to salvation:

> “Later,
> As the shrines skeins of light
> Slowly close their eyes,
> Something reaching into them
> From that place they learn to bear
> The lame lamp post
> To the huge temple door,
> The sacred beads in their hands
> gaping
at the human ground (The Temple Road, Puri).

The ‘stream of common men’ or the road to the temple and their prayers has a purified thinking with god relationship and its effect is true universal brotherhood. Religion is the mainstream to overcome the miseries of life and remain oblivious about fanatic world.

In Dawn at Puri the poet harps on the innocence of the people who always love to wash their sinful body on the sacred land Puri. Puri is the gateway to heaven and it is the link between heaven and the Home. The devotees are diverting from ‘inferno’ to purgatory and at last paradise is their zenith touch. So the poet sketches:

“Endless crow noises
A skull on the holy sands
Tilts its empty country toward hunger
White-clad widowed women
Past the centers of their lives
Are waiting to enter the Great temple” (Dawn at Puri)

The poem Dawn at Puri narrates by describing the Oriyan landscape, especially the holy city of Puri. Mahapatra is deeply rooted in Indian culture and ethos with which he is emotionally attached as a poet. Though the language of expression is English his sensibility is ‘Oriya’. Puri is the living protagonist for him. Puri is not only a setting but also a protagonist because he presents a graphic description of Puri as a central character. Here Puri is personified.

Dawn at Puri is an imagist poem (a poem consisting of a number of vivid, sharply etched, but not necessarily interrelated images). The Panorama of Puri (in Orissa- a land of ‘forbidding myth), artistically portrayed with vivid images and symbols, becomes evocative. Puri is the name of a famous town in Orissa, which is considered sacred because of the temple dedicated to Lord Jagannath, the presiding deity of Orissa. This temple is said to date that to 318 A.D. It is particularly famous for the chariot festival of Jagannath; an annual ritual conducted for the glory of this deity and is attended by a large number of pilgrims. ‘Endless crow noises’; a reference to the endless cawing of the crows, a visual as well as an auditory image. ‘A skull on the holy sands’: This is a startling imagery created with the juxtaposition
of the abstract with the concrete, where the abstract ‘holy’ and the concrete ‘skull’ are grouped together. It is believed that the deity of Puri was carved out of a tree trunk that was washed ashore and this fact is alluded to in his poem ‘Losses’. Hoping for some kind of redemption for this wayward world, the speaker in the poem muses: “Perhaps the piece of driftwood/ washed up on the beach/ heals the sand and the water”.

Puri is regarded as a sacred site and it is the wish of every pious Hindu to be cremated there to enable them to attain salvation. ‘It’s empty country towards hunger’: a reference to the poverty to the people of Orissa including the sight of the skull lying on the sea-beach symbolizes the utter destitution of the people. ‘White-clad widowed women’: reference to widows wearing white saris and the phrase that points to their predicament as well as the rigidity of Hindu customs and rituals. ‘Past the centers of their lives’: having spent the middle years of their lives and passing their prime. ‘Their austere eyes stare like those caught in a net’: the misery resulting in utter hopelessness is clearly visible on their faces for there is an expression of solemnity in the eyes of the widows in which no worldly desire is perceptible and are full of desire like the eyes of creatures trapped in a net.

‘Dawn’s shining strands of faith’: A person having a firm belief in religion never loses hope, so in spite of their circumstances, the only thing that sustains the widows is their religious faith and the hope born of it. The reference to dawn is to be noted. It refers to a new beginning in nature and thereby, to a new start in mankind and civilization. The tone of quiet acceptance, with a latent awareness of suffering, perhaps indicates a very Indian sensibility. ‘The frail early light’: the dim light of the dawn is a reference to the title of the poem which must be noted. ‘Leprous’: from leprosy, an infectious disease affecting the skin and nerves and causing deformities. ‘A mass of crouched faces’: a large number of timid persons standing in a group, having no confidence in themselves, preferably referring to the lepers and widows who are not allowed to move freely in the town. ‘And suddenly breaks out of my hide’: suddenly emerges from beneath my skin.

At Puri, there is a stretch of beach called Swargadwara or ‘Gateway to heaven’ where the dead are cremated. Many pious Hindus and widows feel that it is possible to attain salvation by dying at Puri. Mahapatra states: “Her last wish to be cremated here/ twisting uncertainly like light/ on the shifting sands.” Puri is not only famous as a place for the four ‘dhams’ or ‘sacred cities’ but also for the ‘math’ or
the monastery set up by Shankaracharya. Lord Jagannath is the main deity in Puri
who is in the form of Lord Vishnu. The way Mahapatra delineates the events and
incidents in the poem shows us that he disapproves of what is going on under the
cover of tradition and practices. You will notice how life “lies like a mass of
crouched faces without names” and you also can see how people are trapped by faith
as expressed in the expression “caught in a net”. The shells on the sand are “ruined”
the word, “leprous” is suggestive of decadence and infirmity. The poem evokes loss
of identity, anonymity, death, disease and decadence. Most of the Hindus wished to
be cremated in the land of Lord Vishnu. The speaker’s mother also had such a last
wish, the wish to be cremated in Puri. This is fulfilled by the effort of her son in
the blazing funeral pyre which is seen as “sullen” and “solitary”. The poem winds
up on an uncertain note like the corpse of his dead mother.

The title of the poem is very suggestive as it does not talk about only one
particular dawn which might have been particularly unpleasant because one’s mother
is not cremated every day. But personally one could feel that this dawn could be
made more special. The poet is suggesting that all dawns at Puri are more or less
similar with dead mothers being cremated everyday and crows’ cawing along with
skulls and hunger indicating poverty-ridden India which shows absolute
“Indianness”. The poem is about feelings and compassion for the people who suffer.
The poem is a scathing attack on tradition and traditional practices which are mostly
ruthless and biased. The poet bears no sympathy for rituals and hollow traditions.
What we notice in the poem is emptiness of tradition, the indifference of society and
fossilized Hindu culture.

The holy sand is the long beach where the funeral pyres go on burning. The
great temple is the temple of Jagannath which has a long mythic layer for the great
spiritual shrine. According to Hindu mythology Jagannath, Balaram, Subhadra the
three idols remain incomplete for the immature waiting for the divine grace of fixed
day of fulfillment in marking the idols by the old agile priest. Man’s desire will never
be fulfilled for the incomplete construction. So Jagannath stands supreme as the
savior of mankind. Streams of mankind from different parts of India mingle together
instead of caste, colour and creed. ‘White clad widowed women’ signify the
purifying dress and white dress also symbolizes rejecting of every carnal desires of
fleshy skin and colorful aspirations adieu to have divine grace for the salvation of
their beloved husbands. So the seascape becomes the part of his mindscape and glorifies his mother’s wish:

......her last wish to be cremated here

Twisting uncertainly like light

On the shifting sands. (Dawn at Puri)

The male society stress the woman’s identity on man’s belonging. Husband passing away means the lifelessness of woman. So the ‘widow’ label is clutched to her selfhood. Here is a social space in the Hindu society of Orissa. This poem shows the local space to Indian space and to a kind of universal space. His mother’s last will signifies the tension between science, rationality and education on one hand, and faith culture and religion. A sense of belonging and his own ardent love for the land bears his designation of the poet:

“A man does not mean anything

But the place

Sitting on the river bank throwing pebbles

Into the muddy current,

A man becomes the place. (Somewhere, My Man)

His poetry has love and sex mingling together. He talks freely about this. Eroticism also runs through the cell of these poems. The love poems are Another Evening, Women in love, The whorehouse in a Calcutta street, Hunger, Armour, Love Fragment, Of that love, Lost , The Farewell, and so on.

In A missing Person we have the same smack of bondage in sleep and the stirring of desire. The lovely woman is ‘at the edge of sleep” and the “drunken yellow flames” of the lamp in her hand reminds loneliness, lack of partner, loss of own identify and own self. Mahapatra has a unique vision of love themes. Mixture of hope and fear, dream and reality, meeting and separation, anxiety and fulfillment and dreamy thoughts are merged into the solace breath of mankind. Mahapatra’s poetry gives the glimpses of powerlessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation, self estrangement, loneliness and silence. His early poems are the spurs of alienation.
The poet suffered from loneliness and isolation. The battle din of life’s anxiety pervades his poetic wings caught up in the snare of summer’s fire. The wheels of his journey are gripped. All his hopes and aspiration are turned to ash. The loser, traitor, beggar all are destined to isolated forms. In the graves, a wave the poet perceives silent’s tone. Everyone is identitiless and suffers from alienation in the form of nameless, flames, from the pyre of plundered seconds.

In Mahapatra’s poetry, the beggars estranged from the society at large. The poet’s empathy for the beggar shows the alienated figures of the darker world. Mahapatra is much experienced man. His alienated mind enquires the corruption and becomes dumb with silence:

“I have read the silence
that dances across the land at down
I have watched it grow
from a small lonely window.
It hurts.
The hundred thousand eyes.
when I try to get over it
it creep in to my bed like furtive child” (Silence; A Rain of Rites)

Mahapatra is the master penetrator into the core of the female heart. He depicts the women crux under the society which alienates from them. They are alienated from husbands with almost hopes and aspirations are nipped in the bud when she is dejected in the bed; loneliness becomes her husband’s substitute. Only ‘funeral pyres’ will show her path to complete freedom:

“The good wife
lies in my bed
through the long afternoon;
dreaming still, unexhausted
by the deep rose of funeral pyres. (Indian summer)
In the lonely bed she has no partner to share her pains and separations. Narcissism becomes her icon. She fell in love with her own self, her shadow. Out of alienation she feels and devours satiety:

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In the darkened room
a woman
cannot find her reflection in the mirror
waiting as usual
at the edge of sleep
In her hands she holds
the oil lamp
whose drunker yellow flames
known where her lonely body hides. (A Missing person)
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To escape from darkness she seeks the help of oil lamp, it will help her to touch the light of her life. The hallow flame is compared to the overcome absence of any sharing. So her lonely body hides to escape alienation. This is the picture of Mahapatra’s mother. To quote Mahapatra:

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“Swathed in a sari, holding onto the oil lamp
in the shadows, the softy flames swaying the breeze:
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As the women suffer from alienation, our mother India also has the same suffering. To quote R.Shankar:

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“India also could not find her reflection
physically after decolonization, because during
the colonization India was plundered culturally,
traditionally and economically. India was,
virtually, converted into a skeletal shape.”
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Missing in the true inner self, our Indian lacks culture and tradition of the past glory. She fails to probe the ‘anima’ or the true inner self with the utmost bound of her estranged being. So here inner and outer both selves are tormented. Mahapatra’s
artistic zeal is praiseworthy. To quote Allan Kennedy: ‘‘A Missing person is an epiphany of the creative moment for Mahapatra.’’

In the world there is a feast of somber and gloomy vision of life that is stamped by loss, dejection grief, alienation and suffering. In Hunger and The whorehouse in a Calcutta Street the nameless prostitutes are hanging in identity less alienation. They are sufferers in this cruel world. In Hunger the father victimizes her daughter to have sex with customer for the fulfilled desire of both from bodily passion and physical concerned. So hunger leads to alienation in the girl’s part. The trio-father, daughter and customer are alienated figures crux in this modern decorum. Moreover, it shows how the modern men are dejected and alienated by the whores. The failure of the communication is not exclusive perverse with the whore. “The condition of the modern man is itself solitary and alienated”. So in the poem whorehouse in a Calcutta Street to have a greater experience of love and lust and relationship and to fulfill dreams and fantasies:

“The faces in the posters, the public hoardings
And who are here all together. (The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street)

Mahapatra is a poet of his land. Land and identity becomes the icon of his poetry. Time and again like the Diaspora eye he searches for the root Orissa. The sense of alienation that is rooted in his father’s house gives venture to a rootedness in the land and its history. His ‘Indianan’ and the post-colonial eye with the antagonistic approach of the theories of Darwin, Freud and Marx, give venture to the alienated vision. The conversion and the lingua franca detach his oneself from other. India sensuality with Indian English adjusts the cross references. To Vilas Sarang:

“The poetry of Mahapatra is extremely local and his tone of quiet acceptance, with a latent awakener of centuries of suffering indicates a very Indian sensibility. He effortlessly translates a profundity Indian spirit into English.”

So the poet blooms the vases with poetry from the ashes, remnants, graveyard, hunger, alienation, loneliness and isolation. From murderer to murdered, from master to silent slave, solitude to alienate his identity transmutes the easel of his poetry. So from night to night, the empty window in his lonely well is the material to flourish his ensigns and animations. Though alienate his dreams remain undaunted:

“I want the graveyard to flower without its corpses,
and the sunlit street

to shine without its shadows.

I want the flames to warm the empty heart

of love, to burn a city with pitiable hatred ..... ( )

I want my government to hover

like a butterfly over a garden;

not be, as it, like a wasp or snake ..... ( )

I only want to renew myself

Like this old river’s quiet

That has emerged victorious

Over a hurried layers of religion

In the airlessness of the dead.”

Mahapatra is highly dependent on symbol and imagery as a technique that is

owing to his being influenced of the imagist movement and specially by Eliot and

Ezra Pound. He begins with an image or a cluster of images or an image leads to

another. Use of image is a starting point to travel into a region of darkness of mind

where he has never gone before. He is a culturally aware personality believing in the

fact that knowing Indianness means knowing local, regional, traditional and religious

folks and systems of life. His poetry is rooted in tradition of Orissa, because he

admits that the entire territory of India spills with ancient temples and their ruins and

Puri has been focal centre of Orissa’s cultural and religious life. The images that he

uses are the consequence of affiliation of local and national cultural and religious

life. His prominent images include sleep, twilight, phantom darkness, half light of

rain, the pallor of dreams, the granite eyes needed to see the stones throb, etc born

out of the influence of Eliot’s “The Hollow Man” and Yeats’ “Sailing to

Byzantium”. He borrows instances and allusions from natural world and Hindu

mythology which make his poetry obscure to understand. In this way his poetry

advances in his skilful execution of myth, images and symbols. Bruce King makes a

noteworthy remark in this regard: “While Mahapatra’s world is filled with personal

pain, guilt, remorse, hunger, desire and moments of renewal his environment is filled
with symbols of belief by the ordinary life of people of Cuttack, the temples, the Hindu festivals, the ancient monuments. The poems are varied attempts to bridge an epistemological, phenomenological gap to know, be part of enclose, experience—"

Jayanta Mahapatra did not believe in any rigorous metrical device, or in any regular stanza form, or in any rhyming scheme. He faced the world and kept his findings very honestly and sincerely through imagery, symbols and myths. He recreated the past in modern sense. He did always try to go into roots of Indian culture and tradition where real India lies. Pointing out features of his poetry he says that “My writing would go on to portray cultural values native to Orissa, not to other regions of India. And perhaps I have done just in my poetry.”

At another occasion he made pronouncement that he is basically “an Oriya poet who incidentally writes in English” and his poetry could be treated as “translations”. In his poetry there is lively description of Oriyan culture mixed up with Indian myths taken from the epics and topography. For example, he took myth of golden deer from the Ramayana, that of Putana from the Mahabharata and that of the Himalaya peak being supposed as the abode of the gods. He took resort to myths, history, and legends in his poetry; because he believed that they help him understand his environment and his self in true perspective. To understand present and to apprehend the future he took help of his poetic self. He used images, symbols and allusions to dip into unconscious region of his mind where actual life lies.

Mahapatra has his own deep reflective mood to deal with Indian themes using his own private symbols and opaque images. He has his own existential; skeptic attitude to the universe which helped him make English language with semantic possibilities of his own Indian or more especially Oriyan culture. Mahapatra is a skilled and conscious craftsman who churns out his images and symbols thoughtfully. In such poems he is an Oriyan poet first, but he is Indian too, because by a careful selection of images and symbols, the local becomes symbolic of India as a whole. R. Parthasarathy observes:

“The economy of phrasing and starling images recall the subhasitas (literally, that which is well said) of classical Sanskrit.” ‘Events the exile, ‘the moon moments’, ‘total solar eclipse’ are conspicuous for the use of imagery, which is realistic suggestive and symbolic”.

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In Short, Mahapatra is a great poet of Indian writing in English today. The themes depicted in his poetry define the Indian mind and culture and present the image of India on the one hand and the superb handling of them in words and phrases of rare value and sense speaks of Mahapatra’s rich mind and his wider Indian sensibility on the other. His poetry is sharp cry at the vision of life. Its subject is human suffering and predicament. Its aim is to study human existence in relation to suffering and to make a search for a possibility of its betterment.

8.5 Glossary and Notes

**My mind thumping in the flesh’s sling**: The expression denotes the struggle for control between the mind and the flesh.

**His body clawed…**: images of poverty imply the agony and the predicament of the fisherman, the hapless father of the daughter waiting to be offered as a victim of sexual hunger.

**A fine mixing**: up of metonymic and metaphoric perceptions.

**The sky fell on me**: the protagonist falls a victim to his own hunger and the father’s ‘wile’ which again is the result of another hunger.

**The fish slithering…**: the two hungers are juxtaposed one interacting with the other and the final image unifies all the strands of the theme and clinches the issue. Mahapatra exploits the communicative value of silence. The young man doesn’t speak the girl too doesn’t speak; even the fisherman speaks in a matter of fact tone which has the iminousness of silence.

**Empty Hunger** - is the back of the skull which is empty. Also represents bowl of a beggar. Here it talks about the material hunger of people who throng the temple premises.

**Widowed Women**: widows who live a life of austerity in temple premises.

**Strands of faith**: here the poet talks about cruelty in customs. Widows live a self imprisoning, austere life which reflects in-humanity in customs.

**Twisting uncertainty**: It means that rational explanation of customs and traditions cannot justify the faith of custom –ridden devotees.

**Shifting sands**: It refers to time that fills aging mother
8.6 Check your progress

A. Complete the following sentences by choosing correct alternatives:

1. In the poem, *Dawn at Puri*, the widows’ ‘austre eyes’ suggest the ———.
   a. extreme happiness    b. extreme sorrow
   c. extreme anger    d. extreme follies

2. The poem, *A missing Person* highlights the missing identity of——— in male dominated Indian society.
   a. child    b. boy    c. woman    d. man

3. The woman in *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street* provide ———— pleasure to the visitors.
   a. sexual    b. monetary    c. spiritual    d. material

4. In the poem, *Hunger*, a father sells his daughter in the face of overwhelming poverty. Here a father is a ————.
   a. farmer    b. fisherman    c. priest    d. teacher

5. Mahapatra in the poem, *Silence; A Rain of Rites* took rain as a metaphor to contemplate on physical union in man and woman.
   a. landscape    b. myth    c. silence    d. rain

B. Answer the following questions in one word or sentence each:

1. What does the poem, *The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street* depict?

2. Which poem in *A Rain of Rites* appears autobiographical in tone and temperament?

3. Who are neglected and marginalized at cultural and biological level in this male-dominated society?

4. Where do the people wash their sinful body?

5. What do the rain poems describe?
8.7 Keys to check your progress:
A. 1. b 2. c. 3. a 4. b 5. d
B. 1. The poem, The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street depicts the prostitutes and clients in professional and commercial way.
2. The poem, A missing Person in A Rain of Rites appears autobiographical in tone and temperament.
3. Women are neglected and marginalized at cultural and biological level in this male-dominated society.
4. The people wash their sinful body on the sacred land, Puri.
5. The rain poems describe the rituals centering round the lives of rural people especially Oriyan people.

8.8 Exercises
A. Answer the following questions in 250-300 words.
1. Jayanta Mahapatra as a Post Colonial Poet.
2. Indianness in Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry.
3. The use of imagery in Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry.
4. Major themes depicted in Jayanta Mahapatra’s A Rain in Rites.
5. The cultural heritage of Orissa in Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry

B. Write short notes on:
1. The significance of the title, Dawn at Puri
2. The central idea of the poem, Hunger
3. The theme of love and sex in A Rain in Rites.
4. Jayanta Mahapatra’s treatment to the image of woman.
5. The poetic devices and the language employed by Jayanta Mahapatra in A Rain in Rites.
8.9 Books for Further Reading


9.0 Objectives :

After studying this unit, you will be able to understand

- Meena Alexander as the prominent diasporic poetess.
- Features of diasporic poetry.
- Diasporic consciousness reflected in the poetry of Meena Alexander

9.1 Introduction :

In the Post independence period there has been an extraordinary upsurge of Indian Writing in English, especially in the field of poetry. The large number of Indo-Anglian poets of fairly high poetic talent emerged on the poetic scene. Kamala Das, Lila Roy, Margaret Chatterjee, Monika Verma, Mamta Kalia and Gauri Deshpande are only some of the most remarkable names from a long list of Indian
English women poets. Their poetry contributed liberally to the enrichment of human sensibility. Emergence of Indian women poets in English is the sign of their liberation and self respect of their own feelings. It is sure that these women poetesses are in no way inferior to their male counterparts. These women poetesses have received ample critical attention in India as well as abroad. They are conscious of their own problems regarding their identity, self and sex and write consciously as women. The distinguishing feature of their poetry seems to be confessional, autobiographical, frank, candid, bold and realistic in its expression of their attitude to love, sex and lust.

While discussing Indian poetry in English we can’t ignore the poetry of exile. The poet writing in English and living abroad is torn between the two worlds. A poet may settle down in England or America but his roots are always in India. There are three groups of Indian English poets: those who have spent a few years during their career at abroad and returned to India, those who made abroad their home and thirdly, those who never lived in an abroad for any long period. The poets of the second group are called as the poets of Indian diaspora: G. S. Sharat Chandra, A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy belong to the group. Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee - Divakaruni are the prominent women poets of Indian diaspora.

Diasporic poetry directly reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of immigrant settlement. The clash between the past and the present, the two generations, concern for root and rootlessness, native land and new land, pre-occupation of the third space, a singular culture and the multiculture (cultural synthesis) and such trends continue in diasporic poetry. Meena Alexander is such diasporic poet who is aware of displacement, homelessness, fragmentation of identity, dislocation, origin, race, culture and nationality too.

9.2 Meena Alexander : Life and Works

Meena Alexander is one of the outstanding poets on the Indo-Anglian poetic scene, at least from women’s side. Meena Alexander alias Mary Elizabeth Alexander was born on 17 February 1951 in Allahabad, India, she was a daughter or George Alexander and Mary Alexander. She was named after her paternal grandmother. Her father, a government employee, was deputed by the Indian government to Sudan, and the family moved there in 1956. This was her first experience of migration at the age of five. She attended Unity High School in Khartoum, and she graduated in 1964.
She obtained her B.A. in English literature and French literature with honours from the university of Khartoum in 1969. On the advice of her examiner, Jim Boulton, she enrolled at the university of Nottingham in England to work on her doctorate in English. She received the Ph. D. degree in 1973.

On returning to India, She worked as a lecturer at Miranda House, the Women’s College of Delhi University in 1874 and as a Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Fellow at Jawaharlal Nehru University, in New Delhi in 1975.

She moved to Hyderabad in 1975, and joined the Central Institute of Foreign Languages and then the University of Hyderabad, one taught there for two years. During the period she established the fruitful friendships with the writers, the social activists, academics and the feminists. She married David Lelyveld, an American in 1979 and migrated to United States with her spouse. Then she taught in New York, initially at Fordham University and joined Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She had several visiting teaching assignments at other universities.

Though an emigrant now in New York, she finds her ‘roots’ in Kerala, the Southern state of India. In recent years, she has emerged as a major voice of Indian poetry in English in North America. In her personal narratives as well as in the poetry, she seems to embody some of the defining features of the Indian diasporic sensibility. Although she is the novelist of some reckoning, it is primarily her poetry that is of greater interest to us. She claims the multi-cultural and multi-lingual experience. Her exile is not only physical but also psychological. She equates border crossing with death. Border crossings have moulded her personality, vision and writing.

She has written two novels namely *Nampally Road* (1991) and *Manhattan Music* (1997). Her autobiography *Fault Lines* (1993) was chosen as one of publisher’s weekly Best Book of 1993. *The Shock of Arrival : Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (1996) is her second autobiographical book. She has written two critical books namely *Women in Romanticism : Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelly* (1979), *The Poetic Self : Towards Phenomenology of Romanticism* (1979). She has written several reviews, short stories and articles. However she is essentially noted for her poetry and poetic sensibility. She has published several volumes of poetry including *The Bird’s Bright Ring* (1976), *Stone
Roots (1980), House of a Thousand Doors (1988) and Raw Silk (2004). Out of the trauma of multiple migrations, she emerged as a significant voice of feminism. With strong roots in the rural Kerala, she has received a respectable place among the South Asian writers in English.

9.3 About Stone Roots:

Meena Alexander’s poetic collection Stone Roots was published in 1980 through which she claims her strong roots are in the soil of India. The childhood memories and nostalgia for the past focus on the loneliness of the poet in the foreign country. The separation from grandparents and the division of her world after migration causes the feeling of loss of identity. She considers the poetry as source of courage. The feeling of being displaced, importance of place, love for homeland, the colonial burden of English language, love, sorrow, suffering of women, are the major issues discussed in the collection. The poems also comment on the bloodshed and violence, suffering of common people and racial discrimination. The poems are highly personal and subjective. The abstract images like sky, water and sun are abundant in the collection.

9.4 Summary:

‘Stone Roots’ is the collection of poems which express the childhood memories, loneliness, loss of identity, post-colonial burden of English language, feminist consciousness, sorrow of migration, loss of place, burden of displacement and poet’s efforts to establish identity through writing poetry.

The poem ‘Childhood’ focuses on childhood while the poem. ‘Sometimes I’m in a Garden’ speaks about the lost garden of childhood. The poet is in the search of the lost garden because her ‘rootedness’ in the Indian soil and memories of grandparents and family roots make her lonely and restless. In the poem ‘From a Blue House’, she speaks about the experience of American life where anonymities and loss of identity make her restless and create darkness in her life. In a ‘Dream Poem’, the description of mother – daughter relationship reveals the feminist side of her writing which throws light on the bride burning incidents in India. In ‘Smoke on Water’, poetry becomes the source of courage for her because after migration the poem world divides in two, the feeling of loss is so dominant that poet feels ‘this is no common earth’ but on the next moment, she tries to claim her right on this earth
because her predecessors have lived here. The love for homeland expressed in the poems like ‘June 1977’.

The themes of sorrow, alienation uprootedness, continually run through her poetry. The invading loneliness is expressed in the poem, ‘The Loneliness of Plants’. She is very much sensitive about the possession of place and love for the land and love for the lover which fuse together in ‘Blue Stones’. The fear of being lost and desire to claim roots come together in ‘Stone Roots’. Because of difficulties and insecurities of life ‘the garden path can easily turn into a forest’. The poem ‘Indian Elegy’ discusses the increasing violence and bloodshed. Though poet has been living in the foreign land, she is eagerly waiting for her homecoming in the poem ‘In Place of Heraldic Device’. The poems like ‘In Divi Seema’ and ‘Eye of the Cyclone’ give the picture of poverty and sufferings caused by the natural disasters like cyclone. The other poems dealing with natural disasters are ‘Natural Difficulties’, and ‘No Autumn in My Country’.

The creation of poetry is the effect of sorrow of migration, it is the expression of self. So for the poet, poetry is the medium of survival as expressed in the poem ‘Song of the Crooked Seventies’. The poem ‘On the Malbar Coast’, ‘Threshold City’, ‘At Golconda’, ‘At Konark’ highlight poet’s interest in the places. The memories of the inherited house and grandparents are the recurring themes in the collection. The inheritance is such a great event in her life that she is unable to describe it:

“With what sort of alphabet
should I inscribe it
that the huge mask of God might turn” (Salt Spray)

9.5 Glossary:

- **to articulate** – to utter distinctly
- **garret** – a room partly or entirely in the roof
- **penury** – great poverty
- **to stride** – walk with long steps.
- **aquiline** – curved like the beak of an eagle
• **to blaze** – burn or shine brightly, look angry
• **rigours** – the quality of being unbending
• **epicentre** – centre of earthquake
• **gleam** – a ray of light
• **to glisten** – sparkle
• **to swarm** – haunt
• **to fester** – rankle
• **brawl** – a noisy quarrel
• **clutter** – confused mass
• **hooves** – the cry of an owl
• **glaucous** – of greenish blue
• **frugal** – not costing much
• **to crib** – to shut up
• **oblivion** – the state of being forgotten
• **to placate** – pacify
• **to diminish** – make or become less
• **to astound** – astonish greatly
• **to drench** – make thoroughly wet
• **hoarse** – rough and harsh
• **aspiration** – false report
• **chrysanthemus** – a kind of flower
• **to gulp** – swallow greedily
• **crooked** – bent, dishonest
• **to perish** – die, decay, fade away
• **confederates** – members of alliance
• accountrements – military dress, arms
• to infest – haunt
• onoe – Japanese family name
• icons – a sacred image or picture
• to crouch – stoop, bend
• to sway – move or cause to move unsteadily from side to side
• to howl – make a long wailing sound
• decrepit – worn out
• clamour – noisy shouting, demand or complain angrily
• discrepant – contradiction
• to clutch – seize eagerly
• to tremble – shake as with fear, cold
• to squabble – engage in a noisy quarrel
• to splash – scatter about
• to quiver – shake
• rampant – growing rapidly, furious, rife
• to gnaw – cut away
• grimace – a twisting of the features
• to presage – foretell

9.6 Poem wise analysis

The first poem in the collection is ‘Childhood’ which expresses poet’s feelings about the lost childhood. In her childhood, she understood ‘flesh was not stone’ because stones are lifeless but now she compares herself with stone and puts:

“Children are laid
perfectly, like stone
while stone
The poetess searches for the crudest discipline of space in ‘Sometimes I’m in a Garden’. The feeling of spaceless is dominant and recurring theme in the *Stone Roots*. She remembers the lost garden and alphabets recited by a garden tree. The alphabets, she is searching for, are the alphabets of her lost mother tongue. The loss makes her alone:

“I search the crudest discipline of space
a single room in which I am alone”

She is in search of the lost garden and is sure that she will find it through the medium of poetry.

“It’s slowly that I’ll find the gate
back to that featureless garden
slowly taste the blade
scraping my heart’s blood
into poetry.”

The poem ‘Rootedness’ emphasises the poet’s rootedness in Indian soil despite of her settlement in the foreign land. The memories of grandparents and family roots in the state of Kerala make her lonely and restless.

‘Almost literally
I am dying of loneliness’

A bruised fragrance at the root and ‘the lash of forked tongue’ express her concern about the lost language and multi-lingualism.

The experience of American life is described in the poem ‘From a Blue House’. The poet lives on the third floor of Blue House which seems to her like a ‘Victorian garret’. She compares her experience of American life with heaven.

“Were we live in heaven or near it
on the third floor
of a blue house”
Though living in heaven or near it, she is not happy there because the anonymities, and loss of identity which make her restless and create darkness in her life as a migrated person. So she pens:

“Scratched by light
our anonymities awoke
cried after him was it
a fit of darkness in us?”

The language is the medium of cultural exchange. The connection has lost from the person to person and so she has to depend on the English for expression of self. This dependence creates the sense of alienation in her mind.

“Soon she'll gather all her leaves to her
and barter them for syllables”

In ‘Dream Poem”, the poet deals with the feminist feelings.

“Each woman has a daughter
touched in a mirror
there is ash of the edges of disaster”

While commenting on the mother-daughter relationship, she refers to the social evil the burning of women in India.

“through darkness
a sparrow, burning. . .”

Living in unfixed world, facing the sorrows of migrancy, poetry is the source of courage for her. The poem ‘Smoke on Water’ focuses her search of courage through the medium of poetry.

“I am searching in this poem
for courage, for words
to speak to you with”

She remembers her dead grandmother and writes of division of her world after migration.

“This world divides in two”
The poem ‘Jasmine’ is about the flower Jasmine which is called as ‘a woman’s flower’ and trained ‘against the courtyard wall’. The oppressive and traditional attitude towards women that they cannot live without support is always imposed by male dominated society. The poet is aware of the imposition.

The poem ‘No Common Earth’ again deals with feeling of loss because of migration. The feeling of loss of homeland is so dominant that she feels.

“This is no common earth”

but on the next moment, she tries to claim her right on the earth because,

“All my fathers live here
night after night I see their hands”

The poem ‘June 1977’ describes the month of June in India. The streets full of water, the glistening children and green flowerings make her happy. Love for the country is reflected when she comments:

“In the wet season, you have many green flowerings my India.”

While singing the songs of India, she reminds the burden of the Independence and the colonization which made her century ‘brackish’.

“Your centuries are brackish, India
a black vessel, I
entirely yours”

The poem ‘The Loneliness of Plants’ expresses sorrow, alienation, uprootedness of the poetess. The wounds of migration illumine a dark story of loss. The memories of childhood, the feeling of not getting that childhood spent away are

“invading
the loneliness of plants”

The poetess becomes so sensitive for the place because she encounters alienation and sense of displacement in the foreign country, she realizes the importance of place in the following lines.

“Place was my flesh
and I carried this dread”
in both palms, singing. . .”

In the poem ‘Blue Stones’ the love for poet’s lover and land become one.

“For love of you and this inhuman calling
that day I walked down to the river bed,
our land, full of rivers, dry
in the bitter season.”

The poem ‘Stone Roots’ narrates the story of Yang Chu, the legendary figure who wept at each cross road believing that any road taken would lead to another that crossed a neighbouring road, endlessly multiplying the chances of being lost.

The poetess expresses the feeling of being lost into the streets.

“I am afraid to go out
into the streets of Nampally
the peepul trees dip”

She is worried because

“each chosen road
divided the stone roots”

The poem ‘Indian Elegy’ mourns over the life full of difficulties. She says that nowadays life is full of difficulties. Life is like a garden which can easily turn into forest. The violence, bloodshed and brutality have increased to such an extent that even a flower have become blood thirsty.

“no lilies in Lidice now
its roses grown bloodthirsty’

The poem ‘In Place of Heraldic Device’ depicts her desire for homecoming. She wants the blessing of the Mother Mary:

“Mother of God
I pray, O restive Maria
When your womb grew’

and hopes that her homecoming will turn into reality soon:
“Let a squat lamp

glow this homecoming”

The picture of poverty in ‘In Divi Seema’ is depicted through the images of the girl, her three buoyant goats, a cow, and ploughshare.

She describes the sorrow of poor people unhoused by the natural disasters like cyclone.

“a child

unhoused

in a cyclone

chambered in slit”

Another poem ‘Eye of the Cyclone’ also describes the sorrow and sufferings caused by a cyclone. The Cyclone brought darkness in the life of affected people and “parceled out grief”. The Cyclone is bringer of death:

“Cold with coastal mud

riveted to corpses

these implacable souls

glittering through roses”

The poem ‘Pictures for the Bhagavata Purana’ gives different pictures of poor and common people. The pictures of four women in branches, three young men whose clothing is clotted dark as blood focus on the violence and bloodshed.

The picture of oil from fishing boat, a wooden stool, police station with broken window, a dog with cleft toenails, boy with extra thumb, erect, four women pouring water on a tomb, threshold packed with mud present the realistic condition of the contemporary world.

The poem ‘Natural Difficulties’ speaks of natural disaster and difficulties caused by them. The poet speaks of burnt skies, soil gulping smoke, torn bushes and roses scratched by natural difficulties. And such disaster ruptures her solitude.

“Roses

tarred with light

rupture my solitude”
The violence and terror are described in the poem ‘From a Grey Room’ while ‘Song of the Crooked Seventies’ celebrates sorrow as fuel for creation of poetry.

“Poetry comes from a grey room
in a crooked hour when we can
no longer live”

The transformation of sorrow into poetry is possible only in a grey room. The poetess describes her creation of poetry as expression her own self and own her heart.

The poems like Onoe, Black Mass, On the Malbar Coast, Threshold City, At Golcond, At Konark show poet’s interest in places. In ‘Threshold City’, she describes the city of ‘Delhi’ as a silent and cold. The ‘Timid Orpheus’ portrays the picture of decrepit world full of bloodshed. But to overcome this the ‘Love must keep / gluttonous images’.

The poem ‘Salt Spray’ deals with various themes. The memories of grandmother and ancestral richness is poet’s effort towards reclaiming the lost past. She is aware of colour discrimination. She narrates the story told by grandmother that Jehovah in his rage of white men drowned the colour of their flesh in the sea and expects that Jehovah must rage on every coast so that all the colours will be drowned in the sea.

“On every wast
in every age
it is the task of Jehovah to rage”

The poet hopes for colour discrimination free world.

The memories of grandmother bring the memories of the house which the poetess inherits from her grandmother. It is such a great inheritance that she is unable to describe:

“With what sort of alphabet
should I inscribe it
that the huge mask of God might turn”
9.7 Check your progress

I) Answer the following question by choosing the correct alternative

1) Meena Alexander is a - - - poet.
   a) British b) Diasporic c) Patriotic d) Feminist

2) Meena Alexander’s purpose in writing poetry is - - - -.
   a) to become famous b) to pass the time
   c) to find place d) to please herself

3) The title of Meena Alexander’s autobiography is - - - -
   a) Without Place b) Fault Lines
   c) I Root My Name d) Raw silk

4) Stone Roots was published in - - -
   a) 1988 b) 1980 c) 1978 d) 2004

II) Answer the following questions in one word / phrase/sentence each

1) Who advised Meena Alexander to enroll for Ph.D. at Nottingham University?

2) What is the poetess searching for in this poem?

3) What does diasporic poetry reflect?

4) Which images are abundantly used in this collection?

5) Mention some defining features of diasporic sensibility.

9.8 Critical Appreciation:

Meena Alexander is the immigrant poetess who settled in America. Her poetry reflects her experience like uprootedness, exile, migrant memories and trauma, separation and loneliness, loss of place and identity and her efforts to possess the place and identity through the medium of poetry. Much of her work is concerned with migration and its impact on her subjectivity. Her poetry directly reflects the diasporic feelings and feminist consciousness. Her poetic collection Stone Roots is the best example of the expression of diasporic and feminist feelings.
The loneliness always overlaps the immigrant sensibility. The poetess grieves for loss of roots and difficulties in adjusting in the new soil. She has lost her existence and identity in her homeland and cannot create a new one in the foreign land. So the result is loneliness and alienation. The feeling of being thrown into the strange and lonely world overpowers the mind and finds expression in the poems like ‘Sometime I’m in a Garden’, ‘Rootedness’, ‘The Loneliness of Plants’. Memories of the grandparents, the lost garden of childhood and family roots make her lonely and restless.

“Almost literally
I am dying of loneliness” ‘Rooteness’

In the poem “Stone Roots”, she expressed the sorrow on the loss of roots. The cross road once taken leads to another that crossed a neighbouring road, endlessly multiplying the chance of being lost.

“each chosen road
divided the stone root” ‘Stone Roots’

The feeling of loss is so dominant that the poetess feels “this is no common earth”, but on the next moment she tries to claim her right on earth because her predecessors had lived here.

“All my fathers live here
night after night I see their hands” (No Common Earth)

Immigrant poetry in nothing but is the voice of the restless heart. The immigrants are torn between the memories of their own motherland and the settlement in the foreign land. The anonymity and loss of identity makes the poetess restless and creates darkness in her life as a migrated one:

“Scratched by light
our anonymities awoke
cried after him. Was it
a fit of darkness in us?”
‘From a Blue House’

The poetess is very much sensitive about place. She has realised its importance after living in the foreign country.
“Place was my flesh
and I carried this dread
in both palms, singing. . . .” (The Loneliness of Plants)

In her autobiography, *Fault Lines* (1993), she talks about poets being ‘Creators of that small despised art’ (p. 198). Because, according to her being poet is thought as strange in America and other countries. But in India poets have some special recognition. The poets are persons of great respect. The poetry is always the source of courage and medium of establishing identity for her.

“I am searching in this poem
for courage, for words
to speak to you with” ‘Smoke on Water’

Living in an unfixed world, poetry is support her poet. The sorrow of migration, works as the fuel for creation of poetry.

“Poetry comes from a grey room
in a crooked hour when we can
no longer live.” ‘Song of the crooked Seventies’

The motherland is directly and deeply rooted in the blood of Meena Alexander. Her poetry expresses deep affinity with India. The memories of India always linger in her mind, though she has settled in America after her multiple migrations. She depicts India and its season in the poem ‘June 1977’.

“In the wet season, you have many green flowerings My India” ‘June 1977’

The rootlessness and feminity have very close relations. In the Indian culture and society, Indian women always suffer from the feelings like alienation, loneliness, homelessness, existential rootlessness, nostalgia and quest for identity. An Indian woman is born and grown up in the maternal home and after marriage she is uprooted from her base and is obliged to settle in totally a new environment which is quit unfamiliar to her. She could not forget her maternal house and could not deny her existence in the new family. She cannot forget her roots in her motherland, cannot forget her traditions, and convention but in the new country she has to struggle hard for her identity, and for the settlement. She always tries to search her roots in the adapted country. The feminist consciousness is directly related to the
immigrant sensibility. In Meena Alexander’s poetry the feminist experience and feeling of rootlessness go hand in hand. In her poem ‘Dream Poem’ she says:

“If each woman has a daughter

touched in a mirror

there is ash at the edges of disaster’ ‘Dream Poem’

The inferiority attached to the Indian woman or the whole community of woman is reflected in the poem ‘Jasmine’.

They say it is a woman’s

flower, this querulous hybrid

trained against the courtyard walls’ ‘Jasmine’.  

The poetess expresses the feeling of homelessness of woman in ‘Divi Seema’

“At composed in darkness

May she lie

like the first ploughmarks

on her native soil

a child unhoused

in a cyclone’ ‘Divi Seema’.

Thus the poems in Stone Roots are conscious of exile. They reflect Indian multiculturism, change, exile, difference, loss and nostalgia. Loss is part of the passing of time, history, and the earth’s geography. Meena Alexander’s poetry is meditation. There is mixture of memories, desires and fiction in her poetry. She examines her identity as a woman through poetry. Her poetry is highly subjective. She uses the ecological and abstract images. The abstract images like sky, water and sun are abundant in the collection of poems. The ecological images like birds, bushes, and scenes of garden, nature convey the sense of rootedness in the Indian soil. The images of birds and bushes are freely employed:

“Sometimes I am in a garden by a tree

Whose bark is turning into Alphabets’ ‘Sometime I’m in a Garden’

The poems in Stone Roots are subjective and autobiographical. The personal experiences being woman and being diaspora are expressed in them. She uses the
pronoun ‘I’ frequently, which emphasizes the subjectivity in them. For example in the beginning of poem ‘Smoke on Water’.

She says,

‘I am searching in this poem
For courage, for words’

And in the end says

‘And I do not know how to go on.’

Thus she touches upon the complexities of diasporic life through *Stone Roots*. It deals with the postcolonial geography, and geography of displacement. The poems are related to her experience as a child, as a woman growing up or as someone who is living in a racialized world in the United States. Being a diasporic, she has multiple homes from Kerala to New York. But for her, text itself is the real home. In fact she tries to find place in the text. That is the purpose of her writing.

9.9 Exercises :

I) Answer the following questions.

1. Write a note on diasporic sensibility reflected in *Stone Roots*.

2. Explain the importance of place for the poet with reference to the poems in *Stones Roots*.

3. What is imagery? Comment on the imagery in *Stone Roots*.

4. ‘The poems in *Stone Roots* are highly personal and subjective’ comment and explain.

9.10 Key to check your progress :

I) 1 – b, 2 – c, 3 – b, 4 – b

II) 1. Her examiner Jim Boulton

2. For courage, for words

3. Immigrant experience

4. Abstract images, star, sky, water

9.11 References for further study:


