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**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND ONLINE EDUCATION**

**M. A. Part-I : English**

Semester-I : Group-III (DSE-1)

**Indian English Literature**

Semester-I : Group-III (DSE-2)

**English Literature of SAARC Nations**

(In accordance with National Education Policy 2020)

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## **Preface**

Dear students,

This book contains Self-Learning Material on the Elective Paper group III, DSE-1 Indian English Literature and DSE-2 English Literature of SAARC Nations for Sem-I. You are advised to read the syllabus prescribed for this paper carefully. The syllabus includes general topics related to the texts prescribed. As it is not possible to print the entire text in this book detailed summary has been given. Wherever possible the complete text, especially of poetry, has been included.

You are advised to read each text thoroughly prescribed in the syllabus. Each unit contains the note on General topic, brief history of the genre, note on the author, detailed summary and analysis of the text followed by exercises, topics for further study and references for detail study. Check your progress exercises will enable you to understand the text properly.

There are comprehension questions given at the end of each unit that will help you to face the end examination. Try to write answers with the help of the information provided in the unit, also refer to the books for further study.

We wish you best luck for your final examination.

**Editors**

Centre for Distance and Online Education  
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**Indian English Literature**  
**English Literature of SAARC Nations**  
**M. A. Part-I English Group-III, Paper-DSE1 & DSE2**

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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 understand the unit in the right perspective. Go through the possible answers 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 keep you in the right track as you study the unit.

Dear Students

The SLM is simply a supporting material for the study of this paper. It is also advised to see the new syllabus 2022-23 and study the reference books & other related material for the detailed study of the paper.

## Unit-1

### Narrative Experiments in Postmodern Indian English Novel Salman Rushdie - *Midnight's Children*

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Check your progress

Answer key

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Check your progress

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Check your progress

Answer key

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## 1.0 Objectives :

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- understand the development of novel after Salman Rushdie.
- know about the life and works of Salman Rushdie
- know the detailed summary of the novel *Midnight's Children*
- understand themes and characters in the novel
- know about the symbols and techniques of the novel
- able to answer the question in this unit

## 1.1 Indian English Novel :

English language was transplanted in India as the East India Company, soon after establishing their rule in India, began to feel a communication gap between the British rulers and the natives. In order to solve the communication problem, Charles Grant, one of the directors of East India Company, pleaded for adoption of the

English language in 1792. Later on the English language was adopted in 1835 by a brief resolution of the Governor-General in Council for ‘the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India’. The history of India entered into a new era with this announcement on lord William Bentinck to impart Indians ‘the knowledge of the English literature and science through the medium of English’. Lord Macaulay thought that the product of such education would be ‘Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and intellect’. In the mid of the Nineteenth century, Ram Mohan Roy had initiated social reform programmes and process, favoured the English language for spreading the wealth of information and culture available in British publications. Roy, though a master of Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic language, felt that all renaissance knowledges were compiled in the European languages. He encouraged, with the help of William Bentinck, nurturing the European culture in English language. Lord Macaulay initially introduced English language in the courses of study in Culcutta University, which was to become the model for the other universities in British India. Thereafter, many other educational institutions were opened for the spread of western literature and knowledge among the Indians. These institutions attracted the natives of India on large scale in the metropolitan cities. The class of intellectuals who received their education through the medium of English lived under the impact of western culture. This was the reason that early novels in Bengali were inspired by British fiction. Young intellectuals like Nirad C. Choudhary, who favoured English strongly in the later stages, could read English novels with interest in their university syllabus. They also read Shakespeare’s plays and British poetry. Moreover, the interest shown by British officials in Indian culture, such as Sir William Jones and Horace Haymon Wilson translated Kalidas’s *Shakuntala*, Shudraka’s *Mrichhkatika* as *The Little Clay Cart* respectively and Sir John Wood roof translated Indian cultural *Tantra*, philosophical text into English, has encouraged Indians to reciprocate by studying English literature.

The British rulers thought that by converting the top levels of the Indian society into English knowing people, they would convert the mass intellectuals. They hoped that the new civilization will provide them support but in fact a new class of intellectuals was being formed which was considerably more conscious of their personal rights and duty to their nation. Knowing fully this, Mahatma Jyotirao Govindrao Phuley, another great social reformer came forward insisting on education

especially primary education to all the masses including the untouchables and women. He said that Lord Macaulay's model of the *filtration theory* i.e. after getting English education, the upper class of India will enlighten the lower classes was not working in caste-based Indian society. These two largest sections were denied education for centuries together under the name of great Indian culture which resulted in utter miseries, poverty and tremendous exploitation and abuse. These intellectuals like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyotirao Phuley and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar at later stage aroused a new awareness of exploitations and lead a new period of renaissance. Yet creative writings were done in the regional languages since English language was not much in vogue.

English language, with the support of some big leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy came gradually on the literary scene driving out Sanskrit and Persian as the medium of enlightenment and study. English became popular in a very short period among Indian populace. People used English frequently for speeches and articles, pamphlets discussing current problems. Even veteran nationalists and freedom fighters used the language for their expressions. Even in the meeting of Indian National Congress, resolutions were passed all in English. The time came when Indians could express their literary urge in English. Even some eminent scholars in Hindi like Ageya, Harivansh Rai Bachhan etc preferred to be an M.A. in English.

The Indian-English fiction is actually last to be born in the whole of Indian English literature. The Indo English novels could not be written till the second half of nineteenth century though English was quite popular by now. Barring of the first Indian novel in English Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*(1864), no Indo Anglian could try talent for more than a half century to come mainly because they could not overcome the inferiority complex instilled into them by the centuries of foreign rule. Secondly, since the English language was still considered by a considerable population, a language of British rulers. So it was anti-nationalism to use English as a medium for the creative writing. Such bitter feeling still exists in many. Hence almost every article on Indo-Anglian writing begins with an apology for the writers who prefer to use English for the expression of their creative genius.

We have to bear in mind that Indian English fiction is the product of two parent traditions. It is a part of the Indian English literature which is very recent phenomenon. Indo-Anglian fiction continued to grow with variety. The early novelists were experimenting to provide recognition to Indo-Anglian fiction. They

wrote social, historical and detective novels but historical romances were much popular. The period between 1920-1950 was dominated by novels with political social themes. During the 1950-1970, the next generation of novelists like Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Mulkraj Anand, Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Ruth Pravar Jhabwala, Arun Joshi, Khushwant Singh and host of others were trying their art of fiction writing with unlimited and unrestricted themes. The recent generation of Indian English novelists such as Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukharjee, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee- Divakaruni, Amit Choudhary and others are expressing their creative urge in the form of fiction and earning world-wide reputation.

If we presume the major trio Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulkraj Anand as the 'First Generation' of the Indo English novelists, the 'Second Generation' may be said to consist of the great writers like Khushwant Singh, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Ruth Pravar Jhabwala, Arun Joshi, G. V. Desani, K. Abbas, B. Rajan and others. The 'Third Generation' (1970 onwards) of the novelists such as Salman Rushdie, Chaman Nahal, V. S. Naipaul, Shashi Deshpande, Arun Joshi, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth and many others have earned global fame for their quality writing.

Chaman Nahal's first novel *My True Faces* (1973) made him famous as a novelist. But his next novel *Azadi* (1975) dealing with historical theme of Indo -Pak partition brought him lasting fame. *Into Another Dawn* (1977) *The English Queens* (1979), *The Crown and the Lioncloth* (1981) follow in quick succession. His vision is ironic. He looks at history, politics and society in the satirical manner.

Arun Joshi's *Foreigner* (1968) is his first novel. His second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) has carried the exploration of the consciousness of hopeless, rootless people and further. He has revealed to our gaze new gas chambers of self forged misery. His next two novels *The Apprentice* (1974) and *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) are in the same direction.

Shobha De has earned a respectable place along the Indian English novelists in a short while. The novels to her credit are *Socialite Evenings* (1988), *Starry Nights* (1990) *Sisters* (1992) *Strange Obsession* (1992) *Sultry Days* (1994) and *Speed Post* (1999). She has edited three popular magazines *Stardust*, *Society* and *Celebrity*.

Arundhati Roy blazed into fame when she got Booker Prize in 1997 for her first novel *The God of Small Things* (1997). Vikram Chandra could draw attention of whole literary world by winning Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best First Book for his first novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1999). Sasthi Brata ushers a new field in the Indian English fiction called erotic fiction his novels *She and Me* (1973) *My God Dies Young* (1967) *Encounter* (1978) and *A Search for Home* have become Indian classic in the erotic fiction one may compare him with D. H. Lawrence in the view of style and theme. The same theme is treated in K M Trishonku's *Onion Peel* (1973), Saros Cowasjee's *Good Bye to Elsa* (1975), Kamla Das' *Alphabet of Lust* (1978) and Vikram Kapoor's *Traumatic Bite* (1978).

Khushwant Singh is also one of the greatest writers of Indian English fiction. His *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *I Shall Hear the Nightingale* (1959) are major novels. Both the novels have historical setting. *Train to Pakistan* is the first attempt at the treatment of the theme of Indo-Pak partition. That novel presents the very essence of the partition experience. *Delhi* (1990) is a vivid picturization of Hindu-Sikh riots in Delhi erupted by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination.

### **1.1.1 Literature of Diaspora :**

Globalization has produced new patterns of migration and provoked divergent responses world wide the seemingly homogenizing effect of of globalization cannot hide the responses it has prompted in various regions in its reach. Questions of diaspora arise with particular force tensions between internationalism and nationalism, the relationship between space and identity, and the ways of culture and literature interact. New patterns of mobility are being drawn on the familiar landscape migration and exilic exclusions. New articulations of diaspora, necessarily overlapping with familiar ways of conceptualizing it, have found their ways to literary writings. Different responses to migration, whether as an attendant phenomenon of globalization or a consequence of political persecution, ethnic cleansing or natural disasters, are articulated in literature produced in places where diasporic communities exist. The interaction between 'host' and 'immigrant' cultures, complicated by translation, raise new questions of identity, an interesting paradox that a politics and the issues involved. It also raise new questions of how culture and literature interact, more particularly how the overlapping of old and new

patterns of voluntary and forced migration is remapping cultural identity, politics, literariness and literary texts.

The immigrant writers create and inscribe 'alternative worlds' by exchanging one tradition for another, one culture for another and one home for another. They are caught in a dilemma of nothingness or not belonging. Their identity becomes a hyphenated identity. This very tension becomes a source of creativity as can be seen in the works of Naipaul, Rushdie and others. The tension between what was and what is, between memory and reality, energizes the writers work. Memory help the writer to re-constitute or recreate a remembered past. Memory becomes the most important factor which sets the diasporic writers discourse in the 'centre'. It is the nostalgia for the past that makes the immigrant survives. It sustains and even creates memory.

Another factor that makes immigrant writing so colourful and vibrant is the writers ability to write in another language. Joseph Conrad, V. S. Naipaul, Kazuo Ishiguro and of course Salman Rushdie achieve the simplicity and grandeur of the English language. In their hands English language has become a powerful tool. They have enriched the language, loading it with fresh expressions and emotions. They appropriate the English language for their own situations. These immigrant writers are able to feel in two languages. They redefine the boundaries of language .

As regards the diasporic Indian writing in english, it covers every continent and part of the world. It is an interesting paradox that a great deal of Indian writing in English is produced not in India but in widely distributed geographical areas of indenture i.e. Indian diaspora in the South pacific, the Caribbean, South Africa, Mauritius and the contemporary Indian diaspora in the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia.

With more and more writers of Indian origin settling abroad and emerging themselves in creative writing in the countries of their domicile, the theoretical problem is that of the critical parameters by which their works have to be defined and assessed. Although there are certain common resonances in the literary representations of the experience of the writers of the 'indenture' and the new 'Indian diaspora' the responses and the narratives of the individual writers vary greatly. Writers like Agha Shahid Ali, Bharati Mukharjee, M.G.Vasanjee, Meena Alexander, Rohinton Mistry, V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai and

Salman Rushdie to mention a few differ from each other not only in their socio cultural backgrounds and literary ancestries but also in their thematic preoccupations and literary styles. Further, the responses of the diasporic writers to India are also varied. They range from sentimentality and nostalgia to a cynical celebration of their coming of age. However their diasporic condition, their sense of exile and alienation and their efforts to seek replenishment by making symbolic returns to their origins bind all this writing into a unity.

V.S. Naipaul was born in 1932 in Trinidad and now settled in England since 1950. He spent four years in Oxford and started writing in 1954. He has virtually received every significant award and literary prizes. For his novel *Mystic Masseur* (1957), he got the John Llewellyn Memorial Prize. He was awarded Somerset Maugham Award for *Miguel Street* in 1959. He received the coveted Booker Prize for *In a Free State* in 1971. The salient features of diasporic literature are displacement, fragmentation, and marginalization. It is characterized by cultural and historical dislocation. It deals with ethnicity, racism, regionality, nationality and transnationality. All these features are reflected in the 2001s Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul's groundbreaking novel, *A House for Mr Biswas* (1969). The novel exemplifies bondage of an individual and a society. His *Guerrillas* (1975) retells the backdrop and dwells one more upon the insecurity of the expatriate life. He had problematized the issue of belonging through a total reversal of his relationship with India in the *Engma of Arrival* (1989). It is about the outsider's ways of belonging, and the acceptance of severing his ties with the past and about identifying himself with a past not his own. Later his two Indian novels *Half a Life* (2001) and *Magic Seeds* (2004) return to India unsuccessfully

Rohinton Mistry is a Parsi writer who is part of Indian diaspora. He emigrated to Canada in 1975. His first novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991) was shortlisted for Booker Prize for Fiction. It was awarded Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1992. The novel has its backdrop of the chaotic times of 1971 India, when India and Pakistan went to war over the liberation of East Pakistan. His *A Fine Balance* (1995) has a historical context much of it revolving around the state of emergency declared by Indira Gandhi and the Congress Party in 1975. He returns to scrutinize the dilemma of the Parsi community in Bombay in his recent novel *Family Matters* (2002). It depicts the contemporary Mumbai and is set in the 1990s.

Farrukh Dhondy is living in Britain since 1964. As an expatriate writer, he has fictionalized his experiences and observations in his novels such as *East End at Your Feet*, *Come to Mecca*, *Bombay Duck*, *Black Swan* and *Run*. He delineates the problems arising from migration especially in his last novel *Run* (2002).

Meher Pastonji has written three novels *Mixed Marriage and Other Parsi Stories*, *Sadak Chhap* and *Parvez*. They deal with the issues like quest for identity, cultural ethos, hybridity, feminism, and dislocation of culture, multi-culturalism, global and mixed culture.

The Women writers of Indian diaspora are the product of two cultures. They are unsure of their status to mainstream and also in relationship to their minority group. Though the women diasporic writers like Bharati Mukharjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee-Divakaruni live on the periphery of the mainstream culture, they provide empowered space that promises to create new subjectivities, new identities. To redefine their self identity and to express expatriate experience, they started writing after 1970s. These women have chosen the narrative strategy like the fictional autobiography for their self definition and the mode of expression.

Jhumpa Lahiri<sup>1967</sup> is an Indian English writer whose origin is Indian, though she was born in London she writes about intercultural miscommunications and conflicts all too often experienced by Indian immigrants and second generation Indian-Americans. Her *Interpreter of Maladies* is a collection of nine stories which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2000. Immigrants are portrayed in her novel *The Namesake* (2003). In the Indian context; migration has taken place for different reasons like the economic reasons, for research or for better opportunities. The immigrant, when he moves from one culture to another, has to locate himself in relation to the country he has migrated to, he finds himself displaced with his fractured self and loses his identity and accepts the dualities and multi-cultures. Any migration whether made by choice or necessity results in dislocation and is very painful. Jhumpa Lahiri has beautifully portrayed this agony in her novel.

Kiran Desai is the youngest woman ever to win the Man Booker Prize of 2006 for her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. In this novel we find a globalized India, where past and future live in an uneasy juxtaposition, where lives are being pooled and pushed into varied corners in a world where migration is the iron law of life. Through this novel, Desai has presented the universal human existence, the

multifaceted cultures, social inequality, violent political situation and the animal residing in the human being. She has taken us from India to England to America. The typical loneliness seclusion foreignness of the three generations has been the canvas of the novel. Her first book *Hullabaloo in a Guava Orchard* was an exposition of a modern sensibility.

Chitra Divakaruni spent the first nineteen years of her life in India and at the age of nineteen, she moved to the United States to pursue higher education which culminated in her earning the masters and the Ph. D. degrees. The World Trade Centre hit by the terrorist planes had drastically altered the mindscape of America. The sense of insecurity, awe and horror had unleashed the devil in human form. Divakaruni in her novel *Queen of Dreams* (2004) has written for the first time about the second generation Indo-Americans. In this novel Chitra has focused on the aftermath of 9/11 in which hate crimes were unleashed on the Indian community in various parts of the United States and a few human lives were lost. She analyses the issue of cultural hybridity and also discusses the paradoxes of American policies and tries to reconstruct personal and national histories as historical intervention into master narratives imposed upon by the dominant culture. She also celebrates the courage and humanity of suffering women who rebel against the oppressive patriarchy and dominant culture to join universal sisterhood.

### **1.1.2 Narrative Experiments in Post Modern Indian English Novel**

Storytelling is an essential part of human nature. Man is the only creature that tells stories, and we have been telling stories and listening to them since the time we learned to speak. Storytelling began with oral traditions, and in such forms as myths, legends, fables, anecdotes, and ballads. These were told and retold, passed down from generation to generation, and they shared the knowledge and wisdom of early people. The basic theme of various forms of story-telling were fear of natural forces, deeds of heroes, gods and goddesses, and to teach life lessons from others' experiences. Biblical stories have the primary purpose of teaching spirituality. Most biblical stories were performed in churches to convey spiritual messages to the masses. Narrative is a report of related events presented to listeners or readers, in words arranged in a logical sequence. A *story* is taken as a synonym of narrative. A narrative, or story, is told by a narrator who may be a direct part of that experience, and he or she often shares the experience as a first-person narrator. Sometimes he or

she may only observe the events as a third-person narrator, and gives his or her summation.

Modern narratives have a broader function. After a close study of famous examples of modern narrative, we see that such narratives do not merely entertain, but serve as ways to communicate writers' moral, cultural, and political perspectives. The modern Indian English novelist is a mediator or a reflector on the history of modern India. He is involved in the creative process of transforming the historical facts, the emergence, the rise and fall of the British Raj into novel. The world has seen the works of many Indian novelists writing about different subjects in a different style. There have been novels of introspection, personal and confessional in nature, there have been re-writings of history and restatements of the past, and there have been writings on the social and political condition of the nation. We have also seen the novelist turning in to nostalgia of the past and glorify and idealize it, or to turn to the present in a gesture of protest if not disgust

The novelists of the post-independence period certainly were able to depict 'how the joy of freedom has been more than neutralized by the tragedy of the 'partition'; how in spite of the freedom there still exists corruption, inefficiency, poverty, oppression and heart-rending miseries of the poor owing to the widening gaps between haves and have-nots; how after the establishment of the popular democratic government, the evils and besetting ills have continued to reign and remain uncured.

The post -colonial Indian English novelists had to appeal to the heterogeneous community, people of diverse ethnic-religious and cultural backgrounds. For this purpose he chose themes and situations that had more or less the same validity all over the country. These themes emerged to form recurrent patterns and major trends which were more easily discernible in post-independence Indian society than in that of pre-independence India. That is why the range of the novel widened and the various features of Indian society, economic, political, religious and cultural were exhaustively covered by it.

The eighties revolutionized Indian English fiction with the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981. It was a novel which drew a lot of attention from all over the world for its content and form. Rushdie had made a serious attempt to nativize English language in this novel. He was followed by novelists like Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy,

Upamanyu Chatterjee and many others who had found new voices for their novels. Each of these novelists set their own linguistic and literary standards and the world seemed to be prepared to listen to them. Their narrative techniques, their themes are aspects which require reader's thoughtful attention. Here, we discuss the major novelists of the 80s and 90s and their contribution to Indian English literature.

Salman Rushdie, a major Indian English novelist of the post-colonial phase needs no introduction in the field of Indian English fiction. The impact of his novels on the novelists of the eighties and nineties is palpable. The publication of his *Midnight's Children* (1981) was greeted all over the world because of its exuberance of language and style, its combination of hilarious comedy and mocking political satire.

The charm of the novel *Midnight's Children* lies in its narrative technique. Rushdie has used this technique for the factual rendering in historical setting. With an unbiased approach, he portrays personal experiences and situations. Rushdie's narrator in the novel builds his own reality. He gives an augmented picture of reality and rejects partial realities. While doing so he depicts this reality with a touch of fantasy. The novel is multi coated with episodic causality. His exalted diction, grand word usage and felicitous word phrases leave a strong impact on the readers. We see the use of bold literary innovations and disarrangement, such as unconventional words in the novel.

Saleem Sinai, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, presents his story as an autobiographical narrative that bring around self-conscious parallels between events in his own life and sub continental history as seen from his point of view as well as from the point of view of his diasporic Muslim family during their frequent changes in location between Kashmir, Delhi, Bombay, the Sunderbans, Dhaka, and Karachi. The novel also throws light on the state of Emergency during the 1975-77. It was a period of unrest and turmoil in the country and we see in the novel a kind of scathing political satire of the mid-1970s state of Emergency. In 1975, the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi declared a state of National Emergency, in which all civil rights were suspended, censorship was imposed on the press, people who opposed the government were jailed and all executive powers were concentrated in her hands. The Emergency was an autocratic rule that lasted almost two years. *Midnight's Children* celebrates the disintegration of the polity because it signifies the pluralism of democracy as opposed to the dictatorial discourse of Indira Gandhi's rule. Saleem

is a delegate of many voices, many languages, many characters, and he struggles to contain them all until the end of the story, where he foresees his impending disintegration into 600 million separate identities. His disintegration is seen as a positive value for the polity, because it reaffirms the pluralism that is an essential constituent of democracy. We see Rushdie being robust in endorsing such a form of government. It is clear that Rushdie with his sheer mastery of the language, and his total understanding of the Indian culture was able to narrate the novel in a way that could attract the world. The novel exhibits his profound knowledge of the Indian culture.

Amitav Ghosh is a novelist of immense repute. He appeals to our universal instincts. His novels, deal with the dissonance in the human psyche, with good and evil, with such primal things as love, hate, animosity, vengeance, violence age old family feud, the desire for union, the need for separation, the quest for normalcy, the need for renunciation, with something incalculable in each one of us which may at any moment rise to the surface and disturb our normal balance, with mysteries, uncertainties, complexities of human existence and relationship.

Nationalism, political freedom and international relations are the major themes of Amitav Ghosh's first two novels, *The Circle of Reason* (1986), and *The Shadow Lines*(1990). In *The Circle of Reason*, Amitav Ghosh talks about unity and diversity, in weaving which brought welcome changes all over the world. Ghosh believes in order, harmony, in unity of the world- not in its division into continents and countries. He lays stress on "connection". It is connection with people and places which bring positive changes in the life of an individual. He loves to see individuals rising and prospering through connections. The novel also exhibits Ghosh's annoyance with the Indian culture when it tries to work on divisive and discordant lines. He believes in building a new rational world. It is possible only when we start working on positive lines and start doing things with whatever we have. The novel ends with its orphan protagonists return to India. The sermons of profane rationalism that nurtured him gets blown up and consigned to the flames. He was forced to live a life on the run from his own native land, and now he finds himself free to return and make a new beginning. But it is clear that making a new beginning is not going to be easy for him, he will have to work with the fragments he has.

Amitav Ghosh builds on intensely vivid, funny and moving story out of an intricate web of memories, relationships and images in his monumental novel *The*

*Shadow Lines*. The focus of the novel is the meaning of political freedom in the modern world and the force of nationalism. Ghosh points out the absurdity of drawing lines between peoples and nations. *The Shadow Lines* we draw between people and nations has been a source of terrifying violence. It is one of the great themes of our times. Ghosh commits himself to the whole world of nationalism or internationalism. He neither defends separation or the habit of drawing lines nor defends it openly or completely. His position appears to be that of a realist or agnostic and he takes this position chiefly because of the complexity of human nature or situation because of the inadequacy of human belief or conviction.

Vikram Seth is another major novelist of the post-colonial phase. He is well known for his novels, *The Golden Gate: A Novel in Verse* (1986), *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and *An Equal Music* (1999). He achieved international fame primarily as the author of the epic narrative, *A Suitable Boy*. It is a much admired novel of Indian life, which is set between 1950 and 1952. It brings before the readers a panoramic view of the Indian society in the years immediately after independence. It was transitional period after independence. *A Suitable Boy* was published in India in 1993 when the country witnessed an aggressive brand of communal politics. It was the time when the Hindu right wing slowly tried to seize the Indian national identity. The novel can be seen as a response to the aggressive communalization of politics during the 1990s. We see in the background of the novel, the underlying Hindu-Muslim conflict in the city of Brahmipur, where the story is primarily set. Seth considers his novel a plea for religious tolerance among other things.

Vikram Seth explores in his novel some of the most important political and social issues of the time. He appears to be bent on presenting before his readers the interstices of social change, the way that life and love will go on no matter what history may be up to. The novel aspires to give an idea of India in a realistic manner. The narration explores the Indian society of the post-colonial phase in its multiple political, religious, cultural and communal ramifications.

The novel *A Suitable Boy* endorses the idea of 'strong' India, of cultural harmony and religious tolerance. It also echoes Jawaharlal Nehru's views on secularism as the only way towards development and progress of the Indian nation. Any other approach in India would mean the breaking up of India. The period after independence was important in the consolidation of the nation. His description of many events in the novel can be seen as 'symbolic moments in the nation -forming

process, characterized by gradual rather than violent, social change. The novel's secular and realistic narration and its depiction of the Indian society make it worth reading.

During the 1950s the government made serious efforts to bring social and economic changes in the country. The Land Reform Act was one such effort. Seth talks about the Zamindari Abolition Act in this novel. This act aimed to abolish the feudal land-holdings in the imagined state of Purva Pradesh. It was one of the important social changes which the country witnessed after independence. The seeds of a modern industrialized state were sown and the nation saw the rise of the Indian middle class. It was a phase of transition and a very important moment in the development of modern India. Seth's portrayal of the Indian nation is natural and instinctive. He appears to be very clear in endorsing the Nehruvian ideology of a secular state built on communal harmony, equality and brotherhood. The novel gives us a vivid and lively picture of India. Its vast depiction of the Indian society during the 1950s is characterized by the blending of the 'aesthetic and referential purposes'.

Rohinton Mistry with his novels like *Such a Long Journey* (1992) and *A Fine Balance* (1996) showed to the literary world that he is a novelist who believes in depicting life as it really is. Both the novels exhibit his complete understanding of Indian social life. The portrayal of the Indian middle class is the high point in Mistry's narratives. His bitterness, his anguish towards the government's hostile attitude towards the poor is evident in his novels. His novels can be read for its realism.

*Such a Long Journey* is a great work of art by Rohinton Mistry which deserves to be mentioned in the present study. The novel announces Mistry's advent as a gifted Indian writer. The novel is set against the background of the Indo-Pak war of 1971. It delves into the human predicament meted out to its central character, Gustad Nobel. His hopes are shattered by circumstances beyond his control. Mistry depicts Gustad Nobel as a classical tragic hero. Gustad appears to be completely serene and tranquil in his approach towards life. His sufferings and struggle with fortitude and humility in life reminds us of the classical tragic hero's life and sufferings. The journey which he undertakes in the novel is a journey from hopelessness to hope. The novel derives its form from the classical literary tradition. Mistry's narration reminds the readers of the great tradition where the novelist not only changes the possibilities of art for practitioners and readers but becomes significant in terms of that human awareness

they promote, awareness of the possibilities of life. We find the elements of comedy, tragedy and satire.

*Such a Long Journey* shows Rohinton Mistry's awareness of the social and political situation of India during the 1970s. Mistry gives a realistic and satirical picture of the Indian political system of those times. He appears to be unrelenting so far as his attack on Nehru and Indira Gandhi is concerned. He condemns Nehru for India's defeat at the hands of Chinese in the Indo-Chinese war of 1962. He describes Nehru's frustrations, his ill-temper, his political maneuverings; his feud with Feroze Gandhi for the latter's exposure of scandals in his government, his fixation for his "darling daughter Indira", who left her husband in order to live with him. Mistry exposes the crumbling political order of the country by mentioning the political details in his novel. Sohrab, Gustad's son suggests two things for a drastic social change.

The world which Mistry creates in the novel is a world in which all forms of corruption can be seen. Hypocrisy, cruelty towards the poor, loss of moral and ethical values, despair and decay has become paramount. The rampant corruption in the society makes Mistry a realist. He is perturbed to find people living in sub-human conditions because of corruption. He appears to be a reporter of human conditions as in itself it is. Wars between nations show the degenerating political situation of the world. Breakdowns of communication between nations lead to political unrest and upheavals. Mistry becomes ruthless in his criticism of the government because he is a nationalist at heart and is concerned about the lives of the people of the nation.

*A Fine Balance* (1996) is an absorbing and moving text about life of common, vulnerable people who scuttle about on this globe and whose lives are caught in the vicious cycle of poverty. The novel depicts the picture of the present-day India, shows the sufferings of the outcasts and innocents trying to survive in a cruel and hostile world and grapples with the question of how to live in the face of death and despair. The poor- who are the main characters in this novel- are not always going to remain poor, but are also maimed, mutilated, poisoned, homeless and hopeless. The period which Mistry mentions in this novel was a period of great civil unrest. The novelist is successful in creating the story around his readers and involving them in the lives of his characters. Mistry's depiction of the Indian society at the time of Emergency is such that one gets a feeling that the events are getting unfolded before

one's eyes- the smell of the street, the loud, blatant vendors screaming their slogans as the pedestrians walk by take the readers directly to the locale of the novel.

The first part of the novel give the reader brief histories of each of the main characters. The story takes place in an "unnamed city by the sea", somewhere in India, exploring the lives of four very different people of diverse backgrounds. Mistry beautifully uses his descriptive language to make ordinary things extraordinary. It is clear in the novel that the politics of the nation is responsible for the sufferings of the common man. The characters of the novel have to pay a heavy price for their simplicity and their lack of understanding of the national politics during the time of Emergency. The novel is a harsh condemnation of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her associates, and of the disparaging viciousness of Emergency. Mistry takes his readers to a roller coaster of emotions throughout the novel leading them from happiness to depression in the blink of an eye.

Mistry, like Amitav Ghosh appears to be against the divide in society on the basis of caste and religion. There has to be a balance in the society. One cannot draw lines and compartments. Sometimes one has to use his/her failures as stepping stones to success. One to maintain a fine balance between hope and despair. The struggles of the characters hold our attention all through the novel. Mistry, undoubtedly succeeds in depicting a moving tragedy with his strong impulse toward political and social commentary. The novel explores the resilience of human spirit and the searing heartbreak of futile imaginings. His novels *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* can be read for their treatment of the layers of socio-political irregularities and caste aberrations that generate a society of anarchy.

Arundhati Roy entered the Indian literary scene with her award winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997). The novel set in the southern Indian state of Kerala, during the late 1960s when Communism rattled the age-old caste system, is an arresting novel for its exuberance of style. The recipient of the Booker prize, Roy in this novel presents before her readers the story of a broken family. It is supposedly the story of young twins Rahel and Estha and the rest of their family but the book feels like a million stories whirling out indefinitely. The plot of the novel, focus around a destined, forbidden relationship between Ammu, a divorcee and Velutha, the low cast untouchable carpenter. The narrative is presented from the perspective of Ammu's twins, Rahel and Estha. Their story stretches both backwards and forwards, not only into the subdued past in a pattern of 'analepsis' (flashback) but

also towards its horrendous conclusion, which is anticipated, repeatedly in a process of 'prolepsis' (a flash forward in which future events are anticipated in the narrative 'present').

The core narrative strategy outlined here can be adequate to tell a personal story of confronting alienation, and the writers in this survey skillfully use it to depict several arcs of how their protagonists come to terms with their 'awayness' in the context of the return to their homelands. In one instance, the protagonist comes to realize that she belongs elsewhere, that 'home' is no longer the place where she was born; that place has become too unrecognizable, too alien, too threatening. The protagonist accepts the self as permanently divided and this is the price he will pay for the migration; he will always be an outsider. And in another instance, the returnee decides to attempt to stay and explore the challenge of belonging, despite disappointments, broken expectations, and unease about whether it will work out. By sticking to this strategy, some of the writers are also able to make compelling and vivid observations about the political changes in their homelands. Most of these novels include strong critiques of the postcolonial outcome. However, if a writer wants to do something more ambitious, to go beyond telling the tale of a self-focused journey, it requires him or her to break out of the pattern of the core narrative strategy. The unique social position of migrant postcolonial writers asks more from them than to merely tell a self-focused story.

## **1.2 Life and Works of Salman Rushdie:**

Salman Rushdie was born on June 19, 1947, to an affluent family in Bombay, India. Rushdie's birth coincided with a particularly important moment in Indian history: after nearly one hundred years of colonial rule, the British occupation of the South Asian subcontinent was coming to an end. Almost exactly three months after Rushdie's birth, Pakistan and India achieved their long-awaited independence when, at the stroke of Midnight's on August 14 and 15, respectively, power was transferred from Great Britain to the sovereign governments of each country. The period that immediately followed independence proved tumultuous. Political and social tensions between Hindus and Muslims caused not only the division of India into two separate countries—a calamitous event referred to as Partition—but also wide-scale riots that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. The violence that accompanied

independence was a prelude to the multiple wars, coups, and governmental abuses that plagued the area in the years that followed.

The political upheaval and constant threat of violence that marked the first three decades of independence forms the backdrop for *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie's most celebrated novel. Like Rushdie himself, Saleem, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, is born on the eve of independence, and the events of his life closely parallel events in the development of both India and Pakistan. Most of Rushdie's novels concern themselves, to some extent, with the character and history of these two major South Asian nations and describe the various, often violent struggles between different religions, classes, languages, and geographical regions. In the thirty years following independence, India and Pakistan fought three separate wars: two over Kashmir, and one over the creation of an independent Bangladesh. The wars produced millions of refugees, claimed thousands of lives, and led to a nearly permanent state of tension between the two countries.

Raised in a well-to-do Muslim household, Rushdie was given an excellent education. After graduating from the University of Oxford in 1968, he moved briefly to Pakistan, where his family had immigrated after Partition, before returning to England to work as an actor and copywriter. Soon after, Rushdie published his first novel, *Grimus* (1975). A blend of science and literary fiction, *Grimus*, though generally ignored by critics, nonetheless marked the debut of a new literary talent that incorporated myth, magic, and fantasy into his narratives. Six years later, Rushdie published *Midnight's Children*, which won the Booker Prize in 1981, and was later deemed the best Booker-winning novel from the first twenty-five years of the competition, earning the title "Booker of Bookers." Heralded by critics as an enormous literary achievement, the novel instantly earned Rushdie comparison with some of the world's greatest contemporary writers. However, Rushdie's great international fame is mainly owed to his 1988 novel *The Satanic Verses* and the controversy that followed its publication. Muslim religious clerics and politicians deemed *The Satanic Verses* sacrilegious and offensive for its harsh, critical portrayal of Islam and for its less-than-reverent treatment of the Prophet Mohammed. The novel was banned in Rushdie's native India and prompted the theocratic Iranian government to issue a fatwa—a religious ruling—calling for his death in 1989.

Rushdie spent the next nine years living in secrecy, under the protection of bodyguards and the British government. Fearful for his life, Rushdie nonetheless

continued to write and publish books, most notably *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), as well as two works of nonfiction, *The Jaguar Smile* (1987) and *Imaginary Homelands* (1991). When the Iranian government lifted the fatwa in 1998, Rushdie was able to enjoy a return to a moderately normal life and eventually settled in New York City.

Rushdie's work and *Midnight's Children* in particular, is often associated with several categories of literary fiction, including magical realism, postcolonial fiction, and postmodern literature. His work is often compared to, and admittedly influenced by, novels like Gunter Grass's *Tin Drum* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Equally significant as the incorporation of mythical and fantastical elements into his fiction is Rushdie's uniquely Indian perspective on the English language. Rushdie's novels hum with an eclectic mix of prose styles, which echo the rhythm and slang of English as it is colloquially spoken in India. Familiar English words get combined in new and unusual ways, and long, unbroken sentences run on freely, sometimes spanning a page or more. The inspiration Rushdie draws from both ancient and contemporary Indian culture is also notable in his fiction. Elements taken from traditional Indian mythology and religion thread those through the novel, as do the artistic conventions of modern Bollywood, the vigorous, populist cinema industry based in Bombay. In its sheer exuberance and sprawling range of cultural sources, as well as its attempt to include as much of India's vast cultural identity and contemporary history as possible, *Midnight's Children* is as complete a reflection of the life and character of the subcontinent as any single novel could possibly provide.

**Check your progress:**

**A) Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence each.**

1. Where was Salman Rushdie born?
2. Where did Rushdie Completed his graduation?
3. What is the title of Rushdie's first novel?
4. Which of Rushdie's novels was banned in India, and forced him to live in secrecy for nine years?

**Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Bombay
2. At Oxford University
3. *Grimus*
4. *Midnight's Children*

**Glossary and Notes :**

- Bildungsroman- A novel dealing with a person's early development.
- Foreshadowing- A literary technique to show or say something will happen in the future.
- Satire- a way of criticizing something such as a group of people or a system in which you deliberately make them seem funny so that people will see their fault.
- Irony- a situation that is unusual or amusing because something strange happens or is true.
- Diaspora- 1.the movement of the Jewish people away from ancient Palestine,to settle in other countries.2.The spreading of people from a national group or culture to other areas or countries.

**1.3 Introduction to *Midnight's Children*:**

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) earned immense praise both in India and abroad. Living in the United Kingdom, he is understandably indifferent to the literary fashions of the West and so writes mostly on the socio-political issues of Indian subcontinent. His fiction mirrors the, microcosmic India caught in the crucible of tradition, struggle and change. *Midnight's Children* is a novel about the struggle for independence, the partition of India, and its repercussions and post independence days. The holocaust of the partition of India has been presented in a realistic manner in this novel. The novel reflects a period of about seventy years in India's modern history dealing with the events leading to partition and beyond.

*Midnight's children* covers the experiences of three generations of a Sinai family living in Srinagar, Amritsar and Agra and then in Bombay and finally migration to Karachi. Saleem Sinai is the narrator of the events. He works in a pickle factory by day and records his experiences by night. Saleem Sinai is the central character of the

novel and highlights the connection between public affairs and private lives of Indian society. With the help of Saleem's personal collective experiences, the novel is virtually highlighting all the major events of twentieth century Indian history. There is a truthful picture of typical Indian divisions and dissents, chaos and illusion, communal tensions, religious fanaticism, besides traditional values and modernizing efforts. Saleem Sinai is aware of all historical events, his birth at the benighted movement thrust upon him at the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement.

*Midnight's Children* is fairly a political novel presenting the most realistic pictures of many events of Indian political scenario. He presents the happenings in such a lively manner that it appears as if the political history of Indian subcontinent has been redrawn. The plot of the novel is more on the line of bildungsroman, i.e. a novel dealing with a person's early development. The novel was named as *Midnight's Children* as the hero of the novel Saleem, like Salman Rushdie himself was born on the stroke of Midnight's. The novel is often regarded as an 'autobiographical' piece of fiction because both the hero Saleem and writer Rushdie were born in the same part of the city Mumbai and at the same time i.e. Midnight. There is an obvious interaction of history and individual characters in the novel. The theme of the novel is greatly influenced by the Bangladesh Liberation Movement and Emergency in India. The part III of the novel is more political than the early parts of the book. The characters of the novel act and interact with almost all major Indian events. The characters are neither stereotyped nor predictable the story of the novel is complex containing several stories within its theme.

#### **1.4 Characters in *Midnight's Children*:**

**Saleem Sinai** - The narrator and protagonist of the novel. Born at the moment of India's independence and blessed with the powers of telepathy and an uncanny sense of smell, Saleem tells his extraordinary life story as his body begins to crumble, an account that significantly parallels the history of postcolonial India. As a narrator, Saleem can be both unreliable and self-centered at times.

**Aadam Aziz** - Saleem's grandfather. Aadam is the patriarch of the family, a doctor and skeptic whose loss of faith leaves what he refers to as a "hole" inside of him. Aadam falls in love with his wife, Naseem, after only being allowed to see her through a hole in a perforated sheet.

**Ahmed Sinai** - Saleem's father. A shrewd businessman who is nonetheless destined for failure, Ahmed spends much of his marriage fighting his wife and his alcohol addiction.

**Mumtaz (Amina Sinai)** - Saleem's mother, and the daughter of Aadam Aziz. Born as Mumtaz, she changes her name to Amina after her marriage to Ahmed. A loving, devoted mother, she inherits her father's skepticism and her mother's determination. Despite being married to Ahmed, she is never able to forget her first husband, Nadir Khan.

**Mary Pereira** - Saleem's ayah and surrogate mother. Mary is responsible for switching Saleem and Shiva at birth out of a misguided sense of social justice. In order to compensate for her crime, she dedicates her life to raising Saleem.

**Shiva** - Saleem's archrival. Shiva is born at exactly the same moment as Saleem. While Saleem is raised in a loving, wealthy household, Shiva is raised in abject poverty by a single father. He is blessed with a pair of preternaturally strong knees and an amazing prowess in war. Shiva is named after the Hindu god of destruction, who is also the god associated with procreation.

**Parvati-the-witch** - A real witch, and, like Saleem, one of the children born at the moment of India's independence. Parvati is Saleem's closest ally as a child and later becomes his wife. Despite her fantastic powers, she is unable to make Saleem fall in love with her and, as a result, embarks on an affair with Shiva that result in a child. In the Hindu religion, Parvati is the consort of Shiva.

**Padma** - Saleem's devoted caretaker and future wife. Padma is as strong and down-to-earth as Saleem is weak and dreamy. She provides Saleem with a skeptical yet patient audience.

**Naseem Ghani** - Saleem's grandmother and Aadam Aziz's wife. After marriage, Naseem becomes known as Reverend Mother, in part because of her religious devotion. As her husband withers away with age, Reverend Mother grows increasingly large and powerful.

**William Methwold** - Saleem's biological father. An Englishman, William Methwold seduces women with his perfectly parted hair, which is actually a wig. He owns Methwold's Estate, a portion of which he sells to Ahmed Sinai. He sees his departure from India as marking the tragic end of an era.

**Alia** - Saleem's aunt and a sister of Amina. After Ahmed Sinai rejects her for her sister, Alia harbors a lifelong bitterness and determination to destroy her sister and her sister's family.

**Hanif** - Saleem's uncle and a brother of Amina. Hanif was once one of the most promising film directors in India. However, his dream to create art free from melodrama and superstition fails, and, as his career falls apart, he commits suicide.

**Nadir Khan** - Amina's first husband. As a young man, Nadir Khan is the personal assistant to Mian Abdullah, as well as a bad poet. He falls in love with Amina but is forced to divorce her on account of his impotence. He later changes his name to Qasim Khan and becomes a communist.

**Mustapha** - Saleem's uncle, and a brother of Amina. Mustapha is the ideal, obedient civil servant. He is so passive, he's nearly inconsequential—a fate he takes out on his children by constantly beating them until they have no personality left.

**Emerald** - Saleem's aunt, and a sister of Amina. Emerald marries Major Zulfikar and enjoys an opulently comfortable lifestyle. Selfish and self-absorbed, she only reluctantly comes to her sister's aid.

**General Zulfikar** - Emerald's husband and an important figure in the Pakistani army. General Zulfikar helps orchestrate a coup against the Pakistani government and makes money by smuggling items into the country. His constant abuse of his son, Zafar, eventually provokes Zafar into killing him.

**Zafar** - The son of General Zulfikar and Emerald. Zafar wets himself throughout his life and is ridiculed and abused by his father as a result.

**Aadam Sinai** - The biological son of Shiva and Parvati-the-witch. Saleem raises Aadam as if he were his own child. Aadam is just three years old at the novel's conclusion.

**Picture Singh** - A snake charmer, and the leader of the magician's ghetto. Charming and diplomatic, Picture Singh is Saleem's closest friend. He is undone by his desire to prove himself the world's greatest snake harmer.

**Wee Willie Winkie** - Shiva's father. Wee Willie Winkie is a poor man who earns a living by singing for the wealthy families of Methwold's Estate.

**Vanita** - Saleem's biological mother. Vanita dies during labor.

**Evie Lilith Burns** - A violent, tough American girl. Evie is briefly the leader of the children living on Methwold's Estate, and she is Saleem's first love.

**Sonny Ibrahim** - One of the children living on Methwold's Estate. Sonny is Saleem's best friend. He is also in love with Saleem's sister, the Brass Monkey.

**Joseph D'Costa** - A social radical who later becomes a ghost. Joseph D'Costa's political beliefs inspire Mary's decision to switch Shiva and Saleem, and his ghost later compels her to confess her crime.

**Commander Sabarmati** - A high-ranking official in the Indian navy. After learning that his wife, Lila, has had an affair, Commander Sabarmati shoots her, kills her lover, and then surrenders. He temporarily becomes a national hero.

**Homi Catrack** - a film magnate and resident of Methwold's Estate. Homi Catrack has an affair with Lila, the wife of Commander Sabarmati, and is subsequently murdered by the commander.

**Lila Sabarmati** - The wife of Commander Sabarmati. Lila's husband shoots her in the stomach for having an affair.

**Doctor Narlikar** - A doctor, and Ahmed's business partner. Dr. Narlikar devises a scheme for reclaiming land from the ocean but dies before he can implement it.

**Alice Pereira** - Mary's sister. Alice eventually works for Ahmed Sinai and is responsible for Mary's chutney factory.

**Farooq, Shaheed, and Ayooba** - Three soldiers assigned to work with Saleem in the Pakistani army. Each one is eventually killed during the war.

**Narlikar Women** - An unnamed, unnumbered group of "grossly competent" women who take over Dr. Narlikar's affairs after his death.

**Mian Abdullah** - A political figure before independence. Mian Abdullah is the founder of the Free Islam Convocation, an organization dedicated to resisting the partition of India along religious lines.

**Ghani** - Naseem's father. Ghani is a blind, wealthy landowner.

**Tai** - An old boatman from Kashmir. Tai is a mysterious, ancient, and wise figure who remains resentful of the world's encroachment into his territory until his death.

**Ramram Seth** - A prophet who predicts Saleem's future while Amina is pregnant

### **1.5 Brief Summary of *Midnight's Children* :**

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a 1981 magical realism novel revolving around India's independence. The novel is semi-autobiographical, though the main character and Rushdie stand-in has magical powers. *Midnight's Children* was critically acclaimed and won many literary awards, including the Booker Prize and the special Booker of Bookers Prize, which commemorated the award's 25th anniversary.

The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, is born on August 15th, 1947, at the exact moment India gains its independence from Britain. Thirty years later, Saleem feels as if he is dying, so he decides to tell the story of his life to his lover, Padma. Saleem begins the story of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz who lived in Kashmir, India. In Saleem's story, Aadam is a doctor caring for a woman named Naseem, who becomes Saleem's grandmother. When Aadam is treating her, propriety dictates that she must stay behind a sheet.

The sheet was also a trick by Naseem's father, who wanted Aadam to fall in love with his daughter. It works, and he finally gets to see her face when she has a headache. Naseem and Aadam marry. They move to Amritsar, where Aadam witnesses for Indian independence from British rule. These protests are violently suppressed and end with the protesters being massacred. After having three daughters and two sons, Aadam becomes a follower of an activist named Mian Abdullah. Abdullah is assassinated for his beliefs, and Aadam agrees to take in his assistant, Nadir Khan. Naseem labels Nadir as cowardly and protests his staying in their house.

Ultimately, Nadir Khan and Aadam's daughter Mumtaz fall in love. They marry, but even after two years, fail to consummate their marriage. Nadir Khan is found to be hiding at Aadam's and flees, leaving his wife behind. Mumtaz remarries Ahmed Sinai, a merchant. Mumtaz decides to change her name to Amina and she and

her husband move to the large city of Delhi. Amina is soon pregnant, and visits a fortune teller to learn about her future child. The prophecy about her child states that he will never be older or younger than his country. Due to some complications with Ahmed's factory being burned down by terrorists, he decides to move them to Bombay.

In Bombay, Mumtaz and Ahmed buy a house from an Englishman named William Methwold. One of their neighbors is an entertainer named Wee Willie Winkie who lives with his pregnant wife, Vanita. Unbeknownst to Willie, Vanita had an affair with Methwold and he is the father of her child. Both Vanita and Mumtaz go into labor and have their children at Midnight's, though Vanita does not survive childbirth. The midwife who has recently had an affair with a socialist, decides to switch the babies so that the poor baby can live a life of privilege and vice versa. Saleem is not truly the biological child of Mumtaz and Ahmed, but of Vanita and Methwold. The midwife becomes Saleem's nanny out of guilt.

Saleem's birth is given large press coverage, since it coincided with Indian independence. Saleem is strange looking, with a cucumber-shaped nose and blue eyes. One day, Saleem is punished for hiding out in the bathroom, where he accidentally witnesses his mother using the toilet. She forces him to be silent for a day, wherein he notices he can hear the thoughts of others. Ultimately, he realizes he can also hear the thoughts of those children born in the same hour as him. He also finds out that they all have powers; the strongest ones being born closest to Midnight's. Shiva, the child with whom he was switched at birth, is physically strong and gifted in fighting.

Saleem loses a part of his finger and is rushed to the hospital. When the doctors obtain his blood type, it is revealed that Saleem cannot be Ahmed and Mumtaz's biological son. Saleem's nanny admits she switched the two boys at birth. Ahmed, now an alcoholic, becomes violent at hearing the news, which prompts Amina to take Saleem and his sister to the recently created nation of Pakistan to live with her sister.

After Ahmed dies, the family moves back to Bombay. At this time, India is embroiled in a war with China. Saleem's large nose has been giving him trouble all his life, so he gets an operation to fix it. After the operation, he is no longer telepathic, but has an enhanced sense of smell and he can sense people's emotions.

After India loses to China, the family moves back to Pakistan. There, his entire family is killed, save his sister Jamila, during a war between India and Pakistan.

Saleem loses his memory after being hit in the head. He ends up in the army, although he is not quite sure how he ended up there. Saleem witnesses many war crimes and barbarisms, and he escapes into the Bangladesh jungle. There, Saleem recovers some of his memory, but does not recover his name until he meets Parvati-the-witch, who is another one of *Midnight's Children*. She helps him recall his name. They retreat to a magicians' ghetto.

Parvati wants Saleem to marry her, which he refuses to do. She then has an affair with Shiva, who is now a famous war hero. Shiva and Parvati have relationship troubles, and Parvati returns to the magicians' ghetto, pregnant and unmarried. Saleem agrees to marry her. Indira Gandhi, who is the prime minister of India, has begun sterilization camps to decrease India's population. She also destroys the magicians' ghetto. Parvati dies after childbirth, and Shiva captures Saleem to take him to a sterilization camp. There, all of *Midnight's*'s children are sterilized, as to protect the Prime Minister from their powers. Gandhi does not win her first election.

All of *Midnight's Children* are set free, and Saleem heads out to find Aadam, Parvati's son. He finds him with a snake charmer they knew in the ghetto and the three travels to Bombay. There, Saleem eats some chutney which reminds him of his nanny. He tracks down the chutney factory his former nanny owns, and there he meets Padma. He decides to marry her, but is certain that on his thirty-first birthday, the anniversary of India's independence, he will die and explode into dust.

## **1.6 Chapter-Wise Summary of *Midnight's Children***

### **1.6.1 Summary of Book One**

The novel *Midnight's Children* is divided into three parts namely Book One, Book Two and Book Three. Each book is divided into sub-chapters. The Book One has eight chapters namely, The perforated sheet, Mercurochrome, Hit-the-spittoon, Under the carpet, A public announcement, Many headed monsters, Methwold and Tick, tock.

#### **The Perforated Sheet:**

Saleem Sinai opens the novel by explaining the exact date and time of his birth: August 15, 1947, at *Midnight's*. Saleem's birth coincides precisely with the moment

India officially gains its independence from Britain. Thus, as Saleem notes, his miraculously timed birth ties him to the fate of the country. He is thirty-one years old now and feels that time is running out for him. Saleem believes his life is ending and he must tell all of the stories trapped inside of him before he dies.

Saleem begins the story with his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, on an early spring morning in Kashmir. Saleem describes Kashmir as a place of incredible beauty and notes that, in 1915, Kashmir was still pristine, looking just as it had during the time of the Mughal Empire. At this point in the story, Kashmir is free of the soldiers, camouflaged trucks, and military jeeps that will come to characterize it in later years.

While praying, Aadam bumps his nose against the hard ground, and three drops of blood fall from his nose. As a result, he vows never again to bow before man or god, and consequently a “hole” opens up inside of him. Aadam has recently returned home from Germany, after five years of medical study. While Aadam was away, his father had a stroke, and his mother took over his duties in the family gem business. As Aadam stands on the edge of a lake, Tai, an old boatman, comes rowing toward him. Saleem describes Aadam’s features, particularly his prominent nose. Saleem also describes the enigmatic Tai and the local rumors that surround him.

Tai’s boat draws closer. He shouts out to Aadam that the daughter of Ghani the landowner has fallen ill. Here, Saleem interrupts his narrative to note that most of what matters in our lives takes place in our absence, but he reassures us that he has the ability to see things he didn’t actually witness. In this way, he is able to describe Aadam taking care of his mother, attending to the landowner’s daughter, and being ferried across the lake by Tai, all at the same time.

At the landowner’s opulent house, Aadam realizes that the old man, Ghani, is blind. While waiting to see the patient, Aadam gets nervous and considers fleeing, but then he has a vision of his mother and decides to stay. Aadam is taken in to see the patient, who is flanked by two extremely muscular women holding a white bed sheet over her like a curtain. In the center of the sheet is a hole, approximately seven inches in diameter. Ghani tells Aadam that, for modesty’s sake, he can only examine his daughter through the seven-inch hole.

### **Mercurochrome**

Saleem sits at his desk, writing. **Padma, described as a great comfort despite her inability to read, cooks for Saleem and presses him to eat.** Saleem returns to

his story, saying that his grandfather's premonition to run away was well founded, because, in the ensuing months and years, Aadam fell under the spell of the perforated cloth. The isolated parts of Naseem's body that Aadam has seen begin to haunt him, and his mother notes that Ghani is using the illnesses as a ploy, to arrange a marriage between his daughter and Aadam. Saleem notes that his grandfather fell in love through a hole in a sheet and that this love filled in the hole left by Aadam's renunciation of his faith.

Naseem experiences numerous ailments over the next few years, and, in each case, Aadam examines her by moving the sheet so that the hole exposes the affected area. However, as Naseem never develops pains in her head, Aadam never lays eyes upon her face. On the day World War I ends, Naseem finally complains of a headache, and the doctor receives permission to see her face, at which point he falls even further in love with her. In that same year, Doctor Aziz's father dies, followed shortly by his mother. Ilse, Aadam's anarchist friend from Germany, comes to visit him and deliver the news that their friend Oskar has died. Agra University offers Aadam a job, and he decides to leave Kashmir and proposes to Naseem. Ilse drowns herself in the lake that same day, in a spot where, as Tai once told the young Aadam, foreign women often come to drown themselves without their knowing why.

Padma, who has brought in Saleem's dinner, interrupts the narrative and demands he read her what he has written. When Saleem returns to the story, it is August 6, 1919, and Aadam and Naseem are in the city of Amritsar. Mahatma Gandhi has issued a call for a day of mourning—Hartal—on August 7, to protest the British presence. On the day of Hartal, riots break out, and Aadam treats the wounded with Mercurochrome, which leaves bloodlike red stains on his clothing. Six days later, a peaceful protest erupts, in violation of the martial law regulations. The crowd moves into a compound, where Brigadier R. E. Dyer and his troops eventually surround them. Aadam's nose begins to itch furiously. As the brigadier issues a command, Aadam sneezes violently, falling to the ground and thereby missing a bullet aimed in his direction. The troops continue to fire into the crowd. Of the 1,650 rounds fired, 1,516 find their mark.

Before concluding the chapter and going to bed, Saleem discovers a crack in his wrist. He then tells how Tai, the boatman, died in 1947, protesting India and Pakistan's dispute over Kashmir. Tai walked to where the troops were stationed, intending to give them a piece of his mind, and was shot dead.

### 1.6.1.1 Check your progress:

1. On what day was Saleem born?
2. Whose daughter falls ill and is taken care of by Aadam Aziz?
3. How many inches wide is the hole Aadam can attend to Naseem through?
4. What is Aadam's relation to Saleem?
5. What is Padma unable to do?

### Hit the spittoon

Saleem Sinai the protagonist claims that his body—worn down by time, history, and fatigue—will soon break into hundreds of millions of pieces. He describes how he makes his living making chutney and other condiments and how Padma prepares his food and bed in the factory. Being impotent, Saleem can't respond to Padma's sexual advances.

Saleem returns to his family history, jumping ahead to the summer of 1942. Aadam and Naseem now live on Cornwallis Road, in Agra, and have five children: Alia, Mumtaz, Hanif, Mustapha, and Emerald. Naseem has become a formidable figure with age and is now generally referred to as Reverend Mother. She has also developed a verbal habit of referring to things as *whatsitsname*. Saleem recounts a story of how, in the early 1930s, Naseem became furious with Aadam for dismissing the children's religion tutor, whom he felt was teaching the children to hate people of other faiths. Incensed, Naseem refuses to feed Aadam, waiting until he's almost dead of hunger before she relents.

Back in 1942, Aadam has aligned himself with a charismatic man named Mian Abdullah, also known as the Hummingbird. Abdullah heads the Free Islam Convocation, which opposes the creation of a separate Muslim state. One day, during a visit to a university campus with his personal secretary, Nadir Khan, Mian Abdullah is attacked by a band of assassins. When the assassins begin to cut him with their knives, Abdullah starts to hum, the pitch growing increasingly higher. One of the killers' eyes shatters and falls out of its socket; the surrounding windows shatter as well. Dogs throughout Bombay hear the Hummingbird and rush to the scene, injuring the assassins to such a degree that the murders are rendered unrecognizable. Mian Abdullah dies, but Nadir Khan manages to escape and, finding

Rashid the rickshaw boy in the field surrounding Doctor Aziz's house, pleads with Rashid to notify Aadam of the situation.

### **Under the Carpet**

The period of optimism that Mian Abdullah inspired ends with his assassination. The Rani of Cooch Naheen, one of Abdullah's allies, takes to her bed, while Aadam puts his energy into treating the poor. One day, while using the bathroom, Aadam is startled to find Nadir Khan hiding in the laundry bin. Aadam agrees to provide him sanctuary, despite his wife's protests and concerns for their daughters' purity. In retaliation, Naseem promises never to speak again, and silence descends upon the house.

Several suitors line up for the three Aziz daughters, including Major Zulfikar, an official in the Pakistani army; Nadir Khan, who lives hidden in the Aziz basement; and Ahmed Sinai. Mumtaz, Aadam's favorite daughter and the darkest-skinned of all the children, tends to Nadir Khan. The two fall in love without ever exchanging a word, and Nadir asks Aadam for his daughter's hand in marriage. The family arranges a secret marriage between the two. Afterward, Mumtaz happily moves into the basement, returning to the upper floors by day to preserve the secrecy of her husband's concealment.

The Rani of Cooch Naheen dies, her skin having turned completely white, and bequeaths a silver spittoon to the Aziz family. Mumtaz falls ill, and, while giving her a check-up, Aadam discovers that after two years of marriage Mumtaz remains a virgin. Upon hearing the news, Naseem ends her three years of silence, releasing a torrent of abusive words at her husband. Saleem notes that this occurred on the same day that America dropped the atomic bomb on Japan: August 9, 1945. Emerald runs out of the house and tells her suitor, Major Zulfikar, that Nadir Khan is living in her basement. Nadir Khan flees, leaving a note for Mumtaz that reads, "I divorce you." Emerald goes on to marry Major Zulfikar. At Emerald's wedding, Mumtaz and Ahmed Sinai—who had previously been courting Alia, the eldest daughter—have a conversation. They eventually marry, and Mumtaz changes her name to Amina Sinai.

#### **1.6.1.2 Check your progress:**

1. How does Saleem make a living?
2. When is Mian Abdullah murdered?

3. Who does Aadam discover hiding in his laundry bin?
4. Which of Aadam's daughters marries Nadir?
5. What happens on the same day Nadir leaves Aziz's home and ends his marriage?

### **A Public Announcement**

Saleem begins describing the political events of 1947. He interrupts his story at one point to complain that a Dr. N. Q. Balliga has dismissed his claims to have cracks in his body. He returns to his historical account and describes his mother and father's departure from Agra and their subsequent arrival in Delhi. Amina remains in love with her first husband, Nadir Khan. However, with her typical assiduousness, she trains herself to fall in love with her new husband by focusing on one part of his body or personality at a time, echoing the courtship of her mother and father through the perforated sheet. Without fully being aware of it, she slowly transforms her new house into the basement she used to live in, and Ahmed gradually begins to resemble Nadir Khan as he puts on weight and loses his hair.

One morning, two of Ahmed's business associates, Mr. Mustapha Kemal and Mr. S. P. Butt, arrive at Ahmed and Amina's house. The men tell Ahmed about a fire at one of his warehouses, set by a radical anti-Muslim organization named Ravana, after a many-headed demon. On the street, a young man named Lifafa Das calls out for people to come "see the world" through his peepshow box. The peepshow contains as many postcard images as Lifafa could find depicting global scenes. As eager young children surround him, one girl starts a chant, scorning Lifafa as a Hindu. Soon, others join in, and a mob forms, accusing Lifafa of being a rapist. Amina brings Lifafa into her house, securing his safety by announcing to the crowd that they'll have to kill her, a pregnant woman, before she'll let them harm him. In exchange for saving his life, Lifafa offers to take Amina to see his cousin, a great seer who will tell her unborn child's fortune. Musa, a household servant, says nothing, although Saleem notes that Musa will eventually be responsible for destroying the world, albeit by accident.

### **Many-headed Monsters**

Saleem questions the roles that chance and providence play in determining the future. He wonders about his father's perspective on fate as it relates to Saleem's

own impending birth and considers the role time plays in the partition of India. He notes that what's true isn't necessarily what's real and briefly introduces his ayah, or nanny, Mary Pereira and the stories she told him during his childhood.

Amina Sinai sets off to visit the seer as her husband sets off, with money hidden under his coat, to pay off the Ravana. The narrative jumps back and forth between these two clandestine journeys. As Amina leaves the city in a taxi with Lifafa, she loses her “city eyes” and becomes aware of the abject poverty around her: the beggars, cripples, and starving children clutching at her saris. Meanwhile, Ahmed, surrounded by the stench of failure, is consumed by his money problems and the knowledge that he will never rearrange the Quran in chronological order, as he has always wanted too. Saleem relates a host of disappointments and missed opportunities that will haunt his unhappy father for the rest of his life, as well the tragic deaths awaiting Ahmed's companions, Mustapha Kemal and S. P. Butt. Lifafa reassures and comforts the frightened Amina as they walk up dark steps, past cripples, to the room where Lifafa's cousin appears to be sitting six inches above the ground. Ahmed and his companions follow the orders of the Ravana and deposit the money at an ancient fort overrun with wild monkeys who are taking the building apart brick by brick. In the room with the prophet, Ramram, Amina lets him touch her belly, at which point he falls into a trance and begins to deliver an almost incomprehensible prophecy. He tells her that her son will never be older or younger than his country and there will be two heads, knees, and a nose. He eventually collapses onto the floor, overwhelmed by what he has seen. At the temple, wild monkeys attack the Ravana members assigned to collect the ransom, and Ahmed and his associates begin scrounging to re-collect their money. As a result, the Ravana burn down the men's warehouses. Ahmed decides to get out of the leather business and move to Bombay, where land is cheap. On June 4, as Earl Mountbatten announces the partition of India into two separate nations, Ahmed and Amina board a train for Bombay.

### **1.6.1.3 Check your progress:**

1. Who begins to resemble Nadir as Amina transforms her new house into her old basement?
2. Who does Amina protect from an angry mob?
3. Who, according to Saleem, will be responsible for destroying the world?

4. Where is Amina going, as Ahmed heads off to pay the Ravana?
5. Where do Amina and Ahmed go on the day India is divided into two separate nations?

### **Methwold**

Saleem describes the estate that once belonged to an Englishman, William Methwold. The estate is comprised of four identical houses, each bearing the name of a different European palace. Saleem's parents buy one of the houses, agreeing to the conditions that they purchase everything inside the house and that the legal transfer of property will not occur until Midnight's, August 15. Methwold says that his reasons for the conditions are allegorical, as he equates the sale of his estate with the national transfer of sovereign power.

Saleem lists the other inhabitants of Methwold's Estate: Mr. Homi Catrack, a film magnate who lives with his idiot daughter; old man Ibrahim, his sons, Ismail and Ishaq, and his wife, Nussie; the Dubashes, who become parents of Cyrus, Saleem's first mentor; Doctor Narlikar; and finally, Commander Sabarmati, his wife, Lila, and their two sons, who will grow up to be nicknamed Eyeslice and Hairoil. As the transfer of power draws closer, the inhabitants of Methwold's Estate complain incessantly of having to live among Methwold's things. As the inhabitants settle in, they remain unaware of the fact that they have begun to imitate Methwold's habits, from the cocktail hour he keeps to the accent with which he speaks.

*The Times of India* announces a prize for any child born at the exact moment of independence. Still recalling the prophet's words, Amina declares that her son will win. The summer rains begin, and Amina grows so heavy she can scarcely move. After the rains end, Wee Willie Winkie, a poor clown, returns to the estate to perform for Methwold and the new families. Willie Winkie tells the crowd that his wife is expecting a child soon as well. Saleem tells us that the child actually belongs to Methwold, who seduced Winkie's wife with his perfectly parted hair. Saleem's narrative then jumps to a church, where a midwife named Mary Pereira sits in a confessional booth, telling the young priest about her relationship with an orderly named Joseph D' Costa, who has taken to committing acts of violence against the British. Saleem says that on the night of his birth, this woman made the most important decision in the history of twentieth-century India. Back at Methwold's Estate, Musa is still "ticking like a time-bomb" as the hour approaches Midnight's.

## **Tick, Tock**

On August 13, 1947, Bombay comes alive as the city prepares for India's imminent independence from the British. At Midnight's, the nation of Pakistan will officially be created, a full day before India will be declared independent. Violence breaks out on the borders of Punjab and in Bengal.

A series of events occurs all at once, and Saleem's narrative skips between them. At Methwold's Estate, Ahmed and William Methwold drink cocktails in the courtyard. Meanwhile, at the old house on Cornwallis Road, in Agra, Aadam Aziz rises from his bed and nostalgically pulls out the perforated sheet, only to discover that moths have eaten it. Back at Methwold's Estate, Wee Willie Winkie's wife, Vanita, goes into labor. William Methwold walks into the courtyard of his former compound, stands in the exact center, and salutes the landscape. Shortly afterward, a sadhuji, or holy man, enters the compound and sits under a dripping water tap. He proclaims that he awaits the birth of the One, the Mubarak. As soon as he says this, Amina goes into labor. Once the sun has set, Methwold ends his salute and pulls off his hairpiece. Amina and Vanita lie in adjacent rooms at the nursing home, and two boys are born at Midnight. Upon hearing the news, Ahmed drops a chair on his toes. In the ensuing confusion, Mary Pereira switches the babies' nametags in memory of her revolutionary Joseph, giving Saleem, biologically the son of Willie Winkie and Vanita, to Ahmed and Amina.

Padma interrupts the story to call Saleem a liar. He responds by saying that even after his parents discovered what Mary Pereira had done, they could not go back and erase the past, so he remained their son. Saleem mentions a letter the prime minister sent when he was born, which he buried in a cactus garden along with a newspaper article titled "Midnight's Child." He tells us that the newspapermen who came to take pictures of him gave his mother a pathetic sum of one hundred rupees.

### **1.6.1.4 Check your progress:**

1. How many identical houses was Methwold's estate comprised of?
2. Who is Saleem's first mentor?
3. According to Saleem, who made the most important decision in modern Indian history on the night of his birth?
4. Which two women go into labor on the eve of independence?

5. Who switches the babies' name tags?

**1.6.1.1- Answer key to check your progress:**

1. August 15, 1947
2. Ghani
3. Seven
4. Grandfather
5. Read

**1.6.1.2 - Answer key to check your progress**

1. Making chutney
2. 1942
3. Nadir Khan
4. Mumtaz
5. America bombs Hiroshima

**1.6.1.3- Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Ahmed
2. Lifafa
3. Musa
4. To a seer
5. Bombay

**1.6.1.4 -Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Four
2. Mr.Homi Catrack
3. Mary Pereira
4. Amina and Vanita
5. Mary

## **1.6.2 Summary of Book II:**

Book Two of *Midnight's Children* has fifteen chapters. They are The fisherman's pointing finger, Snakes and ladders, Accident in a washing- chest, All-India radio, Love in Bombay, My tenth birthday, At the Power Cafe, Alpha and Omega ,The Kolynos Kid, Commander Sabarmati's baton, Revelations, Movements performed by pepperpots, Drainage and the desert, Jamila Singer and How Saleem achieved purity.

### **The Fisherman's Pointing Finger**

Padma becomes upset at Saleem because he has used the word love in reference to her. Saleem returns to his story and describes a painting of Walter Raleigh that hung above his crib as a child. In the painting, a fisherman points off into the distance, and Saleem speculates as to what his finger might be pointing at.

Amina and Ahmed bring Saleem home from the hospital. Saleem is not a beautiful baby, but he is a large one, with an enormous cucumber nose and blue eyes that the family assumes came from his grandfather. The residents of the estate pass him around like a doll, and Mary and his mother dote on him. Wee Willie Winkie continues to come to the compound and sing, eventually bringing his son, Shiva, who has knobby knees and, according to Saleem, will later be saved by a war. The baby Saleem witnesses all of the compound inhabitants' private lives—their affairs, fights, and habits. Saleem the grown-up narrator claims responsibility for almost everything that happens, including his father's eventual alcoholism. Feeling neglected by his wife, Ahmed begins to flirt with his secretaries and curse Amina. He later embarks on a scheme with his neighbor, Dr. Narlikar, to reclaim land from the ocean with tetrapods. One day, Ahmed receives a letter from the government saying his assets have been frozen, presumably because of his Muslim faith. The news gives him a permanent chill and sends him to bed, thereby allowing for the conception of Saleem's sister, the Brass Monkey.

### **Snakes and Ladders**

During the winter of 1948, bad omens appear everywhere. To make ends meet, the family rents the top floor of the house to Dr. Schaapsteker, who has spent his life studying snakes. Amina writes her parents a letter, telling them of their hard luck, and Aadam and Reverend Mother arrive a few days later. Reverend Mother takes

over the household, and her temperament seeps into the food she cooks. From this, Amina finds a new, courageous spirit. She takes the money from her dowry to the racetrack, where she wins repeatedly. She takes some of the money and pays their neighbor, Ismail, to fight the government's freezing of Ahmed's assets. Saleem claims that, even though he was just a baby, he was responsible for his mother's amazing success at the racetrack.

As a child, Saleem loves to play the board game Snakes and Ladders. For him, the game perfectly reflects an essential truth: for every "ladder you climb, a snake is waiting just around the corner," and vice versa. However, the game lacks the ambiguities that are part of life. Saleem offers Amina's brother Hanif as an example of the rule of snakes and ladders. Instead of moving to Pakistan, Hanif moved to Bombay, to follow his dream of making movies. He marries a beautiful film star and becomes the youngest film director in Indian cinema history. On the opening night of his film, however, the theater manager interrupts the screening to announce that Mahatma Gandhi has been killed. Amina and her husband run home and board up the house, terrified that if the killer turns out to be a Muslim, violence will break out. But the killer is revealed to be a Hindu, and the family returns to normal, thereby illustrating Saleem's point that for every up there is a down, and for every down an up.

Mary, the ayah, and Musa, the long-time house bearer, engage in a hostile battle. Musa, believing he's about to be fired, steals some of the family's valuables. They catch him before he can escape, and Musa leaves the house ashamed. Saleem reminds us that Musa will eventually destroy everything.

One night, Mary Pereira sees the figure of a man floating across the rooftops. The family calls the police. They execute a sting operation and, in the process, shoot and kill the shadowy figure. The dead man is revealed to be Joseph D'Costa, Mary's former lover, since turned terrorist. Soon after, baby Saleem falls ill with typhoid. The family expects him to die, until Dr. Schaapsteker offers a remedy made of snake poison. The poison saves Saleem's life, lending Saleem "an early awareness of the ambiguity of snakes." The government unfreezes Ahmed's assets. Saleem's sister, nicknamed the Brass Monkey because of the red-gold hair she sports at her birth, arrives with no fanfare. Saleem closes by noting that his sister learned from an early age that if she wanted attention, she would have to make a lot of noise to get it.

### 1.6.2.1 Check your progress:

1. What word does Saleem use that upsets Padma?
2. What vegetable is Saleem's nose compared to when he is born?
3. What does Saleem's father suffer from?
4. What happens on the night of Hanif's movie premiere?
5. Who do the police kill without knowing their identity?

### Accident in a Washing-chest

Padma has stormed out on Saleem because he compares the writing of his narrative to the recording of the sacred Hindu text the Ramayana by the elephant god Ganesh.

Saleem continues the story in the summer of 1956 when his sister, the Brass Monkey, began burning shoes, perhaps to force people to notice her. Starved for attention, she is a mischievous child, prone to breaking windows, spreading lies, and lashing out at anyone who shows her affection.

By the time he reaches the age of nine, Saleem becomes acutely aware of the expectations surrounding him. In order to escape the fear of failure, he hides in his mother's large white washing chest. He begins to attend school with his friends from the compound, Eyeslice, Hairoil, Sonny Ibrahim, and Cyrus-the-great. His early growth spurt has stopped, but his nose, full of snot, continues to grow. He seeks refuge from the insults and names in the washing chest, where his imagination is free to roam. Years later in Pakistan, just before a roof crushes his mother, Amina, she sees the washing chest one more time in a vision. Saleem says that a black fog of guilt began to surround his mother so that on some days it was impossible to see her from the neck up. Her own sense of guilt brings other people's confessions out. Saleem says that the afternoon phone calls from her ex-husband, Nadir Khan, are the real reason for his mother's guilt.

One afternoon, while Saleem seeks refuge in the washing chest, his mother receives another phone call. Unaware of Saleem, she goes to the bathroom and begins to sob, repeating the name of her ex-husband. She takes off her saris to use the bathroom, unwittingly exposing her naked rump to Saleem. His nose twitches, he

sniffs, and his mother discovers him hiding in the washing chest. She punishes him to one day of silence. During that quiet day, Saleem begins to hear voices rattling in his head, which he compares to the divine voices heard by Mohammed and Moses. The next day, he tells the entire family that angels are speaking to him. Everyone grows angry with Saleem, and his father hits him so hard that Saleem permanently loses some hearing in his left ear. Later that evening, however, Amina remembers the words of Ramram, the prophet, who told her, “washing will hide him . . . voices will guide him.” She asks Saleem about the voices again, but he claims it was all just a joke, and she dies, nine years later, without ever knowing the truth.

### **All India Radio**

Padma’s continued absence haunts Saleem, making him uncertain about the accuracy of his narrative. He acknowledges that he made a mistake about the date of Gandhi’s death, but it no longer matters since his story will continue nonetheless. He lists the similarities between himself in the present and the Saleem of the past. He says the voices are gone now, but the heat remains.

During the summer of 1956, language marches fill the city streets, with protesters demanding that Bombay be partitioned along linguistic lines, dividing the Marathi speakers from the Gujrati speakers. At the same time, various languages and voices fill Saleem’s head. The voices are not angels, but telepathy. Beneath the teeming babble of different languages, Saleem says he could hear a purer, intelligible thought-form, greater than words. Saleem also hears the voice of the other *Midnight's Children*—initially far-off and faint—stating simply, “I.” Still afraid of his father’s wrath, Saleem keeps these voices a secret. Saleem puts his power in a historical context, noting that at the time of his discovery, India was developing its Five-Year Plan. He also explains that instead of using his gift for the betterment of the country, he cheated in his classes, kept his gift a secret, and essentially frittered it away.

Saleem begins hiding in an old clocktower. There, he enters the thoughts of strangers all across India, from movie stars and politicians to cab drivers and tourists. Despite his belief that he can see and know everything, Saleem fails to see Dr. Narlikar’s murder by a crowd of language marchers, who hurl him into the sea, along with his concrete tetrapod. The doctor’s death ends his father’s plan to reclaim land from the ocean. A group of very competent female relations takes over the doctor’s businesses and possessions. Shortly after Dr. Narlikar’s death, Ahmed begins to

grow paler and paler. Saleem traces the cause back to the Rani of Cooch Naheen, who may, he speculates, have been the first victim of a disease that turned India's businessmen white. He closes the chapter by noting what lies ahead—including his alter ego, Shiva, and Evelyn Lilith Burns—and by saying, as an afterthought, that Wee Willie Winkie, “in all probability,” met his death at the end of 1956.

#### **1.6.2.2 Check your progress:**

1. Which Hindu God wrote the Ramayana, the text Saleem compares his story to?
2. What does the Brass Monkey burn to get people's attention?
3. According to his mother's punishment, how long does Saleem have to be silent?
4. Who does Saleem claim is speaking to him telepathically?
5. In 1956, according to which line, people did protest to divide Bombay?

#### **Love in Bombay**

Saleem describes how, during the holy fasting month of Ramzan, he and his sister went to the movies as often as possible. They particularly loved going on Sundays, when the movie theater holds Metro Cub Club viewings, especially for children. There, Saleem falls in love with an American girl, Evelyn Lillith Burns, who arrives at Methwold's Estate on New Year's Day, 1957. Evelyn, however, loves Saleem's best friend, Sonny Ibrahim, who loves the Brass Monkey. Saleem describes Evie's braces and scarecrow-straw hair. A tough girl, she impresses and conquers the children of Methwold's Estate on her first day by riding her bicycle while doing a headstand. Saleem asks Sonny to speak to Evie on his behalf, and, to impress Evie, Saleem tries to learn how to ride a bike. On his first attempt, he crashes head-first into Sonny, his bulging temples meeting perfectly with Sonny's indented temples.

Saleem describes how India became organized into fourteen states and six territories, based upon common language. Bombay, however, remained a multilingual state. As a result, in February 1957, a massive parade of demonstrators marched through the city, seeking a partition of the state along linguistic lines. The children of the estate watch the parade while Saleem tries to impress Evie with his new bike-riding skills. She ignores him, so he delves deep into her thoughts until he comes upon an image of her, standing in a doorway, holding a knife that drips blood.

Saleem delves so deep into Evie's thoughts that she can feel him there, and she pushes him into the parade to get rid of him. Confronted by an angry, mocking crowd, Saleem recites a rhyme in Gujarati to placate the crowd. They move on, singing his offensive rhyme, until they run into a parade of pro-Gujarati marchers. Throats are slit, and, in the end, the state of Bombay is partitioned.

### **My Tenth Birthday**

Padma has returned to Saleem. In an attempt to cure his impotence, she put herbs in his food that left him delirious and ill for a week. Still consumed by a fever, he returns to his narrative once again. He says that during the first hour of August 15, 1947, 1,001 children were born in the newly independent India, each with a special, miraculous power. He speculates that perhaps history, arriving at a new frontier, wanted to endow the future with something genuinely different from the past. Of the 1,001 children, 420 die by the time Saleem realizes their existence, leaving 581 Midnight's Children. Saleem describes the children's various powers, which he discovers by traveling into their minds. He notes that the closer to Midnight's the child was born, the more extraordinary the power the child had. Parvati-the-witch has the powers of a real witch, while Shiva, born with Saleem on the stroke of Midnight's, has the power of war.

Meanwhile, Ahmed continues his steady descent into alcoholism and isolation. Nonetheless, he remains a successful businessman, even after all his secretaries leave him and Mary Pereira's sister, Alice, comes in to work for him. The ghost of Joseph D'Costa continues to haunt Mary and will continue to do so until she confesses her crime. Saleem's tenth birthday arrives. He recounts all of the things that happened that day, beginning with the failure of the government's Five-Year Plan, his mother's suspicious blushing at the mention of the word communist, and, finally, his decision to create his own gang, the Midnight's Children's Conference (MCC).

#### **1.6.2.3 Check your progress:**

1. Who does Saleem fall in love with at the movies?
2. What does Saleem try to learn to do to impress his crush?
3. What does Padma try to cure with herbs?
4. According to Saleem's math, how many Midnight's Children are still alive?
5. The ghost of Joseph D'Costa will haunt Mary until she does what?

### **At the Pioneer Café**

Saleem describes a fever-induced dream in which someone he calls “the Widow” reaches out and destroys the children by ripping them all in two. Someone brings Saleem’s son to the pickle factory, although the boy will not say whom. Saleem says that he is telling this story for his son and that memory has its own special truth. He compares himself and his story to figures and stories from various world religions.

Saleem returns to the year he turned ten. Purshottam, the sadhu, has died from a fit of suicidal hiccups. Saleem restricts his communication with the other Midnight's Children to a single hour a day, between the times of Midnight's and 1 A.M. One day, as his mother goes on a shopping trip, he hides himself in the car and uses his telepathy to follow, through his mother’s mind, the route they are taking. He watches as his mother enters a dirty restaurant called the Pioneer Café. In the morning, film studios pick up extras at the Pioneer Café, but in the afternoon it becomes the hangout of the Communist Party. Saleem watches as his mother sits across from Nadir Khan, now named Qasim Khan, and the two of them exchange meaningful looks and gestures.

Saleem describes how he brought the Midnight's Children together, breaking through the barriers of language and eventually transmitting an image of himself into their brains. They each have a horrible sense of self-image. He introduces himself to Shiva, who recognizes him as the rich kid from the estate his father used to work on. Shiva suggests that the two of them should be the leaders of the gang. Shiva scorns and mocks Saleem’s attempts to create a meaningful purpose for the conference. Shiva, Saleem notes, is the god of destruction and the Hindu pantheon’s most potent deity. He tells how Shiva’s father tried to mutilate him in order to make him a better beggar and how, at the last moment, Shiva saved himself by gripping his father with his powerful knees.

Saleem describes the events of the 1957 election. The Communist Party makes a powerful showing, although the Communist candidate Qasim Khan lost his race, due, in part, to Shiva and his intimidating gang of thugs. Suddenly, however, Saleem realizes that he’s gotten the dates wrong and that the election of 1957 occurred before his tenth birthday.

## Alpha and Omega

Saleem says he will describe the fall of Evie Burns, but, before doing so, he offers a list of alternative titles for the chapter, as well as a description of the events of that winter. Bombay is on the brink of partition. A severe drought occurs, and vandals sabotage the city's water reserves. Several whores are found murdered, bearing strange bruises that look as if made by a pair of giant, powerful knees. As a result of the water shortage, stray cats in search of water overrun Methwold's Estate. Evie promises, in exchange for payment, to rid the estate of the cats. Armed with her Daisy air-gun, Evie ends the plague of cats by shooting them. The Brass Monkey, who was rumored to have been able to speak to animals as a child, is outraged. She calls Evie outside, then pounces on her. The two have a terrible fight, and, a few weeks later, Evie's father sends her away for good. Months later, Evie writes Saleem a letter confessing to have once stabbed an old woman who complained about her assault on the cats. Saleem suggests that perhaps his sister acted out love for him.

Saleem says that he never liked Shiva but nonetheless could not keep him out of the Midnight's Children's Conference. Saleem's mental powers grow stronger, and he is eventually able to turn his mind into an open forum in which all the children can speak to each other. Saleem notes that the conference ignored the warnings of Soumitra, the time-traveler among them, who insisted, "all this is pointless—they'll finish us before we start!"

At school, Saleem's geography teacher rips out his hair. Shortly afterward, Saleem loses part of his finger during a school dance while attempting to impress a girl. Saleem is rushed to the hospital, where his parents are asked to donate blood. His parents' blood types are A and O, but he is neither—thereby proving that they could not be Saleem's biological parents. Ahmed assumes that his wife had an affair. Saleem, looking back on his ten-year-old self, endows him with the gift of hindsight and allows him to ruminate on the homogenous nature of the body and the profound consequences of his mutilated finger. He closes with the image of a ten-year old boy with a bandaged hand thinking about blood and the last look he saw on his father's face.

### 1.6.2.4 Check your progress:

1. What does Purshottam die from?
2. Between what hours do the midnight's children communicate?

3. What is Shiva the Hindu God of?
4. Who ends the plague of cats at Methwold's estate?
5. Which of the Midnight's Children has the ability to time travel?

### **The Kolynos Kid**

Saleem asserts that though he appears to be a perennial victim, the kind of person "to whom things have been done," he persists in seeing himself as the protagonist of his story. He contemplates how an individual's life might be connected to the history of a nation and says that he is linked to India "literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively," and every combination after that: "actively-literal, passively-metaphorical, actively-metaphorically, and passively-literally."

Saleem returns to his story, to the day he left the hospital after losing a portion of his finger. Mary Pereira and his uncle Hanif pick him up from the hospital instead of his parents. They assuage his fears with promises of sweets and food as they drive to Hanif's home on Marine Drive. On the way, they pass a billboard for Kolynos toothpaste, which depicts the brand mascot, the Kolynos Kid, brushing his teeth. Grateful to his uncle and his uncle's wife Pia, he vows to be an exceptional son to the childless couple.

Mary stays with Saleem, feeding him enormous quantities of food, which fuel a rapid growth spurt in him. She tells him fantastic stories in which India's ancient past returns to life. Now that he's growing up, Saleem can't help but notice his aunt Pia's beauty, which persists even though her film career has begun to fade. She blames her career failure on Hanif, who has refused to write anything besides strictly realist film scripts, which, in the current film industry, will never get made. Hanif and Pia only manage to make ends meet because Homi Catrack continues to pay Hanif a studio salary. During one of his aunt and uncle's popular card parties, Homi Catrack hands Saleem a note. He tells him to give it to his aunt without telling anyone, or he'll have Saleem's tongue cut out. Later that evening, Saleem has a nightmare and goes to his aunt and uncle's bed. Curled up next to his aunt, he hands her the note and feels her body stiffen. The next day, she comes home and launches into a tirade against her husband. She storms off to her bedroom, and Saleem follows. Pia throws herself onto the bed, and, while attempting to comfort her, Saleem is overwhelmed by his aunt's beauty and fondles her. Pia smacks him and calls him a pervert. Mary appears in the

doorway, embarrassed, and tells Saleem that his parents have just sent him his first pair of long trousers.

Amina comes to the apartment on Marine Drive to bring Saleem home. On the drive back to their house, she tells Saleem to be good to his father, as Ahmed is unhappy these days. Saleem recalls his mother's indiscretion and is filled with a desire for revenge. In the meantime, the children's conference has been set aside.

### **Commander Sabarmati's Baton**

After returning to Methwold's Estate, Mary Pereira discovers that Joseph D'Costa's ghost has fallen into decay. The ghost tells Mary that until she confesses to having switched the babies, he will be held responsible for her crime.

Saleem realizes that his father no longer wants anything to do with him and that his sister, the Brass Monkey, has become the new household favorite—a fact that surprises her as much as it surprises him. In an attempt to lose her favored position, she tries to become a devout Christian. Saleem notes that this is the first instance of the Brass Monkey's fanatical tendencies, which come to dominate her life in later years.

The Midnight's Children Conference begins to fall apart. Many of the children are already beginning to go their separate ways, as they become increasingly affected by the religious, cultural, and class-based prejudices of their parents. Saleem and Shiva openly debate the merits of the conference. Saleem pleads for mutual tolerance and a sense of shared purpose, while Shiva mocks him as a naïve “little rich boy,” full of idealistic notions.

Saleem begins to visit the old, crazy Dr. Schaapsteker. From him, Saleem learns about snakes and how to watch for his enemies. With his new knowledge, Saleem plots his first attack against Homi Catrack and Lila Sabarmati to punish them for their illicit affair. He clips out letters from newspaper headlines that, once assembled, spell out “Commander Sabarmati Why Does Your Wife Go to Colaba Causeway on Sunday Morning?” He hides the note in the commander's clothes.

Commander Sabarmati hires a detective to follow his wife. One Sunday, after receiving the investigator's report, the commander checks out a revolver, finds Lila and Homi Catrack, and shoots them both. He manages to kill Homi Catrack and severely injure his wife. Afterward, he approaches a traffic cop and tries to turn

himself in. The officer flees when he sees the gun, so Commander Sabarmati is left to direct the traffic until a squad of police officers arrives to arrest him. Ismail Ibrahim, the lawyer who once defended Ahmed, agrees to defend Commander Sabarmati, as well. The Commander becomes a national hero, and the first jury to hear his case acquits him. The judge, however, overturns the verdict. The special treatment has turned the public against him, and the president refuses to pardon him.

Amina never again goes to the Pioneer Café to see Qasim Khan. The residents of Methwold's Estate begin selling their houses to Dr. Narlikar's female relatives, who want to raze all the houses and build an enormous mansion for themselves. Ahmed, still angry over the tetrapods, refuses to sell. After everyone else has moved off of Methwold's Estate, Saleem sits in the yard playing with a small globe. The Brass Monkey comes outside and crushes the globe with her feet. Saleem speculates that perhaps she did so because she missed Sonny Ibrahim, her long-time admirer.

#### **1.6.2.5 Check your progress:**

1. Who picks up Saleem from the hospital after he loses part of his finger?
2. What is the Kolynos Kid a mascot for?
3. At one of Hanif and Pia's parties, who gives Saleem a note to give to Pia?
4. Who exposes Lila and Homi's affair to Commander Sabarmati?
5. In Methwold's yard, what does the Brass Monkey crush with her feet?

#### **Revelations**

Saleem tells us that Lord Khusro, today the wealthiest and most famous guru in India, was once his childhood friend, Cyrus-the-great. After Cyrus's father dies from choking on an orange seed, Cyrus's fanatical mother begins claiming her son is a holy child and invents a history for him based, in part, on a Superman comic book that Saleem had once given to Cyrus.

As the Narlikar women begin to demolish the houses of the estate, Pia calls to tell the family that Hanif has committed suicide. The entire family gathers at the house for a forty-day mourning period. Infuriated by the dust from the demolition, as well as Pia's refusal to mourn, Reverend Mother vows not to eat until her daughter-in-law shows her dead son some respect. After twenty days, Saleem breaks the stalemate by apologizing to his aunt for his previous indiscretion. Pia tells Saleem

that she refuses to mourn because Hanif always tried to avoid melodrama in his films, and she wants to respect that. Once she finishes explaining this, however, Pia breaks into a torrent of grief that amazes everyone. Pia begs Reverend Mother for forgiveness and places herself in her mother-in-law's control. Reverend Mother declares that Pia will move to Pakistan with her, where they will realize Reverend Mother's long-held dream of purchasing a petrol pump.

On the twenty-second day of the mourning period, Aadam Aziz sees God. Aadam tells his family that he asked God why his son died, to which God replied: "God has his reasons, old man; life's like that, right?" Mary believes that Aadam actually saw Joseph D'Costa's ghost, but she keeps this to herself, and the vision of an indifferent God haunts Aadam for the rest of his life. In his old age, he takes to shouting and cursing at mosques and holy men. Finally, on Christmas Day, he takes a train to Kashmir. Two days later, at a mosque in Kashmir, a man fitting Aadam's description steals a lock of hair that once belonged to the Prophet Muhammad. Later, the government replaces the stolen lock with a replica, claiming to have recovered the precious artifact.

On the thirty-eighth day of mourning, Mary sees the ghost of Joseph D'Costa for herself. She calls the entire family together and confesses that eleven years ago she switched Shiva's nametag with Saleem's. Ahmed recognizes the supernatural figure, however, and realizes that it isn't the ghost of Joseph D'Costa, after all. The "ghost" is Ahmed's old servant, Musa, now afflicted with leprosy and returning to seek forgiveness. Mary returns to her mother's house in Goa, though her sister, Alice, stays on to assist Ahmed.

### **Movements Performed by Pepperpots**

Afraid that Shiva will discover the truth about their parentage, Saleem bans him from the children's conference. Meanwhile, Ahmed, distraught over what has happened, drunkenly berates his wife. Reverend Mother advises Amina to take her two children away from Ahmed, so Amina, Saleem, and the Brass Monkey move to Pakistan to live with Emerald and General Zulfikar. At the general's opulent house, Emerald and the general treat Saleem and his family worse than the general's mine-sniffing dog, Bonzo. Once in Pakistan, Saleem finds himself unable to communicate with the other children.

One evening, General Zulfikar hosts an important dinner, attended by many high-ranking military officials. During the dinner, the general allows his son, Zafar, and Saleem to join the men at the table. The commander-in-chief of the army, General Ayub, declares that the government has failed and announces his plans to take over Pakistan. When Ayub decrees a state of martial law, Zafar—who has a tendency to wet his pants—gets frightened and has an accident. General Zulfikar chases his son out of the room, then asks Saleem to come help him. Saleem helps the officers map out their strategy, using pepperpots and other condiment jars to symbolize troop movements. On November 1, General Zulfikar takes Saleem to the President’s house, where Saleem watches as the general forces the naked president out of bed and onto a plane.

Saleem and his family stay in Pakistan for four more years, during which time he becomes a teenager and his sister grows increasingly devout, falling under the country’s religious spell. Relationships between India and Pakistan deteriorate. Along the Indian-Chinese border, skirmishes arise.

On her fourteenth birthday, the Brass Monkey sings, astonishing everyone with her beautiful voice. Everyone begins referring to her as Jamila Singer, and Saleem acknowledges that from then on he would always take second place to her.

#### **1.6.2.6 Check your progress:**

1. How did Cyrus' father die?
2. How long is the mourning period after Hanif’s death?
3. Where do Amina, Saleem, and the Brass Monkey move to?
4. How long does Saleem stay in Pakistan?
5. How old is the Brass Monkey when it is discovered that she is a talented singer?

#### **Drainage and the Desert**

On September 9, 1962—at the exact moment that India’s defense minister decides to use force, if necessary, against the Chinese army—Amina receives a telegram saying that Ahmed has suffered a “heart boot.” She announces that, after four years in Pakistan, the family is returning home to Bombay. Upon seeing her

broken husband, Amina becomes determined to help him recover. During Ahmed's recovery, the two gradually begin to fall in love with one another.

On October 9, as India prepares for war with China, Saleem reconvenes the conference. The children greet one another excitedly as if they are at a family reunion. Six days later, as India faces an unprovoked attack by China, the children begin to turn on Saleem, blaming him for Shiva's absence and chastising him for having sealed off a part of his mind. On October 20, as the Indian army is badly beaten by Chinese forces, the children launch a full-scale attack against Saleem for his secrecy and elitism. During the next month, the children leave him, one by one.

After its initial defeat by the Chinese army, India experiences a new optimism, believing the defeat of the Chinese to be near at hand. At the same time, Saleem's perpetually congested sinuses become completely blocked. As the war between India and China draws closer, Saleem's sinus problems grow worse. On November 20, news of India's defeat by the Chinese dominates the news. The papers proclaim, "Public Morale Drains Away." The next day, the advancing Chinese army halts its progress, and Saleem's parents take him to the hospital to have his sinuses cleared. After the operation, Saleem discovers that his connection to the children has disappeared along with the congestion in his sinuses.

Amina convinces Ahmed that they should move to Pakistan and join her sisters, and they sell their house on Methwold's Estate to the Narlikar women. On their last day in Bombay, Saleem takes the letter from the Prime Minister, the newspaper photo, and an old tin globe and buries them on the property. The family arrives in Karachi on February 9. Soon afterward, Jamila begins her singing career, while Saleem enjoys the pleasure of being able to smell for the first time in his life.

### **Jamila Singer**

Saleem's nose can now detect emotions, feelings, and lies, as well as smells. Saleem's sense of smell has become so acute that, upon arriving at Karachi, he can smell his aunt Alia's bitterness and hypocrisy. Living with his aunt in the shadows of a mosque at the center of Karachi, Saleem explores the city on his Lambretta scooter. Ahmed decides to build the family a new home and has the land consecrated with the brine and umbilical cord from Saleem's birth.

Still emotionally attached to Bombay, Saleem finds himself unable to feel at home in the overwhelmingly Muslim Pakistan. Ahmed buys a towel factory, names it

after his wife, and declares that someday he will produce the most famous towel in the world. Soon after, Major (Retired) Alauddin Latif comes to hear Jamila sing. Saleem and Jamila nickname him Uncle Puffs. Uncle Puffs becomes a fixture at the house and makes Jamila a famous singer. He keeps her face hidden from her audience, however, claiming that a horrible accident has disfigured her face. Jamila performs behind a curtain, which has a single hole for her lips.

Jamila becomes the most celebrated singer in Pakistan, and Saleem confesses that he was in love with her. He demonstrated his affection by bringing her fresh, leavened bread from a secret Catholic nunnery. Sullen and melancholy, Saleem spends his days riding his scooter, taking in the city's smells. His fondness for profane smells brings him to Tai Bibi, who claims to be, at 512 years old, the world's oldest whore. Saleem finds Tai Bibi irresistible, because she can take on the scent of any person. While trying out a series of smells on Saleem, she finds one that particularly affects him. Saleem realizes that she's taken on Jamila's scent and runs out of Tai Bibi's house.

General Zulfikar's son, Zafar, becomes engaged to a prince's daughter from Kif. The prince also has a son, Mutasim, who is well known for his looks and charm. At Zafar's engagement ceremony, Jamila Singer performs, and Mutasim, who has yet to see her face, immediately falls in love with her. After hearing her sing, Mutasim takes Saleem aside and, after asking Saleem to describe his sister, tells Saleem that he has a love charm for her. Saleem tells Mutasim to hand him the charm, then creeps into his sister's bedroom and gives it to her himself. He confesses his love to Jamila while pressing the charm against her palm. The charm works briefly, but Jamila is ashamed and horror stricken, even though she and Saleem share no blood relation. Saleem realizes that even though he and Jamila are not truly related, they are still brother and sister. Saleem reflects that the difference between his Indian childhood and Pakistani adolescence was the difference between an infinite variety of alternatives and an infinite number of lies.

#### **1.6.2.7 Check your progress:**

1. Who turns on Saleem during China's attack on India?
2. Which of the following items does Saleem not bury on Methwold's property?
3. What vehicle does Saleem use to explore Karachi?

4. What does the factory produce that Ahmed buys?
5. Who does Saleem realize he cannot be in love with?

### **How Saleem Achieved Purity**

Saleem recounts the events leading up to Midnight's, September 22, 1965, the moment he achieved purity. Saleem begins to have dreams about Kashmir and says that his dreams spilled over into the general population, becoming public property in 1965. In that year, India and Pakistan fought their second war, largely over the disputed region of Kashmir.

Reverend Mother and Saleem's aunt Pia now run a petrol (gas) station. As Reverend Mother grows larger and hairier with age, Pia embarks on a series of romantic liaisons. Meanwhile, Alia's bitterness begins to take effect, and she exacts her revenge through her cooking. In January, Amina becomes pregnant. Alia's cooking causes her to have terrible nightmares, and she begins to shrivel and age rapidly. Ahmed, distraught over his wife's condition and poisoned by Alia's cooking, becomes listless at work, and the factory begins to fall apart.

In April 1965, Zafar, now a lieutenant in the army, is dispatched to help guard the Rann of Kutch, a disputed territory on the border between India and Pakistan. While waiting for replacement troops, he and his companions think they see a ghost army descending on them. Zafar and his troops lay down their weapons, only to discover that the ghost army is actually a band of smugglers working with General Zulfikar's full permission. Zafar returns to his father's house and slits the general's throat with a curved smuggler's knife. As a result, Emerald is given permission to emigrate to England, though the war prevents her from leaving the country.

On the first day of a short-lived peace between India and Pakistan, Ahmed suffers a stroke that leaves him partially paralyzed and nearly infantile. Saleem says he's now convinced that the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 took place solely to eliminate his family. On the night of September 22, 1965, air-raid sirens ring throughout Pakistan. The first bomb that falls kills Reverend Mother and Pia; the second bomb hits the jail and releases Zafar; and the third destroys Emerald's house. Of the three bombs that land in Karachi, one kills Major (Retired) Alauddin Latif and all of his daughters.

While the bombs fall, Saleem rides his Lambretta toward his home. Two final bombs fall from the sky. One destroys Saleem's mother and father, his unborn sibling, and his aunt Alia. The other destroys the unfinished house Ahmed had been building for the family. As Saleem's house crumbles, the silver spittoon that once belonged to his grandfather hits him in the head, erasing his memory entirely and thus purifying him.

**1.6.2.8 Check your progress:**

1. On which date does Saleem achieve purity?
2. What do Reverend Mother and Pia run in 1965?
3. Who begins to rapidly age and shrivel after eating Alia's cooking?
4. What hits Saleem in the head during a city-wide bombing?
5. What does Ahmed suffer from that leaves him paralyzed?

**1.6.2.1-Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Love
2. A cucumber
3. Alcoholism
4. Gandhi is assassinated
5. Joseph D'Costa

**1.6.2.2 Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Ganesh
2. Shoes
3. One day
4. Angels
5. Linguistics

**1.6.2.3- Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Evelyn
2. Ride a bike

3. Saleem's impotence
4. 581
5. Confesses to her crime

**1.6.2.4 -Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Hiccups
2. Midnight's and 1am
3. Destruction
4. Evie
5. Soumitra

**1.6.2.5- Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Mary and Hanif
2. Toothpaste
3. Homi Catrack
4. Saleem
5. A small globe

**1.6.2.6 -Answer key to check your progress :**

1. An orange seed
2. Forty days
3. Pakistan
4. Four years
5. Fourteen

**1.6.2.7 -Answer key to check your progress:**

1. The Midnight's Children
2. A book
3. A scooter
4. Towels

5. Jamila Singer

#### **1.6.2.8-Answer key to check your progress:**

1. September 22, 1965
2. A gas station
3. Ahmed
4. A spittoon
5. A brain tumor

#### **1.6.3 Summary of Book Three:**

The Book Three consists of seven chapters. They are The Buddha, In the Sundarbans, Sam and the Tiger, The shadow of the Mosque, A wedding, Midnight's and Abracadabra.

##### **The Buddha**

Saleem survives the bombing campaign but retains no memory of his past. When Padma starts to weep for his dead family, he yells at her to weep for him instead. He describes the events following the bombing as if he were narrating a movie trailer.

Saleem describes a secret army camp in the hills. An army officer, Brigadier Iskander, yells at three young recruits to the army's Canine Unit for Tracking Intelligence Activity (CUTIA). The army has assigned these three teenage boys—Ayooba Balcoh, Farooq Rashid, and Shaheed Dar—to work with something called the man-dog, tracking down rebels. Saleem, meanwhile, sits cross-legged under a tree, holding a silver spittoon in his hand. The recruits have heard various rumors about the man-dog: that his sister is the famous Jamila Singer, that he comes from a wealthy family, and that he can't feel anything but has amazing tracking abilities. The man-dog is, of course, Saleem himself. Ayooba, Farooq, and Shaheed nickname Saleem 'buddha,' or old man, which Saleem finds appropriate because of its religious connotations. Saleem claims that Jamila put him in the army's care to punish him for loving her. After months of training together, Saleem begins to irritate the three boys, especially Ayooba. Irritation seems to be in the air since, in the eastern portion of Pakistan, Sheikh Mujib, the leader of the Bangladeshi independence movement, is agitating to form his own government. Saleem grows

fond of the gloomy, private Shaheed, however. Shaheed's name means "martyr," and Shaheed often has dreams of his own death, in which he sees a bright pomegranate floating in front of him.

The Pakistani troops assemble on March 15, 1971, and fly to Dacca along with sixty thousand other troops. At midnight on March 25, the troops march into the city and Saleem leads his team to Sheik Mujib. As they drive through the streets, they see the Pakistani troops murdering, raping, and pillaging the town. Ten million refugees flee from Bangladesh into India. Saleem says the human mind cannot comprehend this number, despite the news headlines that proclaim the "biggest migration in history." They commandeer a boat and head down the Padma River. Saleem reveals to readers that he is leading his companions on a meaningless chase, since they're following an imaginary enemy. He directs them from one place to the next, eventually driving them into the Sundarbans, an enormous jungle on the border of Bangladesh and India that is a maze of foliage and waterways.

### **In the Sundarbans**

Saleem admits that no enemy awaits them in the Sundarbans. No longer able to accept orders, he flees and takes the three boys with him. As the jungle closes in on them, the group realizes they are lost. Rain begins to fill the boat, so they pull onto dry land. Drinking the rain that falls from the leaves, the insane logic of the jungle infects them. The days pass in a haze. Ayooba sees the ghost of a man he killed, and the ghost's fluids drip onto his arm, paralyzing it. All the men begin to see the ghosts of the people they have arrested. After the nightmares, they become overwhelmed by nostalgia, and begin to see images from their past. Saleem, however, remembers nothing until a poisonous snake bites him in the heel.

After two days on the verge of death, Saleem's memory comes flooding back to him. He tells the three boys his entire life story, but in the end he cannot remember his own name. The ghosts come back. In order to silence them, the three boys fill their ears with mud, becoming deaf as a result. The four wander through the jungle and come across an ancient Hindu temple, dedicated to the multi-limbed goddess Kali. Inside the temple, four beautiful women visit them and take them into their arms night after night. Saleem realizes that they are all growing increasingly hollow and translucent. They notice four skeletons in the corner, and can see that the temple is on the verge of falling apart. They flee from the temple and head back to the boat,

where an enormous tidal wave carries them out of the Sundarbans. It's October 1971. In the present time, Saleem notes that no tidal waves were recorded that month.

When Saleem and the boys return, they discover that guerrilla soldiers led by Mukti Bahini have begun to terrorize the Pakistani Army with sniper attacks. In a deserted village, the three boys begin to panic. Saleem, however, can only think about his name and how unfair everything is. He begins to weep, and Ayooba comes over to comfort him. At that moment, a bullet zips by and kills Ayooba. Saleem, Shaheed, and Farooq steal some bikes and begin pedaling. In December, they arrive at a field outside of Dacca, littered with rotting corpses. A peasant stands nearby, selling what he has scavenged. He tells Saleem that India has joined the war, led by a man with enormous, powerful knees. A bullet whips through the air, killing Farooq. Saleem stumbles across the field and comes upon a tangled pyramid of bodies. The bodies are those of Saleem's childhood friends, Eyeslice, Hairoil, and Sonny. The latter speaks briefly to Saleem before dying. Saleem says he believes the war happened in order to reunite him with his old friends.

#### **1.6.3.1 Check your progress:**

1. What is Saleem called by the army after his head injury?
2. According to Saleem, who put him in the army?
3. Which character is not assigned to work with Saleem in the army?
4. Which character, just before their death, is able to reunite with Saleem?

#### **Sam and the Tiger**

On December 15, 1971, Tiger Niazi, the Pakistani army officer in charge of the war against Bangladesh, surrenders to his Indian counterpart and old friend, Sam Manekshaw. Saleem says that he, in turn, surrendered to an old friend, a girl with saucer eyes.

As Saleem and Shaheed return to Dacca, they once again witness the Pakistani army's atrocities. Saleem enters a deserted house that once belonged to a notary, while Shaheed stands outside watching the soldiers. Shaheed looks up just in time to see a grenade heading toward him. It explodes at his midsection, splitting him in half. Shaheed points to a nearby mosque and asks Saleem to bring him to the top of it. Once there, a trail of ants follows Shaheed's blood and begins to devour him. The mosque's loudspeaker picks up his screams, echoing them throughout the city.

As the Indian army advances into the defeated city, a troop of magicians precedes them. A snake charmer by the name of Picture Singh travels with the troops, along with Parvati-the-witch, one of the former Midnight's's children. Parvati sees Saleem and shouts out his name, restoring his lost identity to him and reuniting him with an old, lost friend. At the same time, Sam and Tiger reminisce about their old days in the British Army, and Tiger denies rumors of war crimes. Parvati offers to help Saleem escape from Pakistan by magically transporting him in her basket. Saleem disappears into the basket, and while inside he discovers a rage within him, an anger at all he has seen and had done to him, everything that he has "blindly accepted."

Saleem says that the Widow has now drained the anger out of him, but at that time, his anger was responsible for restoring his ability to feel.

### **The Shadow of the Mosque**

Twenty-six pickle-jars sit on a shelf, corresponding to the twenty-six chapters of the novel thus far. Padma suggests, hopefully, taking a Kashmiri vacation with Saleem.

By the time Saleem arrives in India and stumbles out of the basket, Indira Gandhi's New Congress Party holds a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. Saleem becomes determined to save the country. At the magician's ghetto, which lies in the shadow of a mosque, an old woman named Resham Bibi tells Saleem to leave before he destroys everything. However, Picture Singh, as the head of the magician's ghetto, declares Saleem his personal guest.

Saleem decides to leave soon after, because he remains convinced that he will play a crucial role in India's salvation and feels that his destiny will be impossible to fulfill while living in the ghetto with Parvati and Picture. He decides to go to his uncle, Mustapha Aziz, a senior Civil Servant, for assistance. Saleem admits that he also had a personal, less noble reason for leaving. In Dacca, Parvati had seen Shiva, driving through the streets in a tank and decorated as a military hero. Parvati asked Shiva for a lock of his hair, and Shiva obliged. Parvati felt hopeful that the meeting was a good sign, and that the three of them would someday be reunited. Saleem admits that a fear of seeing Shiva again also prompted him to leave.

When Saleem arrives at his uncle's house, his uncle's wife greets him harshly. Saleem learns that all of his relatives have died and enters a 400-day mourning

period for them. He also learns that once his sister discovered that he had disappeared during the war, she turned against the government and began to criticize it openly. Jamila is never seen or heard from again. Saleem, however, has a dream in which Jamila returns to the secret monastery where he used to get her leavened bread. On the 418th day of his stay, a man whom Saleem believes might be Indira Gandhi's son comes over to dinner. Saleem sees a black leather folder in his uncle's study, labeled Top Secret and titled "Project M.C.C." Saleem says he doesn't condemn his uncle, and notes that he, too, has been a traitor before. Saleem says that, although he didn't know this at the time, the Gandhi family has acquired the ability to replicate themselves, and that is why they wanted to impose birth control on everyone else.

Parvati-the-witch visits Saleem the next day. That evening, Saleem's aunt finds him in bed with Parvati and throws them out of the house. Back in the ghetto, Picture Singh and Saleem discuss the rampant corruption in the government and in the country. Parvati-the-witch shows Saleem the full extent of her fantastic magical powers, casting spells to grow his hair back, erase the birthmarks on his face, and straighten his bandy legs. However, she remains restless, because she wants more than friendship from Saleem. Yet every time Saleem tries to sleep with Parvati, he sees her face transform into a grotesque version of his sister's. After repeated efforts, Parvati gives up, developing a permanent pout on her lips. When Picture Singh suggests that Saleem marry her, Saleem lies and says that he's impotent, thereby wishing upon himself the curse that once afflicted Nadir Khan and, briefly, his father.

#### **1.6.3.2 Check your progress:**

1. Who is split in half by a grenade just before Pakistan surrendered to India?
2. What objects on a shelf correspond to the number of chapters in the novel thus far?
3. What is Picture Singh's occupation?
4. In Dacca, what does Parvati ask Shiva for?
5. Who is never seen again after speaking out against the government?

## **A Wedding**

Saleem describes how Parvati succeeded in getting him to marry her, on February 23, 1975. Having heard of Saleem's impotence, Parvati decides to take her fate into her own hands. Using a magical spell, she summons Shiva to her. Not knowing why, Shiva becomes compelled to come to the ghetto.

Saleem describes Shiva's career for us. Following the war, Shiva becomes a national hero. He grows more refined and sophisticated and develops a reputation as a great lover and seducer. Soon, women from the highest echelon of society are devising ways to have affairs with him. They tuck secret notes into their toes, drop handbags, and spill drinks. A number of illicit children are born from his affairs, although he falls out of love with any woman who bears his child. One woman, angry and bitter, approaches him during a horse race and tells him that he's become the laughingstock of all the rich women. After this revelation, Shiva grows uncomfortable in his new life and becomes unintentionally cruder than ever.

After Parvati casts her spell and brings Shiva to the ghetto, Shiva takes her back to his barracks. The two are briefly happy until, on September 12, she tells him she's pregnant with his child. Their relationship grows violent, and Shiva begins to sleep with prostitutes, siring a line of poor illegitimate children to match his earlier line of rich ones. Meanwhile, the political situation grows darker, as students and workers begin protesting government corruption. The protests lead to the development of an opposition party, the People's Front. Parvati releases Shiva from her spell and he promptly returns her to the ghetto, where she finds Saleem and Picture Singh running from tear gas, launched by the police during a political rally.

In the magician's ghetto, everyone shuns Parvati because of her pregnancy. Picture Singh suggests again that Saleem marry her, and Saleem finds himself unable to ignore his plea—fully aware of the fact that, since Shiva is Ahmed and Amina's true son, Parvati's child will be his parents' true grandchild. Parvati converts to Islam and becomes Laylah, and the magicians perform incredible feats after the wedding ceremony.

While public dissent with the government grows, so does Parvati's stomach. On June 12, at 2 p.m.—the exact moment the Prime Minister is convicted of campaign malpractice—Parvati goes into a labor that lasts thirteen days. Her labor pains correspond to political events involving the Prime Minister, until finally, at midnight

on June 25, the Prime Minister declares a State of Emergency, allowing her to arrest her opposition and censor the press. At the same moment, Parvati's child is being born, and Saleem laughs hysterically at the sight of his son's enormous, floppy ears. Saleem describes the boy as a grave, good-natured child who refuses to cry. Saleem wonders if his long-held belief in the intimate connection between the nation and the individual has leaked into the Prime Minister's mind, since her new slogan has become "India is Indira and Indira is India." Saleem gives a brief synopsis of Indira's life, including a description of her husband's death, and the prominent role her son Sanjay played in the sterilization campaign of 1975. He points out that, in 1975, Indira had been a widow for fifteen years.

### **Midnight**

Saleem says he can't go on with the story, but that he must. He struggles to find the right words, trying to tell it as a dream, but then stops and decides to tell it directly. He says that the winter of 1975–76 brought with it an endless darkness. His son, Aadam, suffers from tuberculosis, and neither he nor Parvati can cure the boy. Saleem insists that, as long as the Emergency lasts, his son will be ill. Parvati tries to make Aadam cry by using magic, but instead he holds in all of his sound. Meanwhile, the government alters the constitution, giving the Prime Minister nearly unlimited power. Saleem can smell danger in the air.

On the last night before "what-has-to-be-described," Nadir Khan visits Saleem and tells him to hide. However, it's already too late, and the next morning bulldozers announcing a "civic beautification program" invade the ghetto. Soldiers drag people into vans and a rumor spreads that the people are being sterilized. The magicians fight back and are successful until military troops arrive. Saleem loses Parvati and Picture Singh. Major Shiva comes and captures Saleem. Parvati dies violently, and by the end of the afternoon, nothing remains of the ghetto, including Saleem's spittoon.

Saleem is taken to Benares and locked in the palace of the widows, on the shores of the Ganges. Though Saleem cannot remember how he was induced to do so, he tells his interlocutors where all of the Midnight's Children can be found. The walls of Saleem's cell begin to whisper with the voices of the children. He gives them a long apology, but they are so excited and happy to hear each other again that they remain unconcerned. He becomes briefly optimistic, until on New Year's Day a

beautiful woman explains to him that the people worship the Prime Minister as a God, and that nothing can compete with her supremacy.

Saleem and the other midnight's children undergo sterilization operations, although—not wanting to leave anything to chance—the doctors perform more aggressive operations on them than on the rest of the population. The doctors remove testicles and whole wombs from the midnight's children, who, as a result, lose all their magical powers. Saleem learns that Shiva had a voluntary vasectomy, and begins to laugh, since Shiva's namesake was the god associated with procreation, and Shiva himself has already fathered a whole new generation of Midnight's's children. In late March of 1977, Saleem is released, along with the other Midnight's's children. The prime minister calls for elections and loses. Shiva is arrested, and then later killed by the same woman who had mocked him for impregnating her. Back in Delhi, Saleem walks around until he eventually finds Picture Singh, holding a small boy of twenty-one months.

#### **1.6.3.3 Check your progress:**

1. In what year do Parvati and Saleem get married?
2. Who convinces Saleem to marry Parvati?
3. What does Aadam suffer from during the winter of 1975-76?
4. How old is the boy Picture Singh is holding when Saleem finds him in Delhi?

#### **Abracadabra**

Saleem confesses that his story about Shiva's death was a blatant lie. Shiva is still alive, and Saleem says that unfinished business remains between them. Padma proposes to Saleem, and he accepts. The honeymoon will be in Kashmir. Saleem speculates that perhaps Padma, with her muscles, might be able to reverse the cracks and looming death he faces. She proposes getting married on his thirty-first birthday, but Saleem says that death is waiting for him that day.

Saleem returns to the story, and his discovery of Aadam and Picture Singh. Aadam's tuberculosis has disappeared. According to Picture Singh, he was cured by the breast milk of a woman named Durga, whom Picture Singh has fallen in love with. While walking past a mirror, Saleem sees himself for the first time in months. He notices how rapidly he has aged, as well as the expression of profound relief on

his own face. Meanwhile, his son, who still won't speak, demands constant attention. After Aadam voluntarily weans himself from Durga's breasts, Picture Singh hears of a man in Bombay who claims to be the greatest snake charmer in the world. Determined to challenge the man, Picture Singh sets off for Bombay with Saleem and Aadam.

When they arrive in Bombay, Saleem discovers that Bombay has changed completely. The three go to the Midnite-Confidential Club, a secret, underground club that caters to the cream of Bombay's society. A blind woman leads them to a room where they wait for the other charmer. A light comes on, and Picture Singh's opponent, the Maharaja of Cooch Naheen, comes out. The two duel for a long time, their snakes coiling and dancing, until the younger man begins to falter, and one of Picture Singh's snakes wraps itself around his neck. Picture Singh collapses after his victory and is carried out. In a back room, they are given food to eat. Saleem takes a bite of chutney and instantly recognizes the flavor. He finds out that the Braganze Pickle factory, located in the north of town, makes this particular chutney. Locating the factory, Saleem walks up to the gate and meets Padma for the first time. He asks to see the manager and hears his name called out. He looks up and sees Mary Pereira, the only family he has left.

Saleem recounts what had happened to Mary. She now lives at the top of the old hill, in the mansion built by the Narlikar women. Her room occupies the same space Saleem's room used to occupy. Mary owes the entire business to her sister, who convinced the Narlikar women to invest in Mary's chutney. Finally, Saleem's son, Aadam, begins to say his first word: abracadabra.

Saleem describes the pickle jars. He screws the lid on the last one, and titles it "Abracadabra." Saleem decides that he will now write the future, and he describes his death. On the day of his wedding, his body breaks and falls apart, reducing him to 600 million specks of dust.

#### **1.6.3.4 Check your progress:**

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

1. Where do Padma and Saleem decide to go for Honeymoon?
2. What cures Aadam of his tuberculosis?
3. Where does Picture Singh go to duel with the Maharaja of Cooch Naheen?

4. Where does Saleem meet Padma for the first time?
5. What is Aadam's first word?

**1.6.3.1- Answer key to check your progress**

1. The man-dog
2. Jamila
3. Arjun
4. Sonny

**1.6.3.2- Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Shaheed
2. Pickle jars
3. Snake charming
4. A lock of hair
5. Parvati

**1.6.3.3-Answer key to check your progress:**

1. 1975
2. Picture Singh
3. Tuberculosis
4. Twenty-one months

**1.6.3.4-Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Kashmir
2. Breast milk
3. Bombay
4. The Midnite-Confidential Club
5. Abracadabra

## 1.7 Plot Construction of *Midnight's Children*:

Saleem Sinai, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, opens the novel by explaining that he was born on midnight, August 15, 1947, at the exact moment India gained its independence from British rule. Now nearing his thirty-first birthday, Saleem believes that his body is beginning to crack and fall apart. Fearing that his death is imminent, he grows anxious to tell his life story. Padma, his loyal and loving companion, serves as his patient, often skeptical audience.

Saleem's story begins in Kashmir, thirty-two years before his birth, in 1915. There, Saleem's grandfather, a doctor named Aadam Aziz, begins treating Naseem, the woman who becomes Saleem's grandmother. For the first three years Aadam Aziz treats her, Naseem is always covered by a sheet with a small hole in it that is moved to expose the part of her that is sick. Aadam Aziz sees his future wife's face for the first time on the same day World War I ends, in 1918. Aadam Aziz and Naseem marry, and the couple moves to Agra, where Aadam—a doctor whose loss of religious faith has affected him deeply—sees how protests in the name of independence get violently suppressed. Aadam and Naseem have three daughters, Alia, Mumtaz, and Emerald, and two sons, Mustapha and Hanif. Aadam becomes a follower of the optimistic activist Mian Abdullah, whose anti-Partition stance eventually leads to his assassination. Following Abdullah's death, Aadam hides Abdullah's frightened assistant, Nadir Khan, despite his wife's opposition. While living in the basement, Nadir Khan falls in love with Mumtaz, and the two are secretly married. However, after two years of marriage, Aadam finds out that his daughter is still a virgin, as Nadir and Mumtaz have yet to consummate their marriage. Nadir Khan is sent running for his life when Mumtaz's sister, Emerald, tells Major Zulfikar—an officer in the Pakistani army, soon to be Emerald's husband—about his hiding place in the house. Abandoned by her husband, Mumtaz agrees to marry Ahmed Sinai, a young merchant who until then had been courting her sister, Alia.

Mumtaz changes her name to Amina and moves to Delhi with her new husband. Pregnant, she goes to a fortune-teller who delivers a cryptic prophecy about her unborn son, declaring that the boy will never be older or younger than his country and claiming that he sees two heads, knees and a nose. After a terrorist organization burns down Ahmed's factory, Ahmed and Amina move to Bombay. They buy a

house from a departing Englishman, William Methwold, who owns an estate at the top of a hill. Wee Willie Winky, a poor man who entertains the families of Methwold's Estate, says that his wife, Vanita, is also expecting a child soon. Unbeknownst to Wee Willie Winky, Vanita had an affair with William Methwold, and he is the true father of her unborn child. Amina and Vanita both go into labor, and, at exactly Midnight's, each woman delivers a son. Meanwhile, a midwife at the nursing home, Mary Pereira, is preoccupied with thoughts of her radical socialist lover, Joseph D'Costa. Wanting to make him proud, she switches the nametags of the two newborn babies, thereby giving the poor baby a life of privilege and the rich baby a life of poverty. Driven by a sense of guilt afterward, she becomes an ayah, or nanny, to Saleem.

Because it occurs at the exact moment India gains its independence, the press heralds Saleem's birth as hugely significant. Young Saleem has an enormous cucumberlike nose and blue eyes like those of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz. His mischievous sister, nicknamed the Brass Monkey, is born a few years later. Overwhelmed by the expectations laid on him by the prophecy, and ridiculed by other children for his huge nose, Saleem takes to hiding in a washing chest. While hiding one day, he sees his mother sitting down on the toilet; when Amina discovers him, she punishes Saleem to one day of silence. Unable to speak, he hears, for the first time, a babble of voices in his head. He realizes he has the power of telepathy and can enter anyone's thoughts. Eventually, Saleem begins to hear the thoughts of other children born during the first hour of independence. The 1,001 midnight's children—a number reduced to 581 by their tenth birthday—all have magical powers, which vary according to how close to midnight they were born. Saleem discovers that Shiva, the boy with whom he was switched at birth, was born with a pair of enormous, powerful knees and a gift for combat.

One day, Saleem loses a portion of his finger in an accident and is rushed to the hospital, where his parents learn that according to Saleem's blood type, he couldn't possibly be their biological son. After he leaves the hospital, Saleem is sent to live with his Uncle Hanif and Aunt Pia for a while. Shortly after Saleem returns home to his parents, Hanif commits suicide. While the family mourns Hanif's death, Mary confesses to having switched Saleem and Shiva at birth. Ahmed—now an alcoholic—grows violent with Amina, prompting her to take Saleem and the Brass Monkey to Pakistan, where she moves in with Emerald. In Pakistan, Saleem watches

as Emerald's husband, General Zulfikar, stages a coup against the Pakistani government and ushers in a period of martial law.

Four years later, after Ahmed suffers a heart failure, Amina and the children move back to Bombay. At the time of India's war with China, Saleem's perpetually congested nose undergoes a medical operation. As a result, he loses his telepathic powers but, in return, gains an incredible sense of smell, with which he can detect emotions.

Saleem's entire family moves to Pakistan after India's military loss to China. His younger sister, now known as Jamila Singer, becomes the most famous singer in Pakistan. Already on the brink of ruin, Saleem's entire family—save Jamila and himself—dies in the span of a single day during the war between India and Pakistan. During the air raids, Saleem gets hit in the head by his grandfather's silver spittoon, which erases his memory entirely.

Relieved of his memory, Saleem is reduced to an animalistic state. He finds himself conscripted into military service, as his keen sense of smell makes him an excellent tracker. Though he doesn't know exactly how he came to join the army, he suspects that Jamila sent him there as a punishment for having fallen in love with her. While in the army, Saleem helps quell the independence movement in Bangladesh. After witnessing a number of atrocities, however, he flees into the jungle with three of his fellow soldiers. In the jungle of the Sundarbans, he regains all of his memory except the knowledge of his name. After leaving the jungle, Saleem finds Parvati-the-witch, one of midnight's children, who reminds him of his name and helps him escape back to India. He lives with her in the magician's ghetto, along with a snake charmer named Picture Singh.

Disappointed that Saleem will not marry her, Parvati-the-witch has an affair with Shiva, now a famous war hero. Things between Parvati and Shiva quickly sour, and she returns to the magicians' ghetto, pregnant and still unmarried. There, the ghetto residents shun Parvati until Saleem agrees to marry her. Meanwhile, Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, begins a sterilization campaign. Shortly after the birth of Parvati's son, the government destroys the magician's ghetto. Parvati dies while Shiva captures Saleem and brings him to a forced sterilization camp. There, Saleem divulges the names of the other midnight's children. One by one, the midnight's children are rounded up and sterilized, effectively destroying the powers

that so threaten the Prime Minister. Later, however, Indira Gandhi loses the first election she holds.

The midnight's children, including Saleem, are all set free. Saleem goes in search of Parvati's son, Aadam, who has been living with Picture Singh. The three take a trip to Bombay, so Picture Singh can challenge a man who claims to be the world's greatest snake charmer. While in Bombay, Saleem eats some chutney that tastes exactly like the ones his ayah, Mary, used to make. He finds the chutney factory that Mary now owns, at which Padma stands guarding the gate. With this meeting, Saleem's story comes full circle. His historical account finally complete, Saleem decides to marry Padma, his steadfast lover and listener, on his thirty-first birthday, which falls on the thirty-first anniversary of India's independence. Saleem prophesies that he will die on that day, disintegrating into millions of specks of dust.

### **1.7.1 Check your progress:**

#### **A) Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence each.**

1. How old is Saleem Sinai when the novel opens?
2. Who is Saleem's audience for the telling of his life story?
3. Which one is not Aadam and Naseem's daughters?
4. What does Mumtaz change her name before moving to Delhi?
5. What does Saleem lose after being hit by his grandfather's spittoon?

#### **1.7.1 -Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Thirty-one
2. Padma
3. Hanif
4. Amina
5. His memory

## **1.8 Characters in *Midnight's Children*:**

### **1) Saleem Sinai:**

Saleem Sinai is the protagonist and narrator of *Midnight's Children*. He is born, along with one other child, at the exact moment of India's independence. His

identity, however, is switched at birth. As a result, he is raised by a prosperous family in Bombay, while his counterpart and future rival, Shiva, is raised in poverty. Saleem has the powers of telepathy and a preternaturally acute sense of smell, which allow him to find the other children of Midnight's and create the midnight's Children's Conference. As he approaches his thirty-first birthday, he says he is nearing death. His body is literally falling apart, and it's only a matter of time before he crumbles into dust. Driven by a desire to beat his biological clock, Saleem narrates his life story to his devoted and loving caretaker, Padma. His tale, which begins with his grandfather Aadam and is at times unreliable and contrived, represents not only his individual life story but also the entire history of postcolonial India. All the major events in his life correspond to important political events in Indian history, leading him to compare his narrative to religious texts. Given his fantastic birth and extraordinary powers, the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, seeks to destroy him along with the other Midnight's children.

## **2) Padma:**

Padma is Saleem's loving companion and caretaker, and she becomes his fiancée at the end of the novel. She is the audience for Saleem's narrative. With strong, hairy forearms, a name associated with dung, and a cynical and often impatient ear, Padma represents the antithesis to Saleem's magical, exuberant, freewheeling narration. She hurries the narrative along, imploring Saleem to get on with the plot rather than veering off into tangents, and often she expresses doubts as to the veracity of Saleem's account. As a rhetorical device, Padma allows Rushdie the chance to acknowledge explicitly any doubts or frustrations the reader may feel in response to the novel. She is the practical voice of criticism. Because she is there to counteract its most extreme tendencies, she supports the novel's more willfully excessive indulgences. Saleem's frequent interruptions, digressions, and self-obsession are all, to some degree, made possible by Padma's expressions of doubt and frustration: the two sides work together to create a holistic reading experience. By explicitly taking into account the difficulties of the narrative, Rushdie is able to move beyond them.

## **3) Shiva:**

Born at the stroke of Midnight and named after the Hindu God of destruction, Shiva is Saleem's rival and counterpart. Switched at birth with Saleem, Shiva is

robbed of his affluent birthright and raised in abject poverty. Blessed with a pair of enormous and powerful knees, Shiva is a gifted warrior and, therefore, a foil for the more mild-mannered Saleem. Shiva represents the alternate side of India: poor, Hindu, and as aggressive as Saleem is passive. As a young child, he is the leader of a street gang and possibly a murderer. He is driven by a determinedly individualist perspective and grows up unable to form any human attachments. Although he is a violent character, he is, nonetheless, a tragic figure, damaged and shaped by the forces of history and class. During the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, Shiva lives up to his name and becomes a war hero, eventually promoted to the rank of major. Along with his military reputation, Shiva also becomes a noted lover among the women of Indian high society, siring a number of illegitimate children. In the end, Shiva hunts Saleem down and turns him over to one of the camps opened during Indira Gandhi's state of Emergency, where Saleem, along with the other *Midnight's Children*, is administered an operation that renders him sterile. In this way, Shiva manages to effectively destroy the children of *Midnight's*.

#### **4) The Widow:**

Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India from 1966–1977, then again from 1980–1984, a term that ended with her assassination. Indira was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, and the widow of Feroze Gandhi, an Indian journalist and politician. Though Mahatma Gandhi was a family friend and political ally, the two are not related.

In her first term, various political and economic reforms made Indira Gandhi highly popular, as did an Indian victory in the 1971 conflict with Pakistan over the creation of an independent Bangladeshi state. However, in 1971, Gandhi was also found guilty of election fraud. Rather than face charges, Gandhi declared a State of Emergency, tightening her hold over the government and ushering in a period of drastically reduced civil liberties, as well as a severe crackdown on political opposition. The emergency lasted nineteen months, after which Gandhi—misjudging the extent of the population's resentment—held an open election and lost. She stepped down but was reelected to office in 1980. Four years later, after a disastrous series of events involving Sikh activists, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. Her son, Rajiv Gandhi, succeeded her and was also assassinated while in office, in 1991. The Gandhi family, however, continues to be a central force in Indian politics.

Long before Indira Gandhi enters Saleem's story in a direct fashion, vague references to "the Widow" hint at her eventual role in the destruction of the midnight's children. Her actual presence in the story is brief, but it is nonetheless of great significance. Throughout the novel, Saleem's personal life constantly reflects India's political turmoil. Finally, with the arrival of Indira Gandhi and the State of Emergency, Rushdie fuses the two narratives with a single crisis. The reforms of the emergency, which included a widespread campaign of forced sterilization, were widely seen as massive abuses of government power and human rights. The nation of India is metaphorically thrown into perpetual darkness just as Saleem's wife, Parvati-the-witch, is killed and the magicians' ghetto destroyed. By making Indira Gandhi's campaign responsible for the destruction of the fictional Midnight's Children, Rushdie holds her accountable for destroying the promise and hope of a new future for India.

#### **5) The Brass Monkey (Jamila Singer):**

Saleem's younger sister, initially known as the Brass Monkey, is born into the world with little fanfare. She eventually grows up to become the most famous singer in Pakistan, adored throughout the country. As a child, Saleem notes that the Brass Monkey learned at an early age that if she wanted attention, she would have to make a lot of noise, which is precisely what she does. She becomes a mischievous child who garners attention by destroying things and remains unable to accept love throughout her adult life. The playful and impish nature of her youth is lost almost immediately upon her arrival in Pakistan. There, in a religiously devout country, she succumbs to the laws of devotion and patriotism, just as her brother becomes more invested in the profane elements of life. She goes through extraordinary lengths to keep herself veiled, and her voice is described as being "pure," reflecting the ideals of a country that values wholesomeness in its women. Despite her devotion, Jamila Singer retains elements of her former self. She rebels against her dietary constraints by secretly eating leavened bread, baked by Catholic nuns, and she openly criticizes the Pakistani army when they abuse her brother.

#### **1.8.1 Check your progress:**

1. With whom Saleem was switched at the time of birth?
2. According to Saleem's maths, how many midnight's children are still alive?
3. What was Indira Gandhi's political position in India?

4. Who is responsible for the destruction of the midnight's children?
5. What does Saleem's younger sister, the Brass Monkey, become famous as?

**1.8.1-Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Shiva
2. 581
3. Prime Minister
4. The Widow
5. A singer

**1.9 Themes in *Midnight's Children***

**A) The Single and The Many:**

Born at the dawn of Indian independence and destined, upon his death, to break into as many pieces as there are citizens of India, Saleem Sinai manages to represent the entirety of India within his individual self. The notion that a single person could possibly embody a teeming, diverse, multitudinous nation like India encapsulates one of the novel's fundamental concerns: the tension between the single and the many. The dynamic relationship between Saleem's individual life and the collective life of the nation suggests that public and private will always influence one another, but it remains unclear whether they can be completely equated with one another. Throughout the novel, Saleem struggles to contain all of India within himself—to cram his personal story with the themes and stories of his country—only to disintegrate and collapse at the end of his attempt.

Politically speaking, the tension between the single and the many also marks the nation of India itself. One of the fastest growing nations in the world, India has always been an incredibly diverse. Its constitution recognizes twenty-two official languages, and the population practices religions as varied as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Buddhism, among many others. Indian culture is similarly hybrid, having been influenced by countless other cultures over the millennia of its development. At the same time, however, maintaining India's sprawling diversity in a peaceful fashion has often proved difficult: India's division into the Islamic nation of Pakistan and the secular, but mostly Hindu nation of India—a process known as Partition—remains the most striking example of the desire to contain and reduce

India's plurality. In *Midnight's Children*, the child Saleem watches as protestors attempt to do divide the city of Bombay along linguistic lines, another attempt to categorize and cordon off multiplicity.

Saleem, a character who contains a multitude of experiences and sensitivities, stands in stark contrast to the protestors who demand their own language-based region, the strict monotheism of Pakistan, and Indira Gandhi's repression of contradictory dissension. His powers of telepathy allow him to transcend the barriers of language, while he himself—with his English blood, poor background, wealthy upbringing, and eclectic religious influences—reflects India's diversity and range. The *Midnight's Children's* Conference that he convenes is, in its initial phase, a model for pluralism and a testimony to the potential power inherent within coexisting diversity, which is a natural and definitive element of Indian culture. In *Midnight's Children*, the desire for singularity or purity—whether of religion or culture—breeds not only intolerance but also violence and repression.

#### **B) The Unreliability of Memory and Narrative:**

Factual errors and dubious claims are essential aspects of Saleem's fantastic narrative. He willfully acknowledges that he misplaced Gandhi's death, an obviously seminal moment in India's history, as well as willfully misremembers the date of an election. He frets over the accuracy of his story and worries about future errors he might make. Yet, at the same time, after acknowledging his error, Saleem decides to maintain his version of events, since that's how they appeared to occur to him and now there can be no going back. Despite its potential historical inaccuracies, Saleem sees his story as being of equal importance as the world's most important religious texts. This is not only his story but also the story of India. The errors in his story, in addition to casting a shadow of doubt over some of what he claims, point to one of the novel's essential claims: that truth is not just a matter of verifiable facts. Genuine historical truth depends on perspective—and a willingness to believe. Saleem notes that memory creates its own truth, and so do narratives. Religious texts and history books alike stake their claim in truth not only because they are supported by facts but also because they have been codified and accepted upon, whether by time or faith. The version of history Saleem offers comes filtered through his perspective, just as every other version of history comes filtered through some alternate perspective. For Saleem, his version is as true as anything else that could be written, not just because this is the way he has arranged it, but because this is the version he believes.

### **C) Destruction versus Creation:**

The battle between Saleem and Shiva reflects the ancient, mythological battle between the creative and destructive forces in the world. The enmity and tension between the two begin at the moment of their simultaneous births. The reference to Shiva, the Hindu God of both destruction and procreation, reflects not only the tension between destruction and creation but also the inextricably bound nature of these two forces. Saleem, as the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, is responsible for creating the world we, as readers, are engaged in. He represents Brahma, the God of creation. What Saleem creates, however, is not life, but a story. By delivering Saleem into the hands of the Widow, Shiva is responsible for the destruction of the *Midnight's Children*, and yet, by fathering Aadam and hundreds of other children, he ensures the continuation of their legacy.

#### **1.9.1 Symbols and Motifs in *Midnight's Children***

##### **The Silver Spittoon**

The silver spittoon given to Amina as part of her dowry by the Rani of Cooch Naheen is responsible for Saleem's loss of memory. Even when he has amnesia, however, Saleem continues to cherish the spittoon as if he still understands its historical value. Following the destruction of his family, the silver spittoon is the only tangible remnant of Saleem's former life, and yet it too is eventually destroyed when Saleem's house in the ghetto is torn down. Spittoons, once used as part of a cherished game for both old and young, gradually fell out of use: the old men no longer spit their betel juice into the street as they tell stories, nor do the children dart in between the streams as they listen. The spittoon is the symbol of a vanishing era, which, in retrospect, seemed simpler and easier. And so, although Saleem may not be able to recall the specific association between the spittoon and his family, the spittoon maintains its symbolic quality as both a container of memory and source of amnesia.

##### **The Perforated Sheet**

The perforated sheet through which Aadam Aziz falls in love with his future wife performs several different symbolic functions throughout the novel. Unable to see his future wife as a whole, Aadam falls in love with her in pieces. As a result, their love never has a cohesive unity that holds them together. Their love is

fragmented, just as their daughter Amina attempts to fall in love with her husband are also fragmented. Haunted by the memory of her previous husband, Amina embarks on a campaign to fall in love with her new husband in sections, just as her father once fell in love with her mother. Despite her best attempts, Amina and Ahmed's love also lacks the completion and unity necessary for genuine love to thrive. The hole of the perforated sheet represents a portal for vision but also a void that goes unfilled. The perforated sheet makes one final appearance with Jamila Singer: in an attempt to preserve her purity, she shrouds herself completely, except for a single hole for her lips. The perforated sheet, in addition to preserving her purity, also reduces to her to nothing more than a voice. The sheet becomes a veil that separates her from the rest of the world and reflects her inability to accept affection.

### **Knees and Nose**

The seer, Ramram, predicts the birth of “knees and nose,” which represent Shiva and Saleem, respectively. In addition to symbolizing each boy's special power, knees and nose also play another role. When Aadam Aziz first kneels down to pray, his knees touch the floor and his nose hits the ground. Knees and nose, in this instance, represent an act of prayer, as well as the submission and humility necessary faith. After hitting his nose on the ground, however, Aadam rejects that submission, and a hole opens up inside of him. Knees and nose also become significant with Farooq's death via a sniper bullet. Shot, Farooq first drops to his knees, then hits his nose on the ground. Just as Aadam bowed before God, Farooq bows before death. Shiva is suspected of killing a string of prostitutes with his powerful knees, while Saleem uses his nose to discover the most decrepit prostitute in the city. Knees and nose—just like Shiva and Saleem, destruction and creation, faith and humility—are inextricably related.

### **Motifs**

#### **Snakes**

Beginning with the snake venom that saves Saleem's young life, snakes play an ambiguous and complicated role in the novel. Saleem often refers to his favorite childhood board game, Snakes and Ladders. In the game's simple formula of good and evil, Saleem learns an important lesson: for every up, there is a down, and for every down, there is an up. Missing from the board game, however, is the ambiguity between good and evil that he later detects as a natural part of life. Generally

considered to represent evil, snakes are, in fact, much more complicated than that simple generalization might imply. While venom has the power to kill, it also has the ability to bring life, and it does so not once but twice in the novel. Snake venom represents the power of Shiva, who is both destroyer and procreator in the Hindu pantheon. In *Midnight's Children*, snakes are also associated with Picture Singh, Saleem's closest friend, whose career is both dependent upon and destroyed by snakes.

### **Leaking**

Throughout the novel, the past finds ways to mysteriously insinuate itself into the present, just as Saleem's personal compulsions and concerns find themselves inexplicably replicated in national, political events. Perhaps inspired by his own constantly running nose, Saleem uses the term leaking to describe this phenomenon. The lines separating past, present, and future—as well as the lines separating the personal and the political, the individual and the state—are incredibly porous. When Saleem begins having dreams about Kashmir, for example, the stirring images of his dreams seem to seep into the national consciousness, and India and Pakistan begin to battle over possession of the beautiful region. In *Midnight's Children*, the interplay between personal and public, past and present, remains fluid and dynamic, like leaking liquid.

### **Fragmentation**

Saleem claims that, much like his narrative, he is physically falling apart. His body is riddled with cracks, and, as a result, the past is spilling out of him. His story, spread out over sixty-three years, is a fragmented narrative, oscillating back and forth between past and present and frequently broken up further by Saleem's interjections. In addition to the narrative and physical fragmentation, India itself is fragmented. Torn apart by Partition, it is divided into two separate countries, with the east and west sections of Pakistan on either side of India. This division is taken even further when East and West Pakistan are reclassified as two separate countries, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Within India, language marchers agitate for further partitions based upon linguistic lines. New nationalities are created, and with them come new forms of cultural identity that reflect the constant divisions.

### **1.9.1 Check your progress:**

#### **A) Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence each.**

1. Which of Saleem's senses is unusually heightened?
2. Which character is Saleem's ayah and surrogate mother?
3. Who is Saleem's best friend?
4. Which character wears a wig to seduce women?
5. Who does Parvati-the-witch have an affair with?

#### **1.9.1-Answer key to check your progress:**

1. Smell
2. Mary Pereira
3. Sonny Ibrahim
4. William Methwold
5. Shiva

#### **1.9.2-Answer the following questions:**

1. What role does religious imagery play in the novel?
2. What is the significance of Saleem's adoption of Parvati-the-witch's son?
3. How does Rushdie's narrative style reflect the novel's intentions?
4. Bring out the Symbolic significance of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.
5. Discuss the Political aspects of the novel *Midnight's Children*.

#### **1.9.3 Write Short notes on the following:**

1. Character sketch of Padma
2. Mary Pereira
3. Adam Aziz
4. Salman Rushdie as a post colonial novelist
5. Amina Sinai

### 1.10 References for further study:

1. Singh P. K. *Indian fiction in English*. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2001.
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## Unit-2

### Trends in Modern Indian English Drama Girish Karnad - *Tughlaq*

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## 2.0 Objectives:

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- understand Girish Karnad as a playwright and his contribution to the post-independent Indian English Drama.
- familiar with the plot, characters, themes and critical aspects of the play.
- understand and appreciate *Tughlaq* as a History Play.

## 2.1 Introduction

One of India's foremost modern playwrights, Girish Karnad has written ten plays of which he has translated five into English. Although rooted in Indian mythology and history, his plays at the same time convey a strong and unmistakable western philosophical sensibility. *Tughlaq*, Karnad's second play, written in 1964, is perhaps his best known. The play was performed at Bhulabai Auditorium in Aug 1970. It was staged by the Theatre Group led by Alyque Padamsee. It was also directed by E. Alkazi and presented in London by National School of Drama for the Festival of India in 1982. The play shows the transformation of the medieval ruler Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq. From a sensitive and intelligent ruler who sets out to do the best for his people, Tughlaq, misunderstood and maligned, suffers an increasing sense of alienation and is forced to abandon his earlier idealism and ends up a tyrant.

## 2.2 Trends in Modern Indian English Drama:

India has the longest and the richest tradition in Drama. Drama was performed from the Vedic Period. Indian Drama is influenced by ancient Sanskrit Drama, Folk Tradition in India and western Drama. Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra* in Sanskrit is a guiding work on Indian Drama. Sanskrit Drama flourished till 15<sup>th</sup> century. Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa, Vishakhadatta and Bhavabhuti are eminent dramatists of the ancient period. Later on the theatrical activity shifted from Sanskrit to different regional languages. With the arrival of the British, Indian Drama had gone through changes on many levels like form, direction, theme, etc.

Krishna Mohan Banerjee and Michael Madhusudan Dutt's plays started new era in Indian English Drama. Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya are exponents of poetic plays. Badal Sarkar, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad have contributed to the modernization of Indian theatre. These

playwrights have made innovations in terms of themes and technical virtuosity. These writers used folktales, legends, history and myths in dramas. Mohan Rakesh presents the total absence of communication between one man and another in the contemporary life. Badal Sarkar depicts the existential attitude of modern man in the present times. Tendulkar's plays like *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence the Court is in Session* focus on love, sex, marriage and moral values in the contemporary society. His plays are remarkable for the use of irony and satire. Girish Karnad has experimented with the fusion of the traditional and the modern dramatic forms and content. Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahesh Dattani are the recent brilliant playwrights. Manjula Padmanabhan is the first Indian to earn international fame with her *Harvest*, a futuristic play that deals with the exploitation of the human body in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Dattani is taken to be the true successor of Girish Karnad and is responsible for the revolutionary progression of English Drama. Alienation, social issues, contemporary presentation of folktales myths history and legends and the present day problems of society are certain themes depicted by the post modern Indian English Dramatists.

### **Trends in Modern Indian English Drama**

Theatre is a living art form and therefore, changes continuously. The origin and development of Drama in India may be broadly divided into three phases. The first phase is characterized by the classical Sanskrit drama and Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra*. The second phase starts with the decline of classical Sanskrit theatre and emergence of Drama in the all Indian regional languages. The third phase starts with the encounter of Indian theatre with the West.

#### **The First phase**

The roots of the theatre in our country are certainly very old and deep. We have an ancient and traditional history in the theatrical activity. The theatrical activity has been an integral part of Indian life since primitive and mythic ages. The Theatrical activity began with primitive, magical, religious or social rites, ritualistic dances, festivals, etc. In the *yadnyas* ritualistic activities were performed in theatrical manner. In Vedic Literature, there are references to dance, song, musical instruments and dialogues. In the well-known work of Panini, the *Ashtadhyayee*, there are mentions of dramatic works and performers. The *Arthshashastra* of Kautilya has references to performances, dances, music and artists. The theatrical activity mainly

consisted of musical or dance based enactments simple or dramatic singing with some acting, miming of heroic sagas, ballads, legends, popular stories or just ordinary narratives. The Patanjali *Mahabhashya*, however, mentions plays, called *Kamasavadha* and *Balibandhan*. Some fragments of dramatic work of the Buddhist poet-playwright Ashvaghosha of the third century B.C., called *Sariputta Prakarana* have also been found. The well-known treatise on dramaturgy, the *Natyashastra* by Bharat Muni, speaks of plays called *Devasurasangram*, *Amritamanthana* and *Tripradaha* in the myth related to the origin of drama. The theatrical activity that started with music, dance, acting, later acquired more regular forms and the period witnessed the flowering of the Indian dramatic tradition.

Bharat Muni's *Natyashastra* acquired the status of the fifth Veda. There is no element of drama and theatre that has not been discussed here extensively, in great depth, and with insight. In fact, the *Natyashastra* is the primary and most important source of fundamental principles and ideas, not only about drama and theatre but also about other performing arts, like music, dance and poetry.

The Sanskrit dramatic works depict different mental states, emotions and ideas, desires and aspirations, strengths and weaknesses, basic moral and social questions as well as individual predicaments. They also present a many-layered, fascinating picture of the social, political, economic and culture life of those times. The Sanskrit plays like *Swapnavasadatta*, *Abhidnyanshakuntala*, *Vikramorvasiya*, *Mrichchakatika*, *Mudrarakshasa*, *Uttarramcharita*, etc are notable for their keen insight, delicate aesthetic sense, structural skill and variety, dramatic and theatrical quality of language and excellence of their poetry.

Bhasa, the earliest playwright, has written plays based on the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and on the stories from popular tales. In his plays the mythological episodes have a wider moral and human perspective. His plays - *Swapnavasadatta* and *Pratijna Yaugandharayana* present a love story in context of society.

Kalidasa's plays are different from Bhasa's plays. All three of them are essentially love stories. *Meghadoot*, *Abhidnyanshakuntala* and *Vikramorvasiya* are remarkable for their unique blend of poetry, Kalidasa's play remind us of Shakespeare's plays.

Shudraka's *Mrichchakatika* presents a love story against the backdrop of social and political upheaval. *Mudrarakshasa* by Vishakhadatta presents political conflict

and power struggle. Bhavabhooti wrote three plays. Two of them *Mahaviracharita* and *Uttaramacharita* are the Rama Story. His third play, *Malatimadhav* presents a love story. Two satirical comedies (Prahasanas) - Mahendra Vikrama's *Mattavilasa* and Bodhayana's *Bhagavadejjukiya* must be mentioned for their different kind of dramatic action and treatment of social life.

Sanskrit plays are based on a very profound philosophical outlook, a comprehensive world view and a highly developed aesthetics that is known as the theory of *Rasa*. Sanskrit plays, unlike Greek drama, defy categorization into tragedy and comedy. Instead, they are categorized according to social and mental status of the protagonists and their consequent actions. The ten kinds of plays, called *Dasha Roopaka* in the *Natyashastra* are classified on the basis of the nature and character of hero, the form and type of the action, not by dividing human life into artificial and externally imposed frames like tragic and comic. Another distinguishing feature of Sanskrit plays is a multi-level organization of communication between characters. The Sanskrit plays use standard Sanskrit as well as different Prakrits or dialects. Sanskrit plays use certain devices like *swagata* or aside, *janantika* and *apavarita akashvani*. The Sanskrit dramatic structure is finely tuned to either with *natyaadharmi* or *loka dharmi*. Sanskrit dramatists made ample use of music and dance.

The Sanskrit theatre had disintegrated gradually by the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. There are many reasons for this decline-social and political instability created foreign invasion and internal conflicts, loss of creative energy in the Sanskrit language gradually confined to a small elite, fall in the standard of dramatic writing due to lack of talent and loss of appeal for common spectators, etc.

For the next one thousand years, the theatrical activity took place not in Sanskrit but in different regional languages.

### **The Second Phase**

This phase of the Indian theatre is spread over a period of about one thousand years, and many of its strands and forms have continued up to the present day. The activity in this entire phase is often called 'folk theatre' today, because unlike the town-based classical Sanskrit theatre it has flourished in the countryside. Still many of them are complex in structures and techniques and training and practice is quite needed to acquire proficiency in them. The miming and acting in the *Kutiyattam* or

*Kuchipudi*, dancing in the *Yakshagana* or singing and drumming in *Swang* or the *Nautanki*, can not be acquired without considerable training. Keeping their special characteristics in mind many scholars call them 'traditional theatre' rather than folk theatre. The theatre of this phase gave more emphasis on music and dance. Traditional theatre persisted for about eight to nine centuries. During the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries the Bhakti Movement inspired a number of new theatrical modes or renovated the existing ones. The *Ankianat* of Assam, *Bhagatmela* of Tamil Nadu, *Krishnattam* of Kerala, *Kuchipudi* of Andhra Pradesh, *Dashavatar* of Maharashtra, *Rasleela* and *Ramleela* of Uttar Pradesh are clearly like Vaishnava religious rituals where stories of Gods are presented by performers. By the end of the Seventeenth century, the Bhakti Movement started losing some of its fervour.

The theatre started presenting historical, social and political themes, or the mythological episodes were presented in a manner that their religious aspect was no more predominant. Dramatic modes like *Tamasha*, *Bhavai*, *Mach*, *Khyal*, *Sang*, *Swang*, *Nautanki*, *Naqual*, *Bhand Pathra*, *Karyala* and others emerged.

The Parsi style plays written in the Hindi speaking region during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in spite of their great success and popularity on stage, have failed to become significant as dramatic literature.

### **The Third Phase**

India's encounter with the West during the nineteenth century had wide-ranging political, economic, social and cultural consequences. In the field of theatre, however, this encounter changed almost everything- its form, direction and pace. According to the Indian view of life, the purpose of drama, and theatre was to create a feeling of pleasure or bliss (*Rasa*), the purpose of the Western drama, on the other hand, was to reveal the struggles of life in their various forms.

The Western drama and theatre entered our country as elements of the culture of the conquerors. The British rulers introduced an educational system which, on the one hand, cleverly devalued Indian history and cultural traditions, and, on the other, made the most outstanding aspects of the Western culture and literature more and more familiar to the Indian elite class.

This new theatre which began in our country in the middle of the nineteenth century was an imitation of the western theatre. At the initial level, there was staging of some English plays in English and then their translations and adaptations into their

own languages, culminating finally, in plays based on Indian themes written and staged in imitation of the Western plays. This theatre started, continued and was accepted only by the newly educated Indians in the cities like Calcutta, Bombay and to some extent Madras. As a result, its achievement in different languages and regions were different. In Bengali and Marathi this theatre became most active, prosperous and popular.

Calcutta became the centre of theatre groups, many playhouses and professional companies, talented actors, playwrights and directors emerged. The Bengali theatre was the first to attract women performers. Dramatists like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Deenbandhu Mitra, Girish Chandra Ghosh, D.L.Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Manmath Ray and others wrote hundreds of plays after the models of Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen, Bernard Shaw and others. But these plays lack creative insight, innovation and originality.

Marathi plays at the initial level were inspired by traditional theatrical performances. The first Marathi play *Seeta Swayamvar* written by Vishnudas Bhave was inspired by Dashavatara of Maharashtra and Yakshagana of Karnataka. Annasaheb Kirloskar, Govind Deval, Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar, Mama Varerkar and Ram Ganesh Gadkari are the prominent playwrights in Marathi.

The impact of the western theatre was greater and more pervasive on the Gujarati theatre. The Parsi theatre was also influenced by the Western theatrical activities. The theatre in South, too imitated the plays of Shakespeare and other English writers but these plays did not exhibit insight and depth in content and lack originality. In the north, the new theatre could not take any shape.

Not only in Hindi, but in every language and region of the country the theatre had come almost to a standstill around 1940. During 1943-44, the rise of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) brought some life to the theatre in many regions of the country. This movement made a significant effort to bring drama and theatre closer to common people. But IPTA was basically west oriented. Another similar attempt in Hindi, the Prithvi Theatre started by the noted film actor, Prithviraj Kapoor in 1944 in Bombay, but it also collapsed around 1960.

It was about 1953-54 that the urban theatre evinced some life. Authentic translations, adaptations of the works of the outstanding playwrights began to be staged. Besides Shakespeare and Moliere, playwrights like Sophocles, Euripides,

Ibsen, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Gorky, Sartre, Camus, Brecht and many others were made available to theatres in Indian languages.

In this phase, at first directors like Sombhu Mitra, Habib Tanvir, Ebrahim Alkazi, Shyamanand Jalan, Utpal Dutt, Satyadev Dubey and later on Arvind Deshpande, Vijaya Mehta, Jabbar Patel, Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, Rajinder Nath, B.V.Karant came to the fore. They completely changed the shape and level of the Indian theatre. As result a number of creatively significant and original plays were written *Evam Indrajit*, *Baki Itihas*, *Pagla Ghora* by Badal Sircar in Bengali, *Shantata Court Chalu Ahe*, *Gidhade* by Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, *Kelu Janamejaya* by Adya Rangacharya, *Tughlaq*, *Nagmandala* by Girish Karnad in Kannada, *Andha Yug* by Dharmavir Bharati and *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* and *Adhe Adhure* by Mohan Rakesh in Hindi brought to Indian dramatic literature the state of creative work.

In the modern times the social media has definitely influenced the theatrical activities. It is quite necessary to empower Indian English drama in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **2.3 Girish Karnad: Life and Works:**

A post-independent dramatist and a multifaceted personality, Karnad has earned international praise as a playwright, poet, actor, director, critic and translator. He has written ten plays out of which he has translated five into English.

He was born at Matheran on 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1938. A Konkani by birth, his initial schooling was in Marathi. He spent a major part of his childhood at a small town, Sirsi at Karnataka. His father was a physician at the Sasson Hospital in Pune. His father had love for Marathi performances by *Balgandharava* and *Keshvrao Bhosale*. Karnad also acted in various Marathi and Kannda plays during his school days. From Sirsi the Karnad family moved to Dharwar. Girish Karnad completed his graduation at Dharwar and shifted to Mumbai for Masters' degree. He was selected as a Rhodes Scholar for study in England. He went to the University of Oxford from 1960 to 1963 and a Bhabha fellow from 1970 to 1972. His interest in theatre is cultivated in his stay at Oxford though he was a student of Statistics. On his return from Oxford, he lived in Mumbai. There he watched a lot of plays, both Marathi and English. He was influenced by Alkazi and Satyadev Dubey. Apart from his interest in Marathi, Kannada and English stage, he also developed an interest in the classical Sanskrit stage.

Karnad had had a distinguished career. Besides a successful administrator, he was a popular playwright and a great actor. Karnad joined Oxford University Press at Madras (now Chennai) as an Assistant Manager. Naturally he came in contact with eminent writers from all over the country. Later on in 1974, due to his service to drama and film he was offered the post of Director, Film and Television Institute at Pune. He also played quite a few roles in Hindi Films. In 1987, he went to the U.S.A. as a Full Bright Scholar in Residence at the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago. From 1988 to 1993, he served as a Chairman of Sangeet Natak Academy, (National Academy for Performing Arts) New Delhi. He was awarded Doctor of Letters (D.Lit) degree of the Karnataka University, Dharwar.

During his formative years, Karnad went through diverse influences. He was exposed to a literary scene where there was a direct clash between western and native tradition. It was India of the fifties and the sixties that surfaced two streams of thought in all walks of life – adoption of new modernistic techniques, a legacy of the post-colonial rule and adherence to the rich cultural past of India. Karnad was fascinated by the western playwrights. Although rooted in Indian Mythology and history, his plays at the same time exhibit a strong and unmistakable western philosophical sensibility. As a playwright mythology has been his most favourite muse.

Karnad has probably provided the most genuine platform for Indian Mythology by transposing folktales and legends from epics like *Mahabharata* into a modern context. “I wanted Indian myths to achieve the status that the Greek myths have on the world stage.” he declares.

His first play *Yayati* came in 1961. It is a retelling of the Hindu Myth on the theme of responsibility. This play was a great success on the stage. *Tughlaq* was written to 1964. It was in Kannada. Alyque Padamsee requested Girish Karnad to translate it into English and he did it. *Havavadana* (1970) is based on *Transposed Heads*, a story by Thomas Mann. Among his other well-known works are *Naga-Mandala*, *Taledanda*, *The Fire and the Rain* and *Odakalu Bimba*. (A Heap of Borken Images) According to K.P.S.Iyengar, “In all his three plays (*Yayati*, *Tughlaq* and *Havavadana*) be the theme, historical, mythical or legendary-Karnads’s approach is modern and he deploys the conventions and motifs of folk art like masks and curtains to project a world of intentions, uncertainties and unpredictable denouements.”

## The Principal Plays of Girish Karnad

### 1. *Yayati* (1961)

Karnad's first play interprets an ancient myth from *Mahabharata*. It is based on an episode where Yayati, one of the ancestors of the Pandavas, is given the curse of premature old age by his father-in-law Shukracharya, who is incensed by Yayati's infidelity. Yayati can redeem his curse only if someone is willing to exchange his youth with him. It is his son, Puru who finally offers to do it for his father. The play examines the moment of crisis that Puru's decision sparks, and the dilemma it presents for Yayati, Puru and Puru's young wife Chitrlekha when son becomes old and the father becomes young. The play is also about two intimate friends Devyani and Sharmishtha.

*Yayati* was written and produced in Kannada and it was an instant success. The presentation of the myth no doubt irritated the orthodox viewers but the more enlightened critics appreciated the new approach in the play. What impressed the modern spectators of *Yayati* was the re-interpretation of the ancient myth in a contemporary context.

### 2. *Tughlaq* (1964)

*Tughlaq* is a historical play that deals with the life and ambitions of a Muslim king Muhammad Tughlaq (1327-32 A.D.) The action of the play takes place first of all in Delhi and then Daulatabad. It is a compelling allegory of the Nehruvian era.

Written during his studies at Oxford, *Tughlaq* captures the disillusionment of many Indians with the idealistic policies of early independent India. In its canvas and treatment, *Tughlaq* is both huge and contemporary. It is a tale of the crumbling to the ashes of the dreams and aspirations of an over-ambitious, yet considerably virtuous king. Despite the Sultan's foolishness to shift the capital of India from Delhi to Daulatabad to "centralize administration", despite the high headedness of making copper coins equal in value to silver dinars, despite the shamefulness of designing a conspiracy to kill his own brother and father at prayer hall, what is remarkable and relatively unknown, in the much infamous characters of Tughlaq is the willingness to work for the people and to ensure their happiness, the courage to take initiative in the direction of communal equality, and a keenly observing and ever-diligent mind. The disappointment in the end when he is not understood by his

own people and followers is obvious. And Karnad captures it beautifully in his inimitable style.

*Tughlaq* was first produced in Kannada in 1965 and was an immense success.

### 3. ***Hayavadana*** (1971)

*Hayavadana* is basically based on a tale from *Brihad kathasaritasagar* by Somdev. The play could be also traced to Thoman Mann's famous story *The Transposed Head*. Here, the writer problematizes issues of personal identity in a world of tangled relationships, adding a sub-plot to the main story.

Devdatta, the intellectual and Kapila, the man of body are intimate friends. Devdatta marries Padmini; Kapila and Padmini fall in love with each other; and the two men kill themselves over the love of Padmini. In a highly comic scene, which is of great dramatic significance, Padmini transposes their heads, giving Devdatta Kapila's head and Kapila Devdatta's. It results in a confusion of identities which reveals the ambiguous nature of human personality. The situation gets complicated. Devdatta and Kapila fight a duel and kill each other again. Padmini performs Sati. The subplot of *Hayavadana* of the horse man is also comical and ironic. Karnad deftly employs all the conventions and motifs of folk tales and folk theatre – mask, doll and a story within the story.

### 4. ***Naga-Mandala*** (1988)

In *Naga-Mandala*, Karnad turns away from the classical traditions as his source to local Kannada folk tales, which he had heard from Indian's renowned scholar of the oral traditions, A.K.Ramanujan.

In *Naga-Mandala*, Karnad weaves two folk-tales together. The first one comments on the paradoxical nature of oral tales in general. The tales are passed from one story teller to another and from one generation to the other. It is a story of an extra-ordinarily beautiful girl Rani who marries Appanna and suffers nothing but loneliness.

### 5. ***Taledanda*** (1990)

It retells an episode of the life of the twelfth century Lingayat Saint and the founder of the movement Basava. Karnad, by exploring aspects of the Lingayat tradition from more than eight centuries earlier, criticizes contemporary fundamentalism and the violence committed in the name of religion.

6. *Agni Mattu Male* (1995)

Another major play is *Agni Mattu Male* (The Fire and the Rain, 1995) in which Karnad deals with the traditional controversy between asceticism and ritual, using his source an episode from the *Mahabharata*. Major critics appreciate it as Karnad's best work.

7. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* (1997)

Here he draws on Tipu Sultan's dream book fascinated by the idea that an important warlord should write down his own dreams privately.

8. *Odakalu Bimba* (A Heap of Broken Images, 2005)

The play is inspired by T.S.Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. It is not based on history or mythology. Instead, it has a very contemporary theme. It is about a writer who is unsuccessful in her own language; but achieves national and international fame when she switches writing in English.

### 2.3.1 Check Your Progress-1

**I] Fill in the blanks:**

- 1) Girish Karnad was born on \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Karnad's first play was \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) *Tughlaq* was written in the year \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Muhammad Tughlaq shifted his capital from Delhi to \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_ was a mythological play by Karnad.

**II] Answer the following questions with one word/phrase/sentence each.**

- 1) What are the major plays of Girish Karnad?
- 2) What is the main theme of *Tughlaq*?
- 3) Why does Tughlaq shift his capital to Daulatabad?
- 4) Which play of Karnad is inspired by T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land*?
- 5) What are the major influences on Karnad?

### 2.3.2 Terms to Remember:

- **Balgandharva and Keshavrao Bhosale** - Great Marathi Actors
- **Folktales and Legends** - Traditional tales told and transmitted from one generation to other.
- **Deploy** - exhibit
- **Denouement** - the Outcome, resolution
- **Mahabharata** - An Indian Epic
- **Allegory** - A story with two meanings – surface and deep (symbolic)

### 2.4 Scene-wise Summary:

#### Scene 1

The play opens with a scene outside the court of the Chief Justice in the year 1327 A.D. Several citizens, mostly Muslims and a few Hindus are gathered there to hear the outcome of a suit filed by a Brahmin, Vishnu Prasad, against the Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. The citizens are discussing the policies and actions of the King. The consensus is that conditions in the Kingdom have deteriorated since Muhammad ascended the throne rumouredly, after killing his own father and brother while they were praying. The Muslims criticize him as he has abolished the jiziya tax and to compensate for the loss in revenues he has levied many other taxes. Hindus too are skeptical about him.

The Public Announcer announces that the Sultan should pay five hundred silver dinars to Vishnu Prasad for illegal appropriation of his land. Sultan agrees to this and offers a job in the civil service to the Brahmin. He wants to prove his impartiality. He also announces to shift the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad in order to strengthen the bond between the Muslims and the Hindus. The people are bewildered due to this decision.

A respected cleric, Sheikh Imam-ud-din, has been spewing venom in Kanpur against the Sultan. People who are influenced by his great oratory have started rioting there and set the city on fire.

Aazam, an ordinary pickpocket meets the Brahmin who has dared file a case against the King – and won it! And the Brahmin turns out to be Aziz, his old friend and a washerman.

**Analysis:** The scene is expository in nature. The readers know much about the protagonist, Muhammad. We introduced to two petty thieves, Aziz and Aazam. Mainly meant to provide comic relief in the play, the two play an important role later.

## Scene 2

The scene II is shifted to the royal palace. Here we are introduced to three characters –

- 1) Tughlaq 's step-mother
- 2) Najib
- 3) Barrani

The second scene begins on a note of dramatic tension. It is reported that Ain-ul-Mulk, Tughlaq's childhood friend is marching against him towards Delhi with an army of thirty thousand soldiers. Muhammad appointed Ain-ul-Mulk, Governor of Avadh, the Governor of the Deccan and he hasn't liked the new appointment, hence, the uprising against the Sultan. Tughlaq's step-mother is worried about Tughlaq's sleepless nights due to the various tensions like these. But Tughlaq tells her, "I am not worried about my enemies. I'm only worried about my people." This explains Tughlaq's craving for an ideal state.

Vizier Muhammad Najib enters with the historian Barani. He reports that they have been able to raise only six thousand soldiers against Ain-ul-Mulk's thirty thousand. Najib also tells Tughlaq that Sheikh Imam-ud-din is also in Delhi and he speaks publically that "The Sultan is a disgrace to Islam. He has forfeited the right to rule by murdering his father and brother at prayer time." Najib reminds him that it is a grave political problem. Najib tells him that both Sheikh Imam-ud-din and Ain-ul-Mulk pose an equal danger to him as both of them are traitors to the throne. Najib slyly suggests a way out by telling Tughlaq that "Sheikh has a striking resemblance to you." Tughlaq, being a crafty politician immediately takes up the hint. While he will be away facing the advancing army of Ain-ul-Mulk at Kanuj, he has asked

Shihab-ud-din, the Prince of Sampanshahr and the son the noble who is against him, to look after the affairs of his kingdom in Delhi.

According to the step-mother Najib is Tughlaq's evil genius.

**Analysis:** The scene is important from the point of view of the development of the plot. We are introduced to the step-mother, Najib and Barani.

### Scene 3

Sheikh Imam-ud-din is a holy man dedicated to the cause of Islam. Tughlaq invites Sheikh Imam-ud-din to address the people in his presence. But he has sent the guards from door to door threatening people of serious consequences should they attend the Sheikh's public address. On the appointed day no one turns out for the address. Sheikh feels disgraced and humiliated. Tughlaq tells him that by accepting royal invitation the Sheikh has lost people's trust. The holy man is easily fooled by the Sultan. Muhammad then tells Sheikh about Ain-ul-Mulk's rebellion against him. In war, Muslims in large number will be killed on both sides. The Sultan seeks the Sheikh's help in going to Ain-ul-Mulk as the royal envoy and negotiate for peace to avoid bloodshed among the followers of the same religion. The Sheikh is taken in and admires Tughlaq's strategy.

**Analysis:** The third scene is full of dramatic action. It dramatizes a direct encounter between Tughlaq and Sheikh-Imam-ud-din. Here the character of Tughlaq is more developed. He defeats the Sheikh with his oratory and cunningly makes him his royal envoy.

### Scene 4

Sheikh Shihab-ud-din has been invited to look after Delhi during the Sultan's absence. The Sultan is out of Delhi-fighting Ain-ul-Mulk. Ratansingh, Shihab-ud-din's adopted brother comes back from the war bringing sad news that Sheikh-Imam-ud-din has been killed in the battle. Muhammad Tughlaq has won the battle against Ain-ul-Mulk and has pardoned Ain-ul-Mulk, cancelled his earlier order of appointing him as Governor of the Deccan and restored the governorship of Avadh to him.

Ratansingh later on explains to Shihab-ud-din all the transpired at the battlefield. The Sheikh was delighted to act as the Sultan's envoy and he was dressed 'exactly like the Sultan'. Muhammad Tughlaq was hiding in the hills behind with his army, the Sheikh got up from royal elephant to deliver his message of peace. But somehow

previously at the moment, a soldier blew the bugle as a signal of attack. Ain-ul-Mulk's army attacked and killed the Sheikh. As the Sheikh fell from the elephant, the enemy was certain that they had killed the Sultan. Tughlaq then fell upon them and defeated them and won the battle.

Ratansingh also informs Shihab-ud-din of the plot that the nobles and the clerics are hatching against the Sultan. They have also invited Ratansingh for the secret meeting. Ratansingh wants Shihab-ud-din to join him which he reluctantly agrees.

**Analysis:** This scene builds up the dramatic tension initiated in the third scene. We come to know how crafty Muhammad is and how superior he is to his enemies. He emerges as a great hypocrite, a wily politician and a crafty manipulator.

### Scene 5

In this scene a number of Amirs, Sayyids and other powerful members of the capital's elite are gathered in a house in Delhi to hatch a plot against the Sultan. Shihab-ud-din is an outsider and not interested to take an active part in the conspiracy. But the people want that an outsider like Shihab-ud-din should lead them. They are against his decision of going to Daulatabad. Shihab-ud-din tries to tell them that the Sultan has done a lot of good work like building schools, roads and hospitals. He has made the proper use of the money collected through taxation. But the people are unhappy as Tughlaq has abolished jiziya on Hindu. Sheikh Shams-ud-din Tajuddarfim addresses Shihab-ud-din. He tells him how Sheikh Imam-ud-din was treated and murdered. They convince Shihab-ud-din that Tughlaq is an enemy of Islam. Shihab-ud-din joins the conspiracy to assassinate the king. They decide to kill him at the prayer time.

**Analysis:** The fifth scene is an extraordinary example of courtly intrigue. Here we can observe the rage of people against Tughlaq for various reasons.

### Scene 6

The setting is Darbar-i-Khas. It is the fateful Tuesday. Tughlaq tells the Amirs that they must hurry up in their discussions as he has promised to join the Imam in offering his prayers at the mosque. He tells them his decision to introduce copper currency. He announces 'A copper coin will have the same value as a silver dinar'. The Amirs, however, object that the people won't accept copper currency. Tughlaq appeals them to stand by him in the implementation of his plans and policies for the

welfare of the people. He begs and kneels before them. The Amirs are shocked and embarrassed. They entreat him to trust them.

As soon as the prayer call is heard, the King gets prepared for the prayer. Shihab-ud-din and the Amirs join in the prayer. Halfway through the prayer, the Amirs pull out their daggers to kill the King. But they are not successful as about twenty soldiers rush out from behind the curtains with pears and surround the Amirs. Tughlaq is praying quietly and calmly. Everyone is killed. Tughlaq stabs Shihab-ud-din to death. But before that he tells Shihab-ud-din that his own adopted brother Ratansingh has betrayed them all by conveying their plan to Tughlaq through a letter.

Tughlaq orders Najib that everyone involved on the conspiracy must be arrested and beheaded. Regarding Shihab-ud-din, since his father is a powerful man, a public announcement be made that he sacrificed his life defending the Sultan when some nobles tried to kill him during the prayer. Shihab-ud-din, therefore, died a martyr's death. Barani is shocked, "Oh God! Aren't even the dead free from your politics?" Tughlaq orders that Delhi be vacated immediately.

"Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke should rise from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now"

**Analysis:** We can observe here Sultan's cunning nature. He is shrewd and crafty who can pre-empt the intriguers and foil their plot. He stabs Shihab-ud-din to death and declares him a martyr. Tughlaq here emerges as a wily politician.

### Scene 7

The scene is laid in a camp on way to Daulatabad from Delhi. Aziz, disguised as a Brahmin civil servant, now in the service of the Sultan is seen with Aazam. The scene elaborately portrays the woes and sufferings of ordinary citizens of Delhi who have been forced to vacate the capital. The road from Delhi to Daulatabad is strewn with corpses, sickness, disease and destitution. Aziz and Aazam are acting as civil servants and actually robbing poor people. It is in this scene only that Aziz tutors Aazam in great lessons of politics.

"Only a few months in Delhi and I have discovered a whole new world-politics! It's a beautiful world-wealth, success, position, power and yet it's full of brainless people with not an idea in their head... It's a fantastic world!"

Aziz invites Aazam to join him in manufacturing counterfeit copper coins.

**Analysis:** The scene is a commentary on the times of Muhammad Tughlaq. Corruption is rife. One has to bribe government officials at every step. People have to pay even to collect the corpses of their relatives. All of Tughlaq's plans to improve the lot of his people come to nought and he becomes a frustrated and bitter person.

### Scene 8

The scene takes place at Daulatabad fort, five years later. Two guards, one young and the other old are talking. The old guard is from Delhi and he has lost his entire family on the way to Daulatabad. Tughlaq enters the scene and talks to the young guard. Tughlaq seems to be slightly disillusioned and disappointed. He seems to have lost his sense of direction and purpose. He is worried about the uprising in Deccan. There are only two people he can trust Ain-ul-Mulk and Shihab-ud-din's father. And the job of running the kingdom smoothly and peacefully is quite stupendous. He feels lonely and isolated. He calls Barani as he cannot bear to be alone. He is suffering from insomnia. The economy is in shambles because people have started making counterfeit coins and claming an equivalent number of silver dinars in exchange from the treasury. His condition is pitiable indeed. He is aware that people call him "Mad Muhammad." To add his woes, his deputy Najib has been killed.

**Analysis:** The scene shows a despondent Muhammad. He cannot understand what has gone wrong and why the people have turned against him. He is stunned by the news of murder of his staunch supporter Vizier Najib.

### Scene 9

The scene takes place in a small cave in hill where Aziz and Aazam are hiding. They have set up their mint to produce counterfeit copper currency. Aazam is tired of stealing and wants to live a safe life. They talk about virtuous people and the inversion of virtues in times of anarchy and misrule. Aziz has an amusing and controlled notion of human virtue. He believes that a human being needs to commit a crime at least once in a lifetime in order to prove his virtue. Real greatness lies in one's ability to steal, to rob and to kill and the best use of power lies in the authority to rape.

Aziz and Aazam murders Abbasid Ghiyas-ud-din, a descendant of the Khalif who has been invited as a state guest by Sultan Muhammad. Aziz then proceeds to Daulatabad dressed as Abbasid Ghiyas-ud-din with Aazam as his assistant. Nobody would know because no one has seen him.

**Analysis:** The scene is around inverted irony. In Aziz, Karnad presents a total inversion of moral virtues.

### **Scene 10**

The scene takes place in the palace of Tughlaq. It is between Tughlaq and the step-mother. Tughlaq is all alone as Najib has been murdered. The royal treasury is full of counterfeit currency and economy is in a bad shape. The step-mother is worried about the state as well as the King. The King is worried about Najib's murder. He thinks that Najib was loyal to him and the throne.

Afraid of Tughlaq's wrath the Queen tries to pacify him. She tells Tughlaq that Najib was responsible for ruin of the state. She also tells him that she was responsible for Najib's death. He arrests her and orders the soldiers that she should be stoned publically.

Then he falls on his knees and pleads for God's mercy. He becomes quite desperate and is unable to pray. He realizes that the people are in a state of unrest and they call him 'Mad Muhammad'.

**Analysis:** Scene 10 is charged with dramatic tension. The loneliness of Tughlaq is highlighted. The state's economy is ruined. No one trusts the King. When he knows that the step-mother has betrayed him by murdering Najib, he collapses in pain and agony. He seeks mercy from God, it is at this moment that Tughlaq feels absolutely lonely in the vast universe.

### **Scene 11**

The arrival of Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid in Daulatabad is announced. This will mark the revival of prayers in the kingdom after a lapse of five years. But no one is interested. People are hungry and starving. Now they need food and not prayers. People due to starvation; eat anything, barks off trees, skins of horses, blood from slaughtered beasts, etc.

It is in such a grim situation in the kingdom that the imposter Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid is received by the Sultan. The Sultan is skeptical about him. The Hindu

woman that appears in scene VII also recognizes the imposter still Muhammad Tughlaq welcomes him, seeks his blessings and requests him to lead the prayers in his kingdom after a lapse of five years. But the people want food and not prayer. They are restless, angry and show sign of agitation.

**Analysis:** The scene shows the fast deteriorating conditions in Tughlaq's kingdom. People are starving and they start rioting after the arrival of the Khalif's descendant in Daulatabad.

### **Scene 12**

Aziz, disguised as Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid lives in the palace along with Aazam. Aazam is fed up of everything. Outside the city people are slaughtered, they are starving and rioting. According to Aazam it is best to escape this slaughter house. He does not feel that they are safe in the Sultan's palace. He has also been disturbed by the Sultan's sleepwalking at night. Aazam wants Aziz to come with him. The money they have collected will 'last them forever'. Aziz wants Aazam to stay back with him but Aazam leaves the fort.

**Analysis:** The scene acquaints us with the mounting unrest against Tughlaq.

### **Scene 13**

Barani wants to leave the palace to attend his mother's funeral and he requests Tughlaq for permission. His mother ostensibly died in rioting. The Sultan knows that he is somehow responsible for the death of Barani's mother. In the meanwhile, a soldier reports to the king that Aazam Jahan the friend of his Holiness Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid is dead, rather murdered.

The most powerful dramatic encounter is between Tughlaq and Aziz. Within a few minutes of their meeting Tughlaq realizes that the man masquerading as His Holiness is someone else. Aziz confesses that he is an ordinary dhobi from Shiknar. He claims that he is the true disciple of the Sultan. Barani wants the severest punishment to be meted out to him. Tughlaq too is furious. But Aziz remains unruffled. He recounts all the stages in his rise from an ordinary dhobi to a holy man. He tells the Sultan how sincerely and tenaciously he has been loyal to the royal dictates. Tughlaq is impressed by him. He feels that he has met a match at last. The King pardons the dhobi for his wit. The Sultan sends him to the Deccan with a letter of recommendation to Khusrau Malik. He allows Barani to leave for the funeral of

his mother. Muhammad is so disgusted that he wants to go back to Delhi. Then he goes, sits on his throne, closes his eyes and sleeps deeply.

**Analysis:** Barani is the Sultan's last confidant and support and he also wants to leave on the pretext of his mother's funeral. Tughlaq pardons Aziz. Instead of punishment he sends him to the Deccan. He announces his decision to return to Delhi and reinstate the city as the capital of his empire. All his utopian plans and schemes have come to nought and he is a bitter and disillusioned man.

### 2.4.1 Check Your Progress:

#### I] Fill in the blanks:

- 1) Tughlaq has abolished the \_\_\_\_\_ tax.
- 2) Vishnu Prasad, the Brahmin is in reality \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ is Shihab-ud-din's adopted brother.
- 4) Aziz and Aazam murder \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_ has a resemblance to the Sultan

#### II] Answer the following questions with one word/phrase/sentence each.

- 1) How does Tughlaq treat Imam-ud-din?
- 2) What important decisions does the King make?
- 3) What is Barani's role in the play?
- 4) Why does Tughlaq kill Shihab-ud-din?
- 5) Why does Tughlaq order stoning of his step-mother?

### 2.4.2 Terms to Remember:

- **Jiziya Tax** - A tax imposed on non-believers of Islam, mainly the Hindus
- **Dinar** - An ancient coin
- **Infidel**- Non-believer in Islam
- **Appropriation** - Taking or usurping somebody's private property.
- **Amir** - The courtier
- **Allegory** - A story with two meanings – surface and deep (symbolic)

- **Vizier** - The Chief Minister
- **Patricide** - Killing of one's own father
- **Fratricide** - Killing of one's own brother
- **Babble** - Speak nonsense
- **Envoy** - Messenger
- **Anarchy** - Lawlessness
- **Transgression** - Act of violating the principles of Islam
- **Ulema** - The scholar and learned man
- **Sayyids** - Those who are well versed in Quran
- **Atheist** - Non-believer in God
- **Slaughter** - Massacre
- **Scowl** - To frown
- **Gory** - Covered with blood
- **Derision** - Scorn, hatred
- **Dire** - Horrible
- **Ferocity** – Savage, cruelty
- **Trance** - A state of hallucination, dreamy state
- **Hallelujahs** - Loud praises to God
- **Amen** - May it be so
- **Insomnia** - Sleeplessness
- **Masquerade** - Disguise
- **Pedigree** - Noble family or ancestry
- **Mirage** - delusion

## 2.5 Major/Minor Characters:

### Major Characters

There are four major characters in *Tughlaq*.

- 1) Tughlaq
- 2) Najib
- 3) Aziz
- 4) Sheikh Imam-ud-din
- 5) Shihab-ud-din

### **1. Tughlaq**

Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq is the historical character who ruled India in the fourteenth century and was called 'Mad Tughlaq'. There is a lot of controversy about this puzzling man because the ambiguities of his character bewilder the critics, the historians and the common people. M.K.Naik points out, "Karnad projects the various contradictions in the complex personality of the Sultan, who was at once a dreamer, and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout and godless." Karnad thinks "Tughlaq was the most extraordinary character to come on the throne of Delhi, in religion, in philosophy, even in calligraphy, in battle, in war field, anything we talk about, he seems to have outshone anyone who came before him or after him."

Tughlaq is the only character that strings together all the thirteen scenes of the play. "All the other characters", as Anantha Murthy says, "are dramatized aspects of his complex personality."

#### **Visionary and Idealist**

Tughlaq is a learned king. He has learnt Greek, Persian and Arabic literature. He knows Islam and Quran very well. His scholarship leads him to become a visionary. He has his ideas which he wants to translate into action. He longs for justice to work in his kingdom without any consideration of might or weakness, religion or creed. His ideas of justice and equality are ahead of his times.

About his liberal outlook and policy of religious tolerance is looked upon with suspicion by the Muslims as well as the Hindus. Tughlaq emerges as an idealist and a visionary when we encounter him first in the play. He has lost a suit filed by a Brahmin for 'illegal appropriation' of the land and by the state officials. Not only has he agreed to the compensation of five hundred silver dinars but also graciously offered him a job in the civil service to assure him a regular income. He wants his people to be treated equally.

## **Democrat and Tyrant**

Tughlaq is a democrat. When he orders the shifting of his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, he goes to his people and tells them.

“I beg you to realize that this is no mad whim of a tyrant. My minister and I took this decision after careful thought and discussion.” He rationalizes this more before them and says “My Empire is large now and embraces the south and I need a capital which is at its heart. Delhi is too near to the border and as you know well, its peace is never free from the fear of invaders. But for me the most important factor is that Daulatabad is the city of the Hindus and as a capital it will symbolize the bond between Muslims and Hindus which I wish to develop and strengthen in my Kingdom.”

He allows people to criticize him openly and not to be afraid of him. ‘The people have been told that they have a right to criticize the Sultan and to voice their grievances openly.’ He goes to the people and talks to them.

All his grandiose plans, however, come to nought. The bond that Muhammad wishes to develop and strengthen between Muslims and Hindus is never forged; people condemn his move of shifting the capital as “sheer tyranny”; and the invitation to join Muhammad to Daulatabad turns into an order after he has foiled the coup attempt of the Amirs against him:

“Najib I want Delhi vacated immediately. Every living soul in Delhi will leave for Daulatabad in a fortnight. I was too soft. I can see that now. They’ll understand the whip. Everyone must leave. Not a light should be seen in the windows of Delhi. Not a wisp of smoke should rise from its chimneys. Nothing but an empty graveyard of Delhi will satisfy me now.”

Since an attempt on his life has been unsuccessfully made while he was at prayers, Muhammad, a devout follower of Islam who prays five times a day, bans prayers in his kingdom:

“There will be no more praying in the Kingdom. Najib, anyone caught praying will be severely punished. Hence forth let the moment of prayer walk on my streets in silence and leave without a trace.”

### **Cruel, Intriguer and Crafty**

Muhammad, being an expert chess player, uses people as pawns in his political games. There are disturbing rumours that Ain-ul-mulk is marching on Delhi because he is unhappy with the Kings's decision to send him to Deccan. Tughlaq manipulates Imam who has resemblance with him and sends him as an envoy to Ain-ul-Mulk. He defeats Ain-ul-Mulk in carefully planned war tactics and also eliminates Imam-uddin his arch-rival in politics. He kills all his conspirators including Shihab-ud-din and declares Shihab-ud-din a martyr. Actually Tughlaq's transformation from a just ruler to a vicious, scheming and cruel tyrant is a result of the descent amongst the courtiers. His Amirs and the courtiers view his decision as the whim of a derailed tyrant. In order to have a firm grip over his state, Tughlaq stoops to trickery, conspiracy and wickedness. To realize his ideal of kingship, he commits one murder after the other. He orders his step-mother to be dragged and stoned to death.

### **Moody and Impulsive**

Nobody can gauge his moods. He is impulsive. He always thinks that he is right and all his actions are right too. Nobody can foretell his moods and actions and his own fate. His step-mother does not know that she will be killed, Sheikh Imam-uddin does not find out that the snake behind the flower, nor do the Amirs suspect that they will be butchered. Even Barani, his confidant, cannot make out that the most treacherous Aziz will be rewarded by him.

### **Bitter and Disillusioned**

All his idealism is shattered. Tughlaq's idea for ideal kingship blows away with the wind. His decision of shifting his capital to Daulatabad proves useless. There is starvation and hunger throughout the country. The economy is in ruins and his scheme of introducing token currency fails. In order to make up for the loss in revenue accruing from the jiziya tax on non believers, mainly Hindus in his kingdom, Muhammad introduces several other taxes. This makes him unpopular. His worst move, however is levying heavy taxes in the fertile Doab region followed by the acquisition of the land in case of non-payment. All this turn him a bitter and disillusioned man. He is a lonely and frustrated soul at the end of the play. He is dazed and bewildered because he cannot comprehend what is happening around him. This is how all the dreams of an idealist and a visionary end. His personality wilts and disintegrates. He is tired and exhausted.

His impulsiveness, his doggedness and his idealism are the causes of his failure. The far sighted and powerful King in Tughlaq evaporated within him. He becomes a living body with a dead soul.

## **2. Najib**

In the court of Tughlaq, Vizier Muhammad Najib is one of the most favourite admirers of the Sultan. He is closest to the Sultan with regard to the administrative work. Like his master, Najib is a crafty politician. Najib was a Hindu but he gave Hinduism because according to him Hinduism did not speak of salvation of society. It only talked of the individual soul and Islam is worried about the world. Najib, the Hindu converted to Muslim is close to Tughlaq as the Sultan wants to develop and strengthen the Hindu-Muslim relations.

Najib is a true politician. In politics he sees his future. It is in his blood-stream. "It is a beautiful world wealth, success, position and power" Najib is full of ideas and so is his Sultan who is all the time counseled by him. Najib is a devil of a politician. To him, in politics courage, honesty and justice are hollow words. They are not necessary in dealing with any political problem.

Najib helps Sultan to face and overcome the problems. He is suspicious by nature and fortunately his duty also demands it of him. He knows all about the movements of those who are attached to or against the Sultan. The step-mother of the Sultan and Barani think that Najib is a 'Yes' man of the Sultan and he caters to the whims and the impulsive nature of the Monarch. They are not aware of the fact that he has his own convictions and at times he disagrees with the Sultan's treating Ain-ul-Mulk kindly and setting him free after he is caught in the battle against the Monarch. Najib disapproves the Sultan's humble behaviour with the Amirs and Sheikh-Shihab-ud-din. He gives wise advices and solutions to the Monarch.

Sultan's mother is convinced that Najib is the evil genius behind the Sultan's machinations and the violence that has been unleashed. She hates him for leading Muhammad 'astray' and she arranges to get him poisoned. In fact he is more sinned against than sinning. The true, faithful and loyal to the Sultan is poisoned for preaching violence and creating chaos in the state. He is not an idealist like Barani; he is also not an unpractical man like him. If Barani is an honest historian; Najib is honestly a politician of a very high culture.

### 3. Aziz

Aziz is the poor washerman from Shiknar who poses, first as a Bramhim and then as Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid to dupe the Sultan. He is an unscrupulous character who, along with his companion and sidekick, exploits the misery and suffering of the poor people on the way from Delhi to Daulatabad, and then turns to minting counterfeit copper coins. Aziz is prototype of people who have existed in this world since time immemorial; they are time-servers and opportunists who are quite shame-faced when exposed.

Aziz is one the most important characters in the play. His amazing story runs parallel to that of Tughlaq. He provides all the entertainment and joy to the readers of the play and his actions are a source of comic relief to the audience after the gruesome murders of one or the other.

Aziz is a dhobi and he has the ambition to amass wealth and to get power. He blackmails the law, the government and also the Highest Religion and Secularism. He is a poor starving dhobi when the Sultan comes to the throne. He disguises himself as Vishnuprasad, a Brahmin of Shiknar and files a suit against the state against the confiscation of his land by government officers. He claims compensation and wins the suit. It is decided that he should receive a grant of five hundred silver dinars from the State Treasury and a post in the Civil Service to ensure him a regular and adequate income. When the Sultan declares the introduction of a new copper currency, Aziz along with Aazam counterfeits coins and gathers huge wealth. When there is too much competition, he leaves this business.

Aziz later, takes the silver dinars and goes to Doab, and buys there some land for farming. He gets the land dirt cheap and collects the state subsidy for farmers. When is discovered he runs to the hills and becomes a robber. He and Aazam start looting and killing the people. He along with Aazam also shift the corpses of all the rebels executed by the Sultan and hang them up for exhibition.

One day he hears Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid is invited to the capital. He learns about a beggar who claims to be Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid, kills him, puts on his turban and the robes and cheats the Sultan. The Sultan bows down to him publically and honours him. The Sultan discovers and gets annoyed and threatens him to hang him but he wins the Sultan's heart with his wit. The Sultan spares him and honours him with a post in his service. Like the Sultan, Aziz is also adamant and tyrant.

Karnad starts by using Azim and Aazam as a dramatic convention to provide comic relief in the play. Aziz's story somehow runs parallel to Tughlaq's.

#### **4. Sheikh-Imam-ud-din**

Sheikh Imam-ud-din is a holy man who is opposed to the liberal religious outlook of Tughlaq. He is tremendously popular among the Muslim masses.

Sheikh criticizes the Sultan for his secular attitude towards the Hindus. He believes that the abolition of the jiziyah tax is contrary to the dictates of Islam. He also accuses the King publicly of having committed the sin of patricide and fratricide. By killing his own father and brother at prayer time the King is supposed to have defied the holiness and sanctity of prayer. His public addresses are a threat to Tughlaq's political authority. He has publicly declared that the King has lost his right to rule and therefore must abdicate the throne. This courageous fiery speaker has a certain resemblance with the Sultan.

In order to neutralize the Sheikh's opposition, Tughlaq indulges in a game of political treachery. Tughlaq invites the Sheikh for a public address supported by the state. But he gives secret orders to his soldiers to go from door to door and forbid the people to attend the address of the Sheikh. The Sheikh is stunned to realize that people have abandoned him. Sultan convinces the Sheikh that people distrust his motives and consider him Tughlaq's spy. By sponsoring the Sheikh's public address Tughlaq has made the Sheikh suspicious amongst the masses.

Now Sultan tells the Sheikh to act as his envoy and sue for peace with rebellious Ain-ul-Mulk. If there is a war, Muslims on both sides will be slaughtered. The Sheikh is flattered and he readily agrees to be the royal messenger of peace. Taking advantage of his striking resemblance to the Sheikh, Tughlaq pushes the holy man into the war and gets him killed. His manipulation of the Sheikh is a startling example of statecraft and political shrewdness.

#### **5. Shihab-ud-din**

Shihab-ud-din is the Prince of Sampanshahr. His father does not like the Sultan and in order to appease him the Sultan invites Shihab-ud-din to look after administration of Delhi in his absence during war against Ain-ul-Mulk. Apart from his valour and bravery, Shihab-ud-din also possesses the essential qualities of a

statesman. He is honest, sincere and straightforward. He likes Tughlaq as an idealist; he treats the step-mother of the Sultan most respectfully.

Ratansingh is Shihab-ud-din's adopted brother. On his request Ratansingh goes to join the battle for the Sultan. And Ratansingh is put in the front. Perhaps as Ratansingh puts to him, "the Sultan's aim was to get him killed." Ratansingh tells him that in the state the weakest back is bearing the heaviest burden of the taxes. Shihab-ud-din learns from him the harrowing tale of the murder of Sheikh-Imam-ud-din. Shihab-ud-din is struck with deep pain. He also informs him that all the Amirs in Delhi are unhappy with the King's decision to shift the capital to Daulatabad. Ratansingh takes him to the meeting of the rebel Amirs. It is during this meeting with Amirs that Shihab-ud-din realizes the gravity of the situation. He makes his stand very clear that he is an outsider in Delhi and he has nothing to do with court politics and conspiracies. A holy man, Sheikh-Shams-ud-din Tajuddarfim implores him in the name of Allah that it is his duty as a Muslim to protest the religious rights of the people and their faith. The King is a danger to leaders and poses a serious threat to Islam. They finally convince Shihab-ud-din that as a Muslim it is his duty to support their cause.

The simple and honest Shihab-ud-din falls a prey to the conspiracy and agrees the plan of murdering the Sultan during prayer. Ratansingh's father is killed treacherously by Shihab-ud-din's father and so in order to take revenge of the death of the father Ratansingh writes a letter to the Sultan all about the treacherous moves of the Amir and Shihab-ud-din. All the Amirs are over taken and killed and Shihab is mercilessly stabbed by the Sultan.

### **Minor Characters**

There are six minor characters in *Tughlaq*.

- 1) Aazam
- 2) Step-mother
- 3) Barani
- 4) Sardar Ratansingh
- 5) Sheikh Shams-ud-din Tajuddarfim
- 6) Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid

## **1. Aazam**

Like Aziz, Aazam too plays an important role in enriching the subplot. Like his friend, he is a simple washerman. Since he cannot find any other profession or occupation, he has taken to pick-pocketing. It is not his habit. It is his occupation. He earns enough money by stealing. He meets his friend Aziz, disguised as a Brahmin and both use various ways to pile money. At first they go on harassing the people on the road to Daulatabad and later murdering and killing and counterfeiting money. Aazam is fed up not only with pick-pocketing but also with the bloody work. He has seen enough corpses. He finds the streets of the city littered with dead bodies, corpses and flies. He is completely bored with this bloody life and is fed up with 'these games'. He wants to live an ordinary life of a common man. He longs to have 'a nice home, till a farm and live happily' kind of a life. Like all other Muslims, Aazam has no love for the Hindus. He calls them infidels and their dress is ungodly to him.

Aazam has no opinion of his about the Sultan. He calls him mad as others call him. He is frightened to see the Sultan in the garden digging his fingers in the piles of copper coins.

Aazam remains with Aziz till his last moment and provides the comic atmosphere in the play. Only in the first and the last action of Aziz, he is not a participant. In all other deeds which are performed by Aziz to realize his ambition, he is an active partner. He lives to help Aziz in all the wrongs he commits and dies to escape the punishment by the Sultan. He is a commoner with the strength and weakness, the vices and virtues of a common man. He is a foil to Aziz.

## **2. Step-Mother**

The step-mother of Tughlaq is the only female character of importance in the play. The mother of Sultan does not play any part. In the words of Sultan himself, "She won't talk to me now – not because father died but because my brother died in that accident. He was more amenable to her whims and he would have made a better king for her."

The step-mother is much concerned about the health and welfare of Tughlaq. She is worried about his sleepless nights. She tells Barani about her concern for Muhammad: “I am worried about him. You know what he is like. He is such an intelligent boy and he works so hard for the people. He doesn’t even go to bed these days. But he is so impulsive – and when he gets into one of his moods. I don’t know what he’ll do next.” She does not like many of Tughlaq’s advisers. She only trusts Barani and requests him not to leave the Sultan. She abhors killing. She thinks that Najib is responsible for all the killings in the state and all the maladministration.

After having learnt about the murders of Imam-ud-din and Shihab-ud-din, she manages the murder of Najib and owns it before Tughlaq who is shocked. He gives order for her being sent to prison and stoned to death.

She has an important role to play in both the plot structure and thematic complexity. The relationship between Tughlaq and his step-mother is very delicately balanced between affection and distrust. Nowhere in the encounters between Tughlaq and the Queen is it suggested that Tughlaq is willing to share his views with the Queen on important affairs of the state.

### **3. Barani**

Barani is Muhammad’s court historian and, like the step-mother and Najib, the Sultan’s confidant and adviser. Barani is a contrast to Najib. Najib is a politician, Barani is a historian. He is only “interested in playing chess with the shadows of the dead.” He is a scholar like Tughlaq and is always engrossed in book. The historian authored *Tarikh-i-firuz Shahi*. A native of Baran near Bulandshawr in Uttar Pradesh, Barani is privileged to spend seven years of Muhammad’s reign in his company. Barani has seen history literally taking shape before his eyes by witnessing the disintegration of the personality of a learned Sultan to a dazed, bewildered and a broken man.

Barani like Najib is the favourite of the Sultan but unlike Najib he is an idealist and is not deft in statecraft. His opinions are very different from those of Najib who has greater influence on Sultan. Barani is a ‘good’ man and sees goodness in everyone unless proved otherwise. He is not suspicious of anybody as Najib is. He does not spy nor wants to be spied upon.

Barani and Najib do not see eye to eye with each other. Barani says, “I am not jealous of Najib and I admire his integrity. But sometimes I am, bothered by his

influences on the Sultan.” Barani is very moderate and temperate. He does not want violence. He praises the Sultan’s generous and kind deed and does not approve of his killings and murders. When the Amirs and Shihab-ud-din at the prayer time in Darbar-i-khas drew out daggers to kill the Sultan, Barani is very much frightened. When Sultan stabs Shihab-ud-din and in frenzy goes on stabbing him and hits out at Shihab-ud-din’s dead body, he is horrified and cries, “yours majesty, ‘he is dead.’” He wants the Sultan to refrain.

Barani like a true friend and adviser tells the Sultan:

“Your Majesty, there was a time when you believed in love, in peace and in God. What has happened to those ideals? You don’t let your subjects pray. You torture them for the smallest offence, hang them on suspicion. Why this bloodshed? Please stop it and I promise your majesty something better will emerge out of it.”

Barani seeks Sultan’s permission to leave the palace on the pretext of attending his mother’s funeral. As he prepares to leave, Muhammad requests him to be kind to him when he passed his “final judgment”. But he finds himself unable to stem the tide against the Sultan and decides to abandon his company.

Barani stands for the virtues of life.

#### **4. Sardar Ratansingh**

Sardar Ratansingh is the adopted brother of Shihab-ud-din. He is a great intriguer and a cheat. He can never forget that Shihab’s father killed his father by treachery and usurped his kingdom. He wants to avenge the murder of his father and so he leaks out the conspiracy of the Amirs against the Sultan and gets them including Shihab-ud-din killed. But like a coward he flies away not to be found anywhere.

Ratansingh does not like the Sultan and calls him “an honest scoundrel” who enjoys killing the people for his own ends. He wants Shihab-ud-din to lead the revolt against the Sultan.

Ratansingh is a coward. He is a treacherous man with no scruples. He betrays his own adopted brother. His is dishonest and liable to be hated. Neither the audience nor the reader can have only sympathy for him. He plays a minor role in the play but he represents quite appropriately and effectively the element of courtly intrigue.

#### **4. Sheikh Shams-ud-din Tajuddarfim**

The Sheikh is a holy man from Delhi. He is quite influential both amongst the masses and the Amirs of Tughlaq's court. The Sheikh holds that as a king Tughlaq has been systematically handlelling and victimizing the clergy. The Amirs seek the support of Sheikh-Shams-ud-din about the legitimacy of their resistance. He claims that Tughlaq has turned into a tyrant and is crushing the faithful to the dust. In order to save faith and restore to Islamic order the King needs to be dispensed with Shihab-ud-din is an honest and a simple man. He is easily turned into the trap laid by the Sheikh's eloquence.

The conspiracy is ultimately exposed and the Sheikh is killed along with all the Amirs.

#### **5. Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid**

Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid is a holy man and a descendant of the holy Khalif from Arabia. Abbasid wishes to come to Delhi and Tughlaq wants to use this opportunity to appease the masses and their matters of religion. He declares to restore public prayers under the holy guidance of Ghiyas-ud-din. Tughlaq intelligently plans Ghiyas-ud-din's visit. But Aazam and Aziz discover that Ghiyas-ud-din is a poor wretch and is visiting Delhi in order to seek the Sultan's patronage and to make a fortune. Aziz traps the holy man at the opportunate time, robs him of his robe and turban and adepts a new identity. They fool the King easily and the King, publicly bows down before the holy man thinking that he is the descendant of the Khalif.

#### **2.5.1 Check Your Progress:**

##### **I] Fill in the blanks:**

- 1) Sultan loves to play \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Aziz first poses as Vishnu Prasad, a Brahmin and then as \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ works as Tughlaq's envoy of peace.
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_ is the Prince of Sampanshahr.
- 5) Najib is killed by the \_\_\_\_\_

##### **II] Answer the following questions with one word/phrase/sentence each.**

- 1) What virtues does Tughlaq possess?

- 2) Why does the Sultan trust Najib?
- 3) What is Aazam's profession?
- 4) Why did Najib give up Hinduism?
- 5) How does Tughlaq treat Sheikh-Imam-ud-din?

### 2.5.2 Terms to Remember:

- **Aziz** - A professional thief, disguises first as Vishnu Prasad and later as Ghiyas-ud-din
- **Aazam** - Aziz's friend
- **Abbasid** - A holy man and the descendant of Khalif
- **Ain-ul-Mulk** - Companion of Tughlaq from childhood and Governor of Avadh
- **Barani** - A historian and an adviser to the King
- **Imam-ud-din** - Muslim scholar and religious leader
- **Muhammad Tughlaq** - Hero of the play, a Muslim Emperor who ruled India in the fourteenth century
- **Muhammad Najib** - The Vizier or Chief Minister of Tughlaq
- **Ratansingh** - An adopted brother of Shihab-ud-din
- **Shams-ud-din** - Sheikh Shams-ud-din Tajuddarfim an old Sheikh at Delhi
- **Shihab-ud-din** - The Prince of Sampenshahr
- **Step-Mother** - Tughlaq's step-mother

### 2.6 Structure and Plot Construction:

The plot of *Tughlaq* can, by no means, be called Aristotelian. The playwright has flouted the unities of time and place. The action of place takes place first of all in Delhi in the year 1327, then on the road from Delhi to Daulatabad and lastly in and around the fort at Daulatabad five years later. The unity of action implies that all episodes in the play must be knit together to form the whole. Not a single episode or incident can be removed from the structure without a loss to the beauty of the plot. In *Tughlaq* there are many superfluous incidents. The episode of Aziz and the Hindu

woman and also of Aziz and the man and woman with six illegal children are incidents are superfluous though they provide dramatic relief. In a tragedy of intrigue that *Tughlaq* is, there are several murders taking place on stage as well as off stage and the sub-plot of Aziz and Aazam has been included to provide some relief amid the grim happenings around.

In *Tughlaq*, however, both incidents and situation are correlated with the characters. Events and incidents which originate from the paradoxical actions of the protagonist and his opponents have been integrated into an artistic whole. To quote Karnad, "The play was deliberately written in the convention of the company Natak."

Karnad in constructing the play has taken resource to much reporting than presenting action on the stage. The characters are shown conversing with one another and giving information about patricide and fratricide by the Sultan about the death of Sheikh Imam-ud-din and thousands of men and women on their way to Daulatabad and also about the murder of Najib, the Sultan's political adviser. Only the gruesome murder of the trusted lieutenant Shihab-ud-din is enacted on the stage by the Sultan. The step-mother of the Sultan is shown being dragged by the soldiers for causing the murder of Najib. The Khalif's descendant is murdered by Aziz during his hide out in the hills.

The reported and the staged murders constituting the very fabric of the play make it a horrible tragedy. Karnad weaves the story of Aziz and Aazam with the main tragic story of Tughlaq, the idealist monarch, so cleverly that one gets time to breathe before and after each murder. The playwright makes Tughlaq aware of the irony of his life when Aziz, the only character in the play who has skillfully used all the schemes of the Sultan for his own designs, kills Ghiyas-ud-din and comes in the guise as a holy messenger of peace. The irony is deeply tragic.

It is peculiar with Karnad that he weaves romance and tragedy together in *Tughlaq*. The play begins with an adventure of Aziz disguising himself as a Brahmin to test the justice and equality of the Sultan and ends with another adventure of Aziz again disguising himself. The adventure is disguise, no doubt, creates surprise in the first scene but later on this becomes the source of irony in the play. First it surprises the audience and the actors but at the end it makes the Sultan and audience feel the tragic irony of life.

Karnad has taken care to create suspense in the play. In developing the plot of *Tughlaq*, Karnad uses suggestive method. Suggestions as to what is going on to happen in future are thrown here and there in the play. Aziz's telling Aazam that he does not intend to be a Brahmin all his life comes true when at the end of the play, he appears as a Muslim saint from Baghdad. The step-mother's hatred for Najib results into Najib's murder.

Karnad has skillfully woven the plot and knit together the comic story of Aziz and the tragic tale of the life of Muhammad. By his use of irony, parallelism, contrast, romance, suspense and the unexpected denouement, the playwright has succeeded in making the play structurally perfect.

### **Thematic and Structural Unity of the Scene**

The action of the play takes place in a period of approximately five years. It begins in 1327 and end in 1332. The action takes place at three different locals: first in Delhi, then on the road from Delhi to Daulatabad and lastly around the fort of Daulatabad. There are 13 scenes elaborately dramatizing the various phases of the life a medieval Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq. Tughlaq's rise to power, his conflict with ulema, the noblemen and finally the collapse of his dreams are systematically and effectively worked out in brilliant theatrical divisions.

In the very opening of the play an old man and a young man discuss the political situation in the country. Their discussion brings into focus the contrast between the present administration of Tughlaq and the administration of the past Sultans. Whenever necessary, Karnad uses voices of common people to highlight the basic issues of the play. The role of the announcer also helps in bringing into focus Tughlaq's administrative and political ideals.

The shift from scene I to scene II is an effective dramatic strategy that structures the dramatic conflict between the public and the private.

Karnad's success as a playwright lies in his ability to build up dramatic tension around characters like Sheikh-Imam-ud-din, Najib voices his apprehension about the Sheikh's presence in Delhi in scene II and in scene III, Karnad exploits the dramatic potentials of those apprehensions to the fullest extent in the next scene.

The first scene introduces Aziz and in the subsequent scenes Aziz simply disappears. He reappears in scene VII at a camp on the Delhi-Daulatabad route. His

last appearance in the last three scenes as Holiness Ghiyas-ud-din Abbasid is extraordinarily theatrical in its impact.

Najib is a practical and knave politician and Barani, a historian. The dramatic intermixing of history, religion and politics is effectively achieved through Najib and Barani. The theme and the structure of the play achieve dramatic unity through certain carefully executed theatrical devices. The contrast between idealism and reality, political designs and historical facts, the conflict between religion and state and the tension between the public and the private are structurally bound together. *Tughlaq's* thematic concerns have a universal significance.

### 2.6.1 Check Your Progress:

#### I] Fill in the blanks:

- 1) The action of the play begins in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 2) *Tughlaq* was written in the convention of the \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 3) *Tughlaq* is a \_\_\_\_\_ play.
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_ is the central symbol used in *Tughlaq*.
- 5) The economy of the state is ruined because of the introduction of \_\_\_\_\_ currency.

#### II] Answer the following questions with one word/phrase/sentence each.

- 1) Where does the action of *Tughlaq* take place?
- 2) How many scenes are there in *Tughlaq*?
- 3) What is the dramatic function of common man?
- 4) How is the contemporary context woven into *Tughlaq*?
- 5) What roles do Aziz and Aazam play?

### 2.6.2 Terms to Remember:

- **Daulatabad** - Also called Deogiri. Tughlaq decided to transfer the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad
- **Paradox** - A statement that says something opposite to what is meant or intended.

- **Mecca** - The birth place of Prophet Muhammad, a place of pilgrimage for Muslims.
- **Kanauj** - A city near Kanpur in U.P., where the battle was fought between Ain-ul-Mulk and Tughlaq.

## 2.7 Critical Aspects of the Play

### Themes

#### 1) **Kingship**

Karnad's *Tughlaq* is a carefully executed play depicting the life of a king which is full of ups and downs. It has tremendous theatrical potential. The play offers fresh psychological insights into the character of Tughlaq. He is presented as a highly learned man and an absolutely unrelenting ruler. He is a visionary king, who wants to work for the welfare of the masses. He wants to achieve peace, prosperity and harmony in his state. But the people around him fail to understand his vision and they go to the extent of conspiring against him. He defeats Ain-ul-Mulk by political treachery and gets Sheikh-Imam-ud-din killed using intrigue.

Kingship is an important motif in the play. In order to protect his kingship he becomes a tyrant but kingship is a burden and Tughlaq learns his lessons in kingship a hard way.

#### 2) **Political Allegory**

Allegories are written to give a moral lesson to the people. It is an art of saying one thing in the guise of another. Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, Spencer's *Faery Queen*, Addison's *Vision of Mirza* Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* are some of the important allegories in English. These allegories satirize the social and political evils in the society.

*Tughlaq* has a very great puzzling quality which cannot be reduced to the minimum. This quality comes from the ambiguities of the character of Tughlaq who is the dominating personality of the play. All the other characters are the dramatized aspects of Tughlaq's personality. The play is also notable for the symmetries of the game of chess. The theme of disguise and ironic success of Aziz runs parallel to the story of *Tughlaq*. The character of Tughlaq is related to philosophical questions on

the nature of man and the destiny of a whole kingdom which is controlled and swayed by a dreamer and a visionary like Tughlaq.

According to U. A. Anantha Murthy the play symbolizes the situation in the country in the 1960's; it "reflects as no other play perhaps does the political mood of disillusionment that followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country."

### **3) Symbolism**

Critics have made detailed analysis of the play, paying special attention to the symbolism of the game of chess, the theme of disguise, the ironic success of Aziz whose amazing story runs parallel to Muhammad's and the dualism of man and hero in Muhammad which is the source of the entire tragedy.

Chess is the most important symbol used by Karnad. Muhammad doesn't play chess as a pastime; he plays it to solve intricate problems. Through chess Karnad has highlighted Muhammad's manipulative skills in the dealing with his adversaries.

Use of prayer is also a symbol in the play. Tughlaq killed his father and brother while they were praying. The Courtiers conspire to murder Tughlaq at prayer. The use of prayer for murder is reminiscent to what Tughlaq himself did to kill his father and brother. The prayer was symbolic of the fact that life is corrupted at the very source. When Tughlaq's step-mother is ordered to be stoned to death for getting Najib poisoned, Muhammad falls on his knees and prays to God to "have pity on me. I have no one but You now." Tughlaq stops prayer for five years in his kingdom. At the end when the Sultan seeks the blessing of Ghiyas-ud-din-Abbasid to start prayers in his kingdom after a lapse of five years. The people are starving and they want food and not prayer. Ironically the Sultan fails to wake up in time for prayer at the end of the play because he is dazed.

The python symbol used to describe the road from Delhi to Daulatabad in scene VIII is indicative of Muhammad's barbarity and inhumanity. The python also symbolizes the increased ferocity and blood thirstiness of Muhammad. It symbolizes the complete degeneration of his personality.

Daulatabad, earlier known as Deogiri, is a Hindu city. Muhammad wants to move his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad not only in the interest of a centralized and effective administration but also to develop the city as a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity. But instead, it leads to rioting and bloodshed.

Aziz and Aazam, the two petty thieves and timeservers symbolize opportunistic and unprincipled people who exploit liberal ideas and welfare schemes of the Sultan to line their own pockets. They are true of all times and climes. They are unscrupulous people who exploit the people's misery and sufferings to their own advantage.

But this world revolves round one central figure of the hero in *Tughlaq* which is the source of the entire tragedy. The play gets "an elusive and haunting quality" from the character of Muhammad, who has been realized in great psychological depth.

### **Tughlaq and Nehru Era in India**

Girish Karnad uses mythical and historical episodes to highlight problems which confront the modern Indian at various levels. *Tughlaq* is a story of Mughal emperor in Medieval India that draws striking parallels between what happened more than six centuries back and what happened in Nehru Era.

In one of the articles Karnad himself has admitted that the twenty years of Muhammad's rule are in many respects similar to the seventeen years of the Nehru era. *Tughlaq* both in history and in the drama enters the stage as one of the most of intelligent monarchs who sat on the throne of Delhi. He was an idealist and a visionary who planned much and planned boldly. But most of his plans came to an ignominious end. We can see in the play how an extremely capable man disintegrates before our very eyes. *Tughlaq*'s idealism is handicapped by the flaws in his own character. We find him impulsive, impatient, insensitive to cruelty and violence and always cocksure that for all the problems confronting the state and the society he alone has the correct answer.

After India gained her freedom, hopes rose very high both in the country and abroad that India was all set for a glorious epoch of progress and power. Nehru's idealism of a 'One World' with each sovereign Nation willingly co-operating in the cause of universal peace, appealed strongly to every section of mankind in a war-weary world. Nehru championed the cause of the politically subject peoples both in Asia and Africa. He came to be looked as the political conscience of the world. He put India very prominently on the political map of the world. His plea for intelligent and sensitive co-operation between the haves and the have nots roused sympathetic responses in every part of the earth. This is echoed by *Tughlaq* who pleads for equi-handed justice towards all his subjects whatever be the religion to which they belong.

The internationalism of Nehru provoked strong opposition from many of the political and religious parties in India. There was a hardcore feeling that the welfare of India was being sacrificed at the altar of Internationalism. Though the outside world accepts Nehru as the voice of India, within the country itself, he did not get the willing co-operation he had budgeted for. We find in the play Tughlaq shaking himself free from the shackles of the Koran, the Ulema and the Sheikhs and dreaming in the light shed by the Greek philosophers and oriental mystics. This rouses the ire of the leaders of Islamic religion. The tirade of Sheikh-Imam-ud-din and the conspiracy headed by Shihab-ud-din are pioneers to the dissatisfaction and mistrust created by the Sultan's policy and ideals. Nehru the intellectual and dreamer, was also in a similar position pathetically unable to have his ideas accepted wholeheartedly by the other political and religious parties.

Tughlaq shifts his capital to Daulatabad. He is also quite adamant on the issue of token currency of copper. Nehru's industrial policy at the cost of agricultural development had been a striking resemblance to Tughlaq's fatal schemes. Agricultural front remained undeveloped; as a result there was food shortage in India. Daulatabad and the copper coinage sealed Muhammad's fate. Kashmir and the Pakistan were legacies of Nehru's internationalism which in practice often meant vacillation in foreign policy.

The insurrection of a trusted Ain-ul-Mulk in Tughlaq's case is on a par with the attack by the trusted China on India. As the Ain-ul-Mulk problem is not satisfactorily solved in the play, the Chinese problem also hangs as the Sword of Democles on India's foreign policy.

Tughlaq was able to fashion an Empire which rivaled in vastness the Ashokan Empire. Similarly Nehru was able to project India on the world map to an extent no ruler of this land has been able to do before in history. But the empire of Tughlaq disintegrated and similarly the reorganization of the states on the linguistic basis failed as today the sense of Indianness has practically disappeared and only linguistic labels stick.

A major reason for Tughlaq's failure was that he was a lone wolf. He was not amenable to advice and his will was law. Nehru also was, as biographers have pointed out, a lonely man taking no one into his confidence. Neither Tughlaq nor Nehru believed in joint planning and joint responsibility.

But Tughlaq was a dictator and Nehru, the Prime Minister of a democratic country.

## 2.8 Answers for the Check Your Progress:

### ★ Check Your Progress (2.3.1)

- I] 1) 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1938 2) *Yayati* 3) 1964 4) Daulatabad 5) *Yayati*
- II] 1) A. *Yayati* B. *Tughlaq* C. *Hayavadana* D. *Naga-Mandala* E. *Taledanda* F. *Agni Mattu Male* G. *The Dreams of Tipu Sultan* H. *Odakalu Bimba*
- 2) The theme of *Tughlaq* is tragic end of an over ambitious, yet considerably virtuous king with all his dreams and aspirations.
- 3) Tughlaq decided to shift his capital to Daulatabad to centralize administration and strengthen the bond between the Muslims and the Hindus.
- 4) *Odakalu Bimba* is inspired by T.S.Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*.
- 5) Karnad was influenced by Indian Mythology, History, Traditional Plays, Folktales and Western Playwrights.

### ★ Check Your Progress (2.4.1)

- I] 1) Jiziya 2) Aziz 3) Ratansingh 4) Abbasid Ghiyas-ud-din  
5) Sheikh-Imam-ud-din
- II] 1) Tughlaq fools Sheikh Imam-ud-din by first inviting the people to a public address by the holy man and later prohibiting them from attending it.
- 2) The King makes following decisions
- 1) Abolition of Jiziya Tax
- 2) Introduction of Copper Currency
- 3) Shifting of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad
- 3) Barani is a historian in the play.
- 4) Tughlaq kills Shihab-ud-din because of his betrayal.
- 5) The King orders stoning of his step-mother because she is involved in the killing of Najib.

★ **Check Your Progress (2.5.1)**

- I] 1) Chess 2) Ghiyas-ud-din 3) Sheikh-Imam-ud-din 4) Shihab-ud-din  
5) Step-mother
- II] 1) Tughlaq has following virtues
- 1) He is visionary
  - 2) He is well read
  - 3) He is compassionate
  - 4) He has tremendous political power
- 2) Tughlaq trusts Najib because he is politically wise and loyal.
- 3) Aazam's profession is pick pocketing.
- 4) Najib gave up Hinduism because according to him Hinduism talks only of the individual soul and not of the suffering of the world.
- 5) Tughlaq indulges in treachery to dispense with Sheikh Imam-ud-din

★ **Check Your Progress (2.6.1)**

- I] 1) 1327 2) Company Natak 3) History 4) Chess 5) Copper
- II] 1) The Action of *Tughlaq* takes place of three different locals – First in Delhi, then on the road from Delhi to Daulatabad and then in and around the fort of Daulatabad.
- 2) There are 13 scenes in *Tughlaq*.
  - 3) The common men highlight basic issues of the play.
  - 4) Human lust for power and politics around is a contemporary issue. Karnad uses those issues in *Tughlaq*.
  - 5) Aziz and Aazam play the roles of akara and makara from the conventional Natak performances.

**2.9 Exercises:**

**A) Question for long answers:**

- 1) Assess and evaluate *Tughlaq* as a history play.

- 2) Write a critical note on the structure and plot construction of Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*.
- 3) Write a critical note on Symbolism in *Tughlaq*.
- 4) "Torn between the real and the ideal" how does Girish Karnad portray Muhammad Tughlaq in his play?
- 5) Discuss Karnad's *Tughlaq* as a political allegory.
- 6) Discuss *Tughlaq* as a play of intrigues.

**B) Short Notes:**

- 1) Ending of the Play
- 2) Sheikh-Imam-ud-din
- 3) Aziz and Aazam
- 4) Compare and contrast the characters of Najib and Barani
- 5) Element of humour and satire in *Tughlaq*

**2.10 References for further study:**

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## Unit-3

### Trends in Modern Indian English Short Stories Mahashweta Devi - *After Kurukshetra : Three Stories*

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#### Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Trends in Modern Indian English Short Stories
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  - 3.6.1 Check Your Progress
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- 3.8 Summary
- 3.9 Answers to check Your Progress
- 3.10 Exercises

### 3.0 Objectives:

After completing the study of this short story you will be able to:

- know about the life and works of Mahashweta Devi
- know about different perspective of *the Mahabharata*.
- know about the Rajavritta and Lokavritta women's point of view
- learn about various characters and themes of the stories.

### 3.1 Introduction

This unit begins with the discussion Trends in Modern Indian English Stories the life and works of the author and studies the text in terms of its plot, characters, themes, etc.

### 3.2 Trends in Modern Indian English Short Stories

According to R. K. Narayan material for writing stories in India is sufficient. Regarding this he once said:

“At the end of every novel I have vowed never to write another one- propitious moment to attempt a short or two. I enjoy writing a short story unlike the novel, which emerges from relevant, minutely worked out detail, the short story can be brought into existence through a mere suggestion of detail, the focus being kept on a central idea of climax. The material available to a story writer in India is limitless. Within a broad climate of inherited culture, there are endless variations: every individual differs from every other individual, not only economical but in outlook, habits and day to day philosophy. It is stimulating to live in a society that is not standardized or mechanized, and is free from monotony. Under such conditions the writer has only to look out of the window to pick a character (and thereby a story).”

This is true with Indian English short story writers. The writers have considered all the issues of Indian society for the story.

Though Indian English short story owes its origin to Kamala Sathianandan's Stories from *Indian Christian Life* published in 1898, the real beginning of this genre was made in 1930s by Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, who are the pioneers of novel and short story in Modern Indian English Literature. These writers were influenced by various western masters. Mulk Raj Anand was influenced by

Maupassant, Frank O' Connor, Theodore Powys, etc. R. K. Narayan was influenced by Chekov and Raja Rao took inspiration from French writers. Even though they took inspiration from western writers, they focus on Indian myths, epics, folk tales and ancient tales.

After 1930s we have a number of Indian English short story writers who have contributed to this genre and made it popular among the readers. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, K. A. Abbas, Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Manoj Das, Ruskin Bond, Sunita Jain, Kamala Das, Keki N. Daruwala, Jayanta Mahapatra, Shashi Deshpande, Vikram Chandra, Shiv K. Kumar, etc are the prominent writers who have written short stories in English language.

All the contemporary issues are reflected in modern Indian English short stories. Almost all the aspects of life of Indian people are depicted by the short story writers. It includes themes like myths, superstitions, ghost, working class, loss of traditional values, corruption in public life, psychological issues, loneliness, human relationship, science fiction, culture, customs, traditions, feminism, rituals, love, sex, death, environment issues etc. The change in our society in terms of urbanization and industrialization becomes a favourite theme of the writers. The stories are rooted in our tradition and culture.

Myths play vital role in the plot construction and stories are built around them. R. K. Narayan, Manoj Das, and others have employed national myths in their stories. Myths give a didactic touch to the theme. Along with myths, short story writers also use anecdotes to give moral and philosophical touch to their stories. The myths are the favorite genre of contemporary writers which adopt different approaches and different styles. The myths are retold from individual's point of view. Retelling the Hindu myths played an important role in modern Indian English literature. Myths, as Nietzsche suggested, worked as cultural foundations that saves the society from fragmentation.

Loneliness is the major theme in literature all over the world and Indian literature is also not exception. People can experience loneliness for many reasons and many things are associated with it. Personal and social things are responsible for the loneliness. The feelings of abandonment, rejection, depression, insecurity, anxiety, hopelessness, unworthiness, meaninglessness, resentment, etc are the causes

of loneliness. These majority causes are reflected in the short stories of Anita Desai, Sunita Jain, Gita Hariharan and other writers.

Psychology is an academic and applied discipline which does the scientific study of mental functions and behavior. Behaviorism became the dominant school of thought all over the world. This is reflected in the stories but comparatively less if the literature of Europe is considered. Indian writers have concentrated on the internal conflict of the characters. In the modern complex world man has lost the stability of the mind. These things are reflected in the stories of Anita Desai, Shiv K. Kumar and others.

The issue of feminism is discussed by many short story writers. The authors explore the treatment given by the male to the women in Indian society authentically.

The general attitude of male towards female, the exploitation and discrimination faced by female and other women issues are reflected in a numbers of Indian English short stories. All the writers have criticized patriarchy society. These things are reflected in the stories of Anita Desai, Sunita Jain, Kamala Das, ShashiDeshpande, and others. Dina Mehta has written from feminine sensibility. Besides this, there are stories which focus that lower class women who are doubly oppressed, firstly by the male sex and secondly by the higher class women. All these are the subjects of the Indian English short stories.

Superstition in the society has attracted the attention of the writers. Fantasy, folk, beliefs, and ghosts are employed as themes in the stories. The stories of Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond are particularly ghost stories. These stories take oneself into an imaginary world, where supernatural elements have a great sway over human life. Khushwant Singh explores superstitions and corruptions humorously and makes the people think on it seriously. He considers that lack of education is responsible for the superstition.

The ghost stories are very fearful. In these stories, the protagonist, deal with the ghost, evils, witches, etc. The ghost sometimes become friendly to the narrator or the protagonist and passes the messages. Peepal tree, graveyard or deserted place is believed to be the residence of such spirits. The other features of the behavior of the ghost are that their presence is associated with the howling of dogs, weeping and cries. The mysterious atmosphere and the strange happenings also are associated

with the ghosts. The stories about ghosts have a great charm and appeal for the readers.

Environment is the key for existence of life on the earth. Without it, there can be no life on earth. The natural environment is a free gift of nature and we need to conserve it for the benefit of life in future. Literature and arts have been drawn to portrayal of physical environment and human-environment interactions. The world has suffered a lot from global ecological crisis mostly due to human atrocities on nature. So literature cannot turn its face away from this. Ruskin Bond satires on the unwise decision of the authorities to cut the trees and build roads and buildings in their place. He focuses on the lack of understanding of the importance of trees to maintain ecological balance. Like Ruskin Bond other short story writers have developed their stories from the ecological point of view. The urban issues like discrimination, inequality, injustice, poverty, working class oppression, suicide, quarrel etc. are discussed by the authors in last two decades. Manoj Das, Arun Joshi, Attia Hosain, Raja Rao, Jayanta Mahapatra etc. have written on the issues of dehumanization from the urban areas.

The conflict between tradition and modernity is the significant theme of many short stories. There are some corresponding forces operating which have placed the Indian society in a dilemma and this dilemma has become the important theme of many modern Indian English short stories. The authors have narrated the experiences associated with different kind of people, and the environment in their stories which display the Indian tradition, value, beliefs, as well as social, religious and economical problems related to life. The stories are focused on every aspect of the reality of life. They have concentrated on both- positive and negative aspect of Indian society. In order to create impressions on the readers mind and make the writing effective the authors have used symbols, images, satire, irony, and other devices.

### **3.3 Mahashweta Devi: Life and Works**

Mahashweta Devi was born on 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1926 at Dhaka, Balgladesh. She was also social activist, who worked for the rights and empowerment of the tribal people. She is considered as one of India's most radical writers. She wrote novels, collections of short stories, dramas and essays. *Hajar Churashir Maa*, *Rudali*, and *Aranyer Adhikar* are her notable literary works. Many of her literary works are translated in other languages. She came from culturally distinguished upper class

background. Her father, Manish Ghatak, was a popular poet and novelist. Devi's mother was also a writer and a social worker.

Her works depicts the suffering of ordinary people. Her prime concern is with the unprivileged castes and tribes of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. Her close association with the downtrodden made her realize that even after independence; people are still deprived of the basic necessities like food, water and houses. She has also contributed for the Culture Studies. She regularly contributed to several literary magazines. She spent days and months living with the people she wrote about. Some of her books have been converted to film, which depict the lives of the poor and untouchable people. She raised a voice against the discrimination of tribal people in India. Devi died of multiple organ failure on 28 July 2016 in Kolkata.

### **Awards**

- 2006: Padma Vibhushan – the second highest civilian award from the Government of India
- 1986: Padmashri for Social Work
- 1997: Raman Magsaysay Award – Journalism, Literature, and the Creative Communication Arts
- 1979: Sahitya Akademi Award (Bengali): – for *Aranyer Adhikar* (novel)
- 1996: Jnanpith Award – the highest literary award from the Bharatiya Jnanpith
- 2007: SAARC Literary Award
- 2009: Shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize
- 2010: Yashwantrao Chavan National Award
- 2011: Banga Bibhushan – the highest civilian award from the Government of West Bengal

### **Major works**

Devi's major works are as listed below:

#### **Novels:**

- *Hajar Churashir Maa (Mother of 1084)* 1974



- iii) From which class Devi comes?
- iv) Who was the father of Devi?
- v) When was *Jhansi Rani* published?

### 3.3.2 Terms to Remember:

- **Activist** : someone who is socially, political active
- **Untouchables**: Belonging to the lowest social and ritual class.
- **Discrimination**: unfair treatment of a person or group on the basis of prejudice

### 3.4 Introduction to the Text:

*After Kurukshetra: Three Stories* was originally written in Bengali by Mahashweta Devi and translated in English by Anjum Katyal in 2005. This is a short collection of fiction set in the time of *the Mahabharat*, which makes the reader think about those victims of the war that every one has forgotten – women.

*After Kurukshetra: Three Stories* is a collection of three stories, each of which centers around women in the aftermath of the Kurukshetra War from *the Mahabharat*. In the stories, Mahasweta Devi speaks of women from a woman's point of view, in a woman's language, marked by thoughts and feelings. She weaves three stories with the ancient epic *Mahabharat* as her source, and the battle of Kurukshetra as a central motif. We look at events from the eyes of marginalized, dispossessed women and dalits. This Kurukshetra is not a legendary dharmayuddha of popular imagination but rather a cold – blooded power game sacrificing countless human beings. Their eyes condemn the wanton waste and inhumanity of war. Mahasweta Devi does not just move aside the curtains of mainstream perspectives to show readers the "other" side of the Kurukshetra war — the women's side — but goes further into this shadow realm to show us the "other" women hidden away there — vibrant, strong-willed, strong-charactered, "common" women, alive with purpose and capable of doing, as the royal women are not.

Marginalization is the process in which individuals or entire group of people are systematically deprived from various rights, opportunities and resources. In three stories, both the rajavritta and lokavritta women are marginalized. But lokavritta women are double oppressed. First by the male sex then by the women, who are considered to be of royal birth. The lokavritta belong to the vaishyas or shudras.

The first story, *The Five Women*, is a tale of five lower-caste war widows who are brought in as companions for the pregnant widow of Abhimanyu, the dead Pandava hero. The second short story *Kunti and the Nishadin* deals with a conveniently forgotten shameful act from the Pandavas' past. *Kunti and Nishadin* presents encounter between the Kshatriya queen and the Untouchable Nishadin. The story presents the different views of life perceived by two different women living in different world. The meeting with Nishadin opens Kunti's eyes towards the other side of life which she has never thought about. It leads Kunti to realize the severity of her sin and meaninglessness of the so called noble life at rajavritta.

The last story, *Souvali*, focuses on the Souvali, who was dasi of blind Dhritarashtra. She was forced to be sexual companion of Dhritarashtra. But she is never given the identity of a wife. Her son is the son of dasi and not the son of Dhritarashtra, even though he is the only living son after the Kurukshetra war. Souvali rebels when she was asked to perform the death rites of Dhritarashtra.

### 3.4.1 Check Your Progress

#### A. Choose the correct alternative

- i) *After Kurukshetra* was published in English.....
  - a) 2001                      b) 2002                      c) 2004                      d) 2005
- ii) *After Kurukshetra* was translated in English by.....
  - a) Anjum Katyal    b) Mandira Sengupta
  - c) Gayatri Spivak    d) Mahashweta Devi
- iii) *After Kurukshetra* has .....stories.
  - a) four                      b) two                      c) five                      d) three
- iv) The central motif of *After Kurukshetra* is.....
  - a) the battle of Kurukshetra      b) Kunti      c) Pandava      d) Kourava

### 3.4.2 Terms to Remember:

- **Central motif:** unifying idea repeated in literary work
- **legendary:** So celebrated as to have taken the nature of a legend, well known, popular

- **Dharmayuddha:** a war fought for dharma and good for all
- **Perspectives:** a way of regarding situations or topics, etc.

### 3.5 Summary of After Kurukshetra - Three Stories *The Five Women*

#### Summary

The first story *The Five Women* is the story of five lower class widows, whose husbands have been died in Kurukshetra war. The story begins after the Dharmayudha between Pandavas and Kauravas. Foot soldiers, from other small kingdoms, fought in the war for the Pandavas and Kauravas. Their duty was to protect the chariot mounted heroes. As they are without armour, they died in large numbers. The dead heroes of Kauravas and Pandavas are cremated by performing rituals. In contrast, the foot soldiers are buried in pyre, as they are common people. The Chandals, lower caste people, collect the wood to burn the pyre of dead bodies of foot soldiers. The five women, Godhumi, Gomati, Yamuna, Vitasta and Vipasha, observe the funeral pyre from the distance. They are searching the dead bodies of their husbands. These five women wail together with same voice 'hai, hai', as they keep on wailing for the loss of their husbands. They search the dead bodies of their husbands to perform the final ritual. But unfortunately, they do not find the bodies. Now they want to return home but could not, because the earth is hot and hard as rock due to the burning pyres. They have to wait till the earth cools down. While these five women are on the way back to home, Madraju, the senior servant, recognizes these women from Kurujangal region, as she belongs to the same region. She offers them the jobs as dasi. They do not agree to serve as dasis to the widow Uttara, wife of Abhimanyu. It is their self- respect. Madraja convinces them to work as companion of Uttara as she is pregnant and her condition is critical due to the death of Abhimanyu in the war. The five women agree to work as companion seeing the condition of Uttara. During the discussion about the war, Madraja talks in favour of war but the five women oppose her saying that the war was not a natural calamity on the other hand it is a war of greed.

Draupadi and Subhadra, mothers- in- law of Uttara, take care of Uttara thinking that her son will become the future king. To provide comfort to Uttara, they agree to appoint these five women as her companion. Uttara feels light hearted and comfortable in the company of the five women. They become good friends of Uttara. There is a common thread among them as they all are widows so, they could

accompany the royal widow not as servant, but as good friend. These five women behave as per their natural instinct and not as servants. Besides their collective effort to live in their own way, they also try to make Uttara feels their essence too.

Many days Uttara keeps herself aloof due to her grief but in the company of five women, she started to recover. The women deliberately discuss various issues in front of Uttara to keep her mind engage. They make Uttara to answer the riddles.

Yudhishthira is the king. All the wives of Kauravas are widows. Acharayas inflict rigorous rules of widowhood and young widows have to silently follow them. One day Kunti asks Draupadi, "Have you not been avenged in full?" She speaks on the terrible effect of the war and Draupadi remains silent. Now days, she remains silent. Subhadra laments on the critical situation. All the sons are dead and their fathers are alive. All the daughters-in-law have lost their husbands. She remembers Gandhari's words that Krishna Vasudeva is responsible for the war. Subhadra thinks regarding Uttara's pregnancy that it would be nice if it were a girl. If it is a boy, he too will go to war. Then Uttara asks many questions regarding five women to Subhadra. At the same time the women are singing song. Subhadra tells Uttara that they are singing a song of mourning. Another question troubles Subhadra. She is not confirm where the foot soldiers go - heaven or hell. She recommends Uttara to take rest.

As Uttara is pregnant, there is a discussion on the ritual of naming child in royal and common families. Uttara tells that it is a lengthy process. Pujas, yagnas, offerings to agni the elder males discussion, the priests study of the signs; the acharya draws up the horoscope. One of the women tells that men and women sing together in their community. Vipasha tells that men and women both protect the field. Women can use spear. Uttara is surprised to hear that like men, women do all the works. Madraja considers that these women are making Uttara restless. Uttara becomes angry and insist that the women should stay with her. Godhumi complains that no funeral rituals were conducted for the foot soldiers. Uttara asks her, why she cannot go back? The women tell Uttara about the critical situation of their region. There are no crops, no animals, no grains. All the rural system is collapsed. Then Godhumi criticizes that in royal family the women are treated subordinate. The widows of royal family are not allowed to laugh, talk loudly or to go outside. The women tell that all the rural system is stopped because all the men have joined the war. And still the environment is not favorable to return home. At the same time Subhadra enters and requests the women not to trouble Uttara as her baby will suffer.

She insists that all the widows must follow the example of Arya Kunti. In this world, widows have no right of happiness and she orders them to leave the palace. The women request her to allow them to stay for some time, as the condition of their way to villages is not favorable, the women request her to allow them to stay for some time.

All the women are discussing on the war. Members of royal family consider that dead heroes will go to heaven. But the five women reject the idea. While the discussion is going on, Godhumi hears the calling of chatak bird. All the five women become happy as the bird is the messenger of the monsoon. They tell Uttara that it is their time to leave. It rains. They tell Subhadra that the earth is cool now. They will depart. They will remarry. Vitasta has made toys for the baby of Uttara that she gives it to her. All the women depart from the palace.

Taking the sources from *Mahabharat*, Mahasweta Devi writes the story *The Five Women* through the angle of marginalized people. The women, in the story, represent two classes- Rajavrittis and Lokavrittis. The rajavrittis are the royal women living in the palace and the lokavrittis belong to the world of the common people (farmers and hunters). The story depicts the contrast life of royal and common people.

#### **Themes:**

**1) Cremation Ritual:** The dead heroes of the Kauravas and Pandavas are cremated by performing rituals while the foot soldiers were buried in pyres without performing any rituals. All the warriors from royal family had armour, but the foot soldiers were without armour and hence died in large numbers.

**2) Widows:** The widows of the common family wear black cloth. A plain black cloth is worn around their waist, covering their heads. They conduct themselves naturally. They get involved in various issues actively. The women of the royal family wear white cloth. They do not wear ornament. Their hair hangs heavily on their shoulders. They are not allowed to laugh. They are instructed to walk in a timid and hesitant manner. Subhadra orders that the rajavritta widows must follow the example set by Arya Kunti. The acharya instructs them the rigorous rules of widowhood.

There is no provision of remarriage in royal family, so the widows live unhappy life, while remarriage is common among the marginalized widows. The common

people think that they must live their life according to nature. It should continue with happiness. The five women say that they will remarry after returning to their native place. They consider that they should create life that's what nature teaches.

**3) Attitude:** Lokavritta women accept any child – male or female, whereas the royal family desires only for a male child. So the special attention is given to Uttara as she is pregnant, because male child will become king in future. When midwife assures a boy in Uttara's womb, Subhadra says, "It would be nice if it were a girl. If it's a boy, he too will go to war." War, according to the royal women, takes away lives of their male children. This attitude is developed temporary due to the terrible effect of the war, which they have experienced.

There is opposite attitude regarding pregnancy between royal and common people. The royal women take more care and rest during pregnancy. The common women consider pregnancy as a law of nature. They do not take rest, they are busy in daily work, which help for normal birth.

The attitude of the royal people towards the war is romantic. They believe that the dead heroes of war are destined to divyalok (heaven). They consider it dharmayudha or righteous war. But the attitude of the marginalized people is realistic. The five women oppose the view of royal people. Godhumi says, "No chariots came down from divyalok. They did not go to heaven". (16) She continues that the foot soldiers died fighting in the very same war, but no funeral rites was held for the souls. They do not see holiness in it. They see only greed for throne in it. The funeral song of the five women focuses the reality, "This war's turned villages into cremation grounds".

**4) Naming Ceremony:** There is a great difference in naming ceremonies of new born children between royal and marginalized family. The whole community gets involved in the naming ritual of common people. Grandparents choose the name. The baby is shaven, bathed in water and then wormed by the sun. Musicians play and women sing. The maternal uncle feeds the baby. The feast is given to the villagers. The naming ceremony in a royal family is a grand program. There are offerings to fire (Agni). The elder male members decide the name. The priest studies the signs and the acharya draws up the horoscope.

In the story the author has also depicted some minor differences in higher and lower class. The wedding in royal family is grand, which remembers life time, but in

marginalized people it is very simple. Uttara still remembers everything of her marriage. The way of living life of common people is according to nature. The five women worship nature and the Earth. They are very close to field, river, mountain, etc. They are familiar with birds and their characteristics, for example Godhumi immediately recognizes the calling of chatak bird and tells its characteristics - it will rain. But Uttara is not familiar with all these things. She has seen mountain ranges from the roof of her father's house. She has only memories of lakes mentioned by her nurse in her childhood. After her wedding she has not gone out of the palace. The five women hunt animals. They enjoy deer hunting and use war weapons like the spear. Thus the total story depicts the contrast life of the people of lokavrittas and rajavrittas.

Mahasweta Devi writes of unacknowledged voice of the society. The story, *The Five Women*, focuses on the women, who are considered insignificant or peripheral. Both the women, rajavritta and lokavritta, are marginalized, but the author points out that the lokavritta women are more oppressed. First by the male sex of the rajavritta, who take them as dasis, then by the rajavritta women, who considered superior than lokavritta women. The lokavritta women are marginalized due to their caste and gender. Hence, they are double oppressed.

Uttara as well as the five women have lost their husbands. But the women in the royal household focus only on their loss. The five women are appointed to keep Uttara entertained. These women are young and have the same pain like Uttara. But nobody cares the emotion of these women. They knew everything about agriculture, cattle rearing and sometimes they even take up fighting to protect their locality, which is mentioned in the story.

Mahashweta Devi also focuses on the class difference. The foot soldiers are burned in pyre without any rituals. They are in the war only to protect member of rajavritta. Even they have no chance to do heroic deeds in the war. The author says that they die in large numbers.

## ***Kunti and the Nishadin***

### **Summary:**

The second story opens with the postwar living condition of survivors in *Mahabharata*. Kunti takes the responsibility of looking after elderly brother-in-law Dhritarashtra and his willingly blindfolded wife Gandhari. Now they live in a lonely ashram situated in the middle of forest leaving behind all the wealth and luxury of palace. It is the responsibility of Kunti to look after daily chores of ashram including collecting dry fire wood from forest. Her body has become very thin by performing various religious rituals. She always feels surprised with the calm and strong behavior of Gandhari even after the death of her hundred sons and her life in bandaged eyes.

In the afternoons, Kunti uses to visit forest to collect firewood. She takes a rope made of dry grass, collects the firewood and brings it to the ashram. Kunti always feels that if her children mainly Bhima had been there, he would have saved her from this hard work. One day, Kunti sees some middle aged nishadins (tribal race of ancient India living by hunting) collecting fire wood with their family members. They are very strong and muscled. Kunti observes that they are carrying the wood on their heads and singing songs but she never tries to learn their language. The nishadins also gather resin, honey, tubers and roots. Kunti finds them smiling and happy.

Seeing the tranquil nishadins, Kunti feels that she is wasting her life living like withered leaves following a predestined path to death. Her memories take her back to the rajavritta where she earlier lived as the mother of Pandavas, wife of Pandu, queen of the kingdom. The memory burns inside her and she is unable to keep them locked in her mind. She remembers her life in rajavritta serving gods and brahmans but she has never spoken to any dasi person like Hidimba or never experienced the life outside rajavritta.

Kunti feels restless as she is unable to share her feelings with anyone. She wants to talk and relieve her sorrow but no one is around except trees and animals. Once she uses to live in utmost luxury eating in golden plates, sleeping on sandalwood bed etc. She was as beautiful as the Sun's crimson rays. She looked after her three children Yudhisthira, Bhima and Arjuna, she also lavished equal love on Nakula and

Sahadeva. Now Kunti feels that what is her final destiny or dharma and she feels desperate to talk with someone to confess herself.

After the death of her sons, she becomes devastated like Drupadi and Uttara but Gandhari consols them all even after the death of her hundred sons. She tells them that this was unavoidable but they have to live with this grief as their lifelong companion. Gandhari cries for her sons cursing the war as this was for power. She cries on the dead bodies of Abhimanyu and Karna also, but Kunti has no courage to cradle severed head of Karna on her lap though he was the only son whose father was selected by her willingly. No Pandavas were sired by Pandu but they are called Pandavas and Karna is rejected that place.

Kunti thinks Gandhari is pure and innocent but she is not. Gandhari cursed Krishna openly for the war but she could not gather the courage to blame. She does not deserve for any forgiveness. This forest has taught her how petty and ignoble they are. But now she has realized that she has to speak. If she remains silent, it will be ultimate sin. Suddenly, Kunti finds that some nishadins are around her and listening her speech. Kunti comes to ashram, Gandhari finds her touch warm. Sleeping on the grass mat, Kunti feels that the thoughts of rajavritta are tearing her apart.

Kunti takes bath in the forest stream and sits in the Sun with her hair loose. She feels that nishadins will not visit this part of forest as she is first time in this part of forest. To remember the road back to ashram, she has broken the branches of trees and carved signs on the trees. She feels that forest gives peace which is not possible in the kingdom. Again Kunti starts to talk with the mother Earth. She says that after the war in Kurukshetra, countless funerals pyres are lit. The foot soldiers, who sacrificed their lives, are burned on mass pyres organized by Vidura on the orders of Yudhisthira. Ghee and camphor are poured to cover the stink of putrefaction but the flames of death may not be hidden.

Kunti says that she has committed another sin by hiding the true identity of Karna from her other children. She shows concern for Pandavas only during the war and never worried about Karna at all. He was as unvanquishable as Indra. The day before the battle, she goes to Karna and demands to take side of Pandavas. He would have insulted her saying that none of the motherhood responsibilities had been carried out by her. On the other hand, he assured her that except Arjuna, he would

not harm any other Pandavas. He told her that still there would be five sons. It means that he considered himself her son but she never suffers over his loss.

Now Kunti curses herself for being mother of five Pandavas and neglecting Karna. After burning the dead body of Karna, she asks Yudhisthira to perform tarpan also for Karna as he was one of his brothers. Yudhisthira becomes very angry with her for not telling about it earlier.

Kunti feels that Karna was the only son she had given birth on her own wish and selection. All other Pandavas were born from different gods selected by Pandu. Kunti remembers Madhavi, the rishi's daughter, who bore four sons without marriage on her father's command. The society accepted her as she was carrying the order of her father. But unmarried Kunti gave birth to Karna sired by Suryadeva without the permission of anyone so she abandoned him. Now Kunti feels that though Pandu is not the biological father of any of her sons, all are called Pandavas except Karna who is considered only a carpenter's son.

When Kunti comes out of the deep thoughts, she sees an elderly Nishadin watching her full of pity. Then the nishadin walks away with her bundle of wood. In the ashram, Gandhari tries to console mournful Kunti saying the cycle of time will move forward. Don't blame her for the past events because they could not change them. Kunti touched the feet of Gandhari and silently goes to sleep.

In the next afternoon, Kunti finds the forest restless. All the animals including birds, monkeys and cheetal are running away into the depths of the forest. Kunti sees that Nishad men-women also walking off with their belongings. There appears an elderly nishadin. Speaking in the language of Kunti, She tells Kunti that she never considers them human beings. She has heard that Kunti wants to confess the greatest sin. So, confess it to her. They, Nishadin, have waited years for this day. Now, no one is there to protect her as her sons are not around. This forest is their mother. Nishadin calls Kunti by her name. Kunti does not like it though she is in the forest for repent. But still she feels offend when nishadin calls her name. Nishadin demands that Kunti should confess her the greatest sin. Kunti argues that she has already confessed all sins. Nishadin tells her that the life of rajavritta folk and lokavritta folk is different. In lokavritta if a girl makes love with a boy on her wish and gets pregnant, they celebrate the event as bliss of nature to create a new life. But the people in rajavritta do not understand the law of nature.

When Kunti says that she has confessed her all sins, nishadin opposes it saying that for the people in lokavritta, to sacrifice of hare innocents for selfish interest is the unpardonable sin and Kunti has committed great sin. Kunti asks for explanation. Nishadin tells her a past event. Many many years ago, you stayed in Jatugriha, house of Duryodhana, in Varanavata town. It was rumored that your sons and you had burned to death there in a cruel plot. You all were aware that the place would be burned to ashes. To save yourself and your sons, there was need of proof that all of you had been burned to death. Nishadins were the regular visitors as they supplied timber and other things to the town. The Jatugriha was on the edge of town. An elderly nishadin and her five sons were invited to a feast. For only once outcast nishadins were invited. Now, the face of Kunti turns pale. Drinking so much wine, all six nishadins lay there senseless. Kunti and others escaped from the secret tunnel. Kunti, the elderly woman who burned along with her five sons in the home, was her mother-in-law. She is her the eldest daughter-in-law. The other women with her were married to her other sons.

Realizing the situation, Kunti asks that nishadin that she does not seem widow. Nishadin tells Kunti that they have right to remarry. Now they have husbands and children. Then Kunti asks what she wants. Nishadin says that she does not want to revenge. Eye for eye is a rule in the rajavritta but they have different ways of life. She killed six innocent tribal and never considered it a sin. Now, see this forest around you. It is full of resin bearing tree which are highly inflammable. All animals smell the air that a fire has started. So they are running far away beyond the reach of the forest. But now, they three weak people cannot run as one is blind from birth, another has chosen to be blind and she is the blindest of the three.

Kunti asks for forgiveness to the nishadin for her sin of killing six innocent tribes. Nishadin says that begging forgiveness is the typical act of rajavritta people. They don't understand such things. This forest has looked after them for years, now the fire will do its work and nishadin disappears.

Realizing the greatest sin she has committed, Kunti sits there unmoved. She has to go back to the ashram and wait there for the forest fire. Already, Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, after the loss of their hundred sons, are patiently waiting for death. Kunti also welcomes death as she prays for the forgiveness.

**Themes:**

Mahasweta Devi's short story *Kunti and Nishadin* presents encounter between the Kshatriya queen and the Untouchable Nishadin. The story presents the different views of life perceived by two different women living in different world. After the Kurukshetra, Kunti enters in to the forest along with Dhritarashtra and Gandhari to die silently observing all the religious rituals expected to be followed by Kshatriya woman. The meeting with Nishadin opens her eyes towards the other side of life which she has never thought about. It leads Kunti to realize the severity of her sin and meaninglessness of the so called noble life at Rajavritta.

**Regret/ Sorrow of Kunti:**

Those who died in the war have escaped from the post war disastrous effects. Now, Kunti along with Dhritarashtra and Gandhari living in the forest suffer a lot as they are waiting for their death silently. Kunti feels that she has done injustice with Karna by not accepting him as legitimate son or not giving him his rightful position as a brother of Pandavas. On the other hand, even after the death of Karna, she did not perform public and ritualistic mourning. Feeling herself guilty of abandoning her first born son, Kunti expresses her sorrow and regret.

While Kunti is mournful for the death of her children but she finds that Gandhari who has lost her hundred sons and whose sorrow is greater than Kunti has accepted the fate and lives a calm life without any grief. Kunti finds herself weak and fragile in front of Gandhari. Even, Kunti feels that Gandhari has mourned for the loss of all soldiers in the war while Kunti fails to do so and mourns only over the death of her children and neglects all other soldiers including Karna.

**Superiority of Tribal Culture:**

It is the common conception that the people living in civilized culture are called in *Mahabharata* as Rajvritta and are superior to the tribal people who are called as Lokavritta people. Mahasweta Devi has shattered this wrong notion by comparing the lives of Kunti and other rajavritta people with Nishadin or tribal women by giving various examples.

Lokavritta culture offers positive recognition to the pleasure of women. Give full freedom and sexual independence to the women. So the female desires and sexuality are not restricted only to the productivity. Nishadin women accept the flow

of desire in nature. They have freedom of remarry and even give birth to the children after being widowed.

In contrast to the freedom of Nishadin, in rajavritta, women are considered subordinate. Kshartiyahood or rajavritta have no cultural freedom. Kunti abandons Karna because of the strict cultural limitation set in rajavritta. Majority of the Kshatriya women who became widow in the war have to live a miserable life abandoning their all pleasures and desires.

### **Disastrous Effects of War:**

By highlighting sorrows of the Kunti and other Kshatriya women, the disastrous effects of war have been presented in the story. The Kurukshetra was never the war for justice on the other hand, it was for the power. Both the parties of the war suffered a great loss and no one survived to rule. The sorrow of Kunti and other women shows it. Kunti practices severe penance to atone the freedom from sins committed by Pandavas and herself.

### **Sin of Kunti and Pandavas:**

During the encounter between Kunti and Nishadin, the false and pretending behavior of Rajavritta people is exposed. Nishadin tells Kunti that while living in Jatugriha where a plot was set to kill all the Pandavas including Kunti, Kunti has committed a biggest sin. Kunti invited an elderly Nishadin and her five sons and got them drunk. Leaving these six Nishadins behind, Kunti and Pandavas flee from the burning mansion. They deliberately killed them to show a false proof of the death of Pandavas and Kunti. Kunti or any one of the Pandavas never expressed sorrow for their sin. The Nishadin woman with whom Kunti talks in the forest is the wife of one of the nishadin's killed in the Jatugriha by Pandavas to save their life. Nishadin expresses her strong contempt to Kunti for her extreme self absorption and willful blindness towards the sorrow of outcaste nishadins whose deaths are unmourned, unremembered and uncommemorated.

### **Women sexuality:**

Mahasweta Devi presents a delicate issue of constricting nature of women sexuality in Rajavritta and Lokavritta. Kunti is forced by Pandu to give birth to her children. She is not allowed to select the biological father of her children. The only

son she has given birth based on her choice is Karna but she is forced to abandon that child too.

On the other hand the Nishadin women have full freedom of selecting their partner. If Nishadin women become pregnant before marriage, tribes celebrate it with her wedding. Women have freedom to select their sexual partner. They can remarry or give birth to the children when they become widow. Such freedom is not available to the rajavritta women.

## Souvali

### Summary

Mahasweta Devi's *Souvali* is a third and last story, in her short story collection *After Kurukshetra: Three stories*. Similar to the first two stories, the theme of suppressed subaltern voices continued in this story. Souvali was a dasi or slave of Dhritarashtra's wife Gandhari. When Gandhari was pregnant, Souvali was forced to be a sexual companion to king Dhritarashtra. Their sexual union gave birth to son, Yuyutsu, who is also called as Souvalya by his mother. After the sexual assault and exploitation both, Souvali and Souvalya, were thrown out and restricted to enter into the palace. Due to biased caste and class system, Souvalya remained confused about his status in the society.

The story begins with the conversation between Souvali and her neighbor. Souvali is waiting for her son Souvalya. Souvalya returns to his mother after performing the last rites of his father Dhritarashtra. His mother lives at the outskirts of the town at an ordinary place. In the conversation, it is revealed that the mother and son are meeting after many years. Their discussion unveils many things regarding their lives and their feelings about royal family. Souvalya tells his mother that he has done tarpon for the death of Dhritarashtra and asks what she has done. She smiles and replies that:

You're the son. You did your duty. Today they had to grant you the first right. You are Dhritashtra's son (43)

The sentence is not a simple assertion. It reveals the hidden truth that she is not wedded wife of Dhritashtra and hence she is not supposed to mourn. He replies that he has not gone near his father. He even has not called him father. But he did the tarpon for him in response to it, Souvali angrily remarks: "Or else his soul would not

have gained release”. In the same remark she complains that her son is not accepted as Kourava. He is only dasiputra. She regrets for her subordinate position in the society. He further talks that he refuses to do the tarpan for Kunti and Gandhari as they have never accepted him.

Souvalya is very curious to know that whether his mother has participated in any kind of tarpon. She replies that she is borne in vaishya family. The royal family took her to serve as dasi from the childhood. When Gandhari was pregnant, she was forced to be a sexual companion to king Dhritrashtra. Their sexual union gave birth to Souvalya. The royal family has rejected both of them and hence she has no regret for royal family. She also compares Souvalya’s social status with Vidura, who was also a dasiputra. He complains that his mother leaves him. She tells him that he was sent to gurugriha, which was separate for dasiputras. He reveals that he faced discrimination at every stage. To retrieve Kauravas arrows and fetch the birds shot down by them, he was transferred to the Kauravas guragriha.

Souvali tells her son how she came to live at the outskirts of the town. He is very happy to learn that his mother has preserved his childhood toys carefully. He also learns that she rejects marriage proposal and waits for him. He tells that Kauravas called him Dasiputra and hence he took the side of Pandavas. Both discussed on the war, humiliation and contrast between rajavritta and lokvritta family. Rajavritta people live artificial life, while lokavritta people carry natural feelings. In a kurukshetra war Souvalya was totally ignored.

**Themes:**

The theme of marginalization continues in the story *Souvali*. The narrator is very keen about highlighting the marginalized status in the story. It is focused in the setting of the story. On the margins of the town live the marginalized. Their settlement is a lively, noisy place. The alleys are narrow, the houses small. Ponds here and there surrounded by trees. Cattle shed beside the huts. (41) The Description emphasizes the central theme of the story that is “marginalization”. In the discussion Souvali many times regret for getting subordinate treatment through the members of royal family. She says angrily:

Gandhari never once, in all these years, acknowledged you (Souvalya) as a Kaurava. Why should she? just a dasiputra. (43)

The last sentence is ironical. It is a classic example of marginalization. Due to lower cast, they are deprived from their judicious rights. Souvali is treated as an object. She is a victim of rajavritta family. Nowhere, she is considered by the members of royal family.

Souvalya was sent to the gurugriha, which was separate one for dasiputra. It is only to prove the superiority of rajavritta people. Souvali retires from her duties as dasi. She started staying away from royal family. The life of dasi women is troublesome. They all are brought at royal family at an early age and their duty was only to serve royal people. The service means all type of works including sex. They have to provide sex service even though they are not interested.

Souvali and her son Souvalya are humiliated by the royal family. Their feelings and emotions are totally ignored. The royal family never accepted them with equal status. They always receive a subordinate treatment. The grief of being outsider is always remained in their mind. Both have the same feeling of being insulted and given secondary treatment.

### 3.5.1 Check Your Progress

#### A. Choose the correct alternatives:

- i) *The five women* was published in.....
  - a) 2000
  - b) 2001
  - c) 1988
  - d) 2002
- ii) The five women belong to.....
  - a) Rajavritta
  - b) Lokavritta
  - c) Pativratha
  - d) Mahabharata
- iii) The women's husbands were.....
  - a) farmers
  - b) courtiers
  - c) attendants
  - d) kings
- iv) Their husbands fought in the dharmayudha as.....
  - a) foot soldiers/padatik
  - b) atirathi
  - c) horsemen
  - d) maharathi
- v) Dhritarashtra and Gandhari retreated to forest with.....
  - a) Karna
  - b) Kunti
  - c) Uttara
  - d) Draupadi
- vi) ..... consoled Draupadi and Uttara on their son's death in the war.

- a) Kunti            b) Subhadra        c) Krishna            d) Gandhari
- vii) The idea of..... was typical of the rajavritta  
 a) forgiveness    b) war                c) fighting            d) jealousy
- viii) Souvali, a low-caste woman, was..... of Dhritarashtra.  
 a) dasi              b) queen              c) mother              d) courtesan
- ix) Yuyutsu is son of.....  
 a) Dhritarashtra b) Duryodhan    c) Arjun                d) Karna
- x) Souvali named her son.....  
 a) Yuyutsu        b) Souvalya        c) Ahana                d) dasiputra

**B. Fill in the blanks**

- i) *The Five Women* was published in.....
- ii) *Kunti and Nishadin* was published in.....
- iii) *Sovali* is published in.....
- iv) *After Kurukshetra* is about.....
- v) The name of Subhadra's daughter -in- law is.....

**C. Answer in one word/ phrase/ sentence:**

- i) What are the names of the five women?
- ii) Who was Madraja?
- iii) Why Subhadra rewarded Madraja?
- iv) What are the two severe guilts of Kunti's life?
- v) Despite the victory of the Pandavas, why Kunti retreated to forest?
- vi) Why Souvali denied mourning on the death of Dhritarashtra?
- vii) Why Souvalya refused to offer tarapan to Kunti and Gandhari?

**3.5.2 Terms to Remember**

- Rajavritta: Royal Family
- Lokavritta: Common people

- Marginalised: treated as insignificant
- Optimistic: having positive attitude
- Unperturbed: free from emotional agitation, free from tension
- Magnanimity: generous, liberal
- Confession: Admission of faults
- Composure: steadiness of mind under stress
- Hypocrisy: An expression of agreement that is not supported by real conviction
- Discrimination: unfair treatment of a person

### 3.6 Characters in *After Kurukshetra Three Stories*

**Abhimanyu** was the youngest son of Arjuna and Subhadra. He was the nephew of Lord Krishna and was married to Uttara, the princess of Matsya Kingdom.

**Chitrangada** was one of Arjuna's wives, daughter of Chitrabhanu, King of Manipur.

**Draupadi** is one of the most important female characters in the Hindu epic, *Mahabharata*. According to the epic, she is the daughter of Drupada, King of Panchala.

**The Five Women** were from Kurujangal. They were companions to Uttara. Their names were- Godhumi, Gomati, Yamuna, Vitasta, Vipasaha. They were farmer's wives. Their husbands died in the war, they are widows.

**Gandhari** is the princess of Gandhar. She was the wife of Dhritrashtra, the blind king of Hastinapura, and the mother of a hundred sons, the Kauravas. As a pativratha (devoted wife) without parallel, Gandhari is regarded as an epitome of virtue, and is among the most respected moral forces in the epic. She was not only married to a blind man Dhritrashtra but for the rest of her life, she kept a cloth tied to her eyes in order to share the pain of her husband.

**Hidimba** was sister of Hidimbo, the rakshasa. She bore Bhima a son named Ghatotkacha.

**Kauravas** are the 100 sons of the King of Hastinapur, Dhritarashtra, and his wife Gandhari. The well-known Kauravas are Duryodhana, Dushasana, Vikarna, Yuyutsu and Dussala.

**Madraja** was the head dasi of the royal women's quarters.

**Madri** was Pandu's second wife, mother to twins Nakula and Sahadeva (two Pandawas)

**Nishadin** was a woman of Nishad people, one of the uncivilized races living by hunting, swineherds, fishermen or flowers by caste.

**Pandavas** are the five acknowledged sons of Pandu, by his two wives Kunti and Madri, Their names are Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. All five brothers were married to the same woman, Draupadi. Together the brothers fought and prevailed in a Great War against their cousins the Kauravas, which came to be known as the Kurukshetra War.

**Souvali** was a maid or dasi in the service of Dhritarashtra. She bore a son named Yuyutsu ( Souvalya).

**Subhadra** was younger sister of Krishna and Balarama, wife of Arjuna and mother of Abhimanyu.

**Uttarā** was daughter of King Virata and Queen Sudeshna. She was sister of Prince Uttar. She was wife of Abhimanyu(son of Arjuna) and mother of Parikshit.

**Vidura** means skilled, intelligent or wise. He was born to Ambika's sudra dasi, and fathered by Vyasa. He is described as the prime minister of Hastinapur and also the uncle of Pandavas and Kauravas. He was advisor of Pandvas.

**Yuyutsu** was a son of Dhritarashtra with Sauvali, a maid. He was the only son of Dhritarashtra who survived the Kurukshetra war.

### 3.6.1 Check Your Progress:

**Choose the correct alternative:**

- i) Abhimanyu is son of.....  
a) Subhadra      b) Draupadi      c) Kunti      d) Gandhari
- ii) Souvali is the mother of.....



## 2) Feminism:

The feminists believe that women and men should have equal rights and opportunities. In the above stories different women are placed in different situations. In the first story the author talks about five peasant women who are named after rivers. They represent for the lokavritta people. Their lives are shattered by the war. Uttara and Subhadra like the five women. But these simple women have their own self-identity constructed by themselves when they show their reluctance to be dasis. They say, "We refuse to serve as dasis, to live as dasis" The author focuses the difference between the common people and royal family. Women from the royal families are the victims of the patriarchy system. Widows from the families are not allowed to live the natural life. They are compelled to live unhappy life. But basic needs are available in these families. But the case with Lokavritta women is different. They have to struggle for survive. The five women give the explanation of the critical economical condition of the village. Secondly they are unable to find out the dead bodies of their husbands. They want to perform rituals. But the foot soldiers are buried in pyre. All the women are widows, but Lokavritta women have no opportunity to lament on their loss of husbands, because they have no basic things, which are required to live. Hence they are double oppressed.

In the second story, *Kunti and the Nishadin*, some critics consider that Kunti deserves the end she gets. Her death is by fire. In *Mahabharata* translated into English by C. Rajagopalachari, there is reference to the House of Lac incident. She drugs the servants who fall asleep and cause them to fall prey to the fire. The Nishadin tells Kunti this past incident and make aware of the sin. Once again the author focuses that the Lokavritta women are oppressed by the members of royal family.

The last story lays focus on Souvali, a dasi of the blind Dhritarashtra who revered him as a husband in the same way as Gandhari. But Souvali is never given the identity of a wife. Her son is viewed as the son of a dasi and not as the son of Dhritarashtra. It is also noted that Yuyutsu (mentioned here as Souvalya) is apparently the only living son of Dhritarashtra after the Kurukshetra war. The short story *Souvali* is dated after Dhritarashtra's death. Souvali does not consent to be a part of her husband's last rites. She does not observe any rituals. She refuses to fast and wear a white cloth. She feels good to have defied the dead Dhritarashtra. She

says- "I'll let my own Dharma tell me what's right". Souvali is depicted as the rebellious character. All the women get secondary treatment in the stories.

### 3) **Rajavritta Women Vs Lokavritta Women:**

Lokavritta women in *After Kurukshetra* display qualities like courage which are confined to the Kshatriya caste. Uttara has lost her husband in the war. And so did the five women. But the women in the royal household focus only on her loss and assign the five peasant women to keep Uttara entertained. It is to be noted that these five women are young too and they have the same pain. But their emotions are never considered. The only support the five women have for themselves is each other.

In the second story, we learn the shocking truth of Kunti being a sinner. She does not consider the lives of the people who serve them in the House of Lac, in Varanavratra. They are killed. She "unconsciously" wanted to kill them for the greater good. It is seen that she does not have a memory of this terrible sin. This careless dismissal of lives for the sake of the greater good is seen throughout the epic. And *After Kurukshetra* rises to rebel against the thought of this greater good.

In the third story, Yuyutsu or Souvalya, the unrecognised son of Dhritarashtra, fulfills the funeral rites for a father who does not seem to know of his existence. His mother, who was a dasi in the court of Dhritarashtra and never his wedded wife, is asked to undergo the process of converting herself into a mourning widow. This shows the actual act of marginalization. She who was denied the social status and recognition must suffer along with those who were given recognition. If there is no difference in the suffering, then there must be no difference in recognition as well. She should be known as Dhritarashtra's wife and not as a dasi.

The readers are completely shaken by the contrast with the lives of the dasis, who are conscious all the time of the crushing grip of royal intentions and the royal interpretation of "dharma". And manage still to live lives that are joyous and meaningful.

The contrast between the royal women and the dasis is drawn out clearly in these stories: while the pregnant Uttara is crushed by the weight of her losses and the widowed queens of two generations yoked by decorum, the five dasis, the women from Kurujangal, actively grieve for their dead husbands but are just as active in wanting to mark an end to one phase and go on to the next. They come to ensure that their husbands have been cremated but now that the rains have come, they will return

to their village to marry other men, because, like the earth on which the rains have finally fallen and must be ploughed, life must also be ploughed and tended so that it will go on.

#### **4) Protest:**

Souvali protests the arrogance of the rajavritta, challenges their superiority and asserts the sense of freedom and the natural human emotions of the lokavritta. The story is a criticism of the sense of arrogance, discrimination and sheer indifference of the rajavritta. This inherent feature of the royalty is in contrast to the life of the common people. Mahashweta Devi is known to the outer world mainly as an activist and a writer who protests and condemns all sorts of hypocrisy. She fights against exploitation and oppression.

Souvali is firm character. Her son is yet confused. She refuses to perform rituals for the death of Dhristrashtra, as he has not accepted her wife. She is treated as an object and hence, she responds ironically to her son's feelings. She is rebellious character. Even the five women do not accept the job of dasi. Nishadin lady does not think of saving Kunti at the end of the story. She considers it as the part of the justice.

#### **5) Oppression:**

In the epic there is no reference to any kind of sin committed by Kunti except the depiction of her deserting the baby Karna, her first born. But here we realize the horror of murder and the careful planning. Kunti drugs the servants, a nishadin with her five sons who fall asleep and cause them to fall prey to the fire. In Mahashweta Devi's version of this incident we see that these unknown, unnamed servants are given an identity as a Dalit woman with her five sons. Also we are completely shaken by the portrayal of the lives of the dasis, who are under the crushing grip of royalty and the royal interpretation of "dharma". But here in the stories they still manage to live lives that are joyous and meaningful.

#### **6) Marginalization:**

Marginalization is defined as the treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant or peripheral. In the stories, both the rajavritta and lokavritta women have had their share of being marginalized. But as we delve deeper, we see that the lokavritta women are doubly oppressed. First by the male sex of the rajavritta, who



### 3.8 Summary

The four main sections in this unit enable students to know about the plot, character/s, theme/s, and narrative techniques of Mahashweta Devi's *After Kurukshetra*.

### 3.9 Answers to check Your Progress

#### 3.3.1 A.

- i) 1926
- ii) Tribal people
- iii) 1979
- iv) *Jhansir Rani*
- v) Multiple organ failure

#### B.

- i) Decca/ Dhaka
- ii) *Jhansir Rani, After Kuruksetra, Hajar Churasir Maa,*
- iii) Upper Class
- iv) Manish Ghatak, a well-known poet and novelist
- v) 1956

#### 3.4.1 A.

- i) 2005
- ii) Anjum Katyal
- iii) Three
- iv) The battle of Kurukshetra

#### 3.5.1 A.

- i) 2000
- ii) Lokvrita
- iii) Farmers
- iv) Foot soldiers/ padatik

- v) Kunti
  - vi) Gandhari
  - vii) Forgiveness
  - viii) Dasi
  - ix) Dhritarashtra
  - x) Souvalya
- B.**
- i) 2000
  - ii) 1999
  - iii) 2000
  - iv) Women's plight and subjugation, marginalization from women's point of view.
  - v) Uttara
- C.**
- i) Godhumi, Gomati, Yamuna, Vitasta, Vipasha
  - ii) Head dasi of royal women
  - iii) Madraja brought five women to rajavritta for Uttara's companionship
  - iv) one was over her unacknowledged son Karna and the other one was regarding the ghastly killing of the family of the forest dwelling Nishads in the house of lac, Jatugriha, which she had long forgotten.
  - v) in order to tend Dhritarashtra and Gandhari.
  - vi) She had left the palace on her own free will and would like to follow her own dharma, even after Dhritarashtra's death.
  - vii) He refused to offer tarpan to Kunti and Gandhari, as they never accepted him.
- 3.6.1 A.**
- i) Subhadra
  - ii) Yuyutsu
  - iii) Abhimanyu

- iv) Main dasi
- v) Dhritarashtra

**3.7.1 A.**

- i) *Mahabharata*
- ii) Third Person
- iii) Three

**3.10 Exercises**

**A) Long Answer Questions:**

1. Consider *After Kurukshetra* as a critique on the kurukshetra war in *Mahabharata*.
2. Comment on the themes reflected in *After Kurukshetra*.
3. Discuss how Mahashweta Devi portrays her women characters.
4. How does Mahashweta Devi expose the marginalization of lokvritta women?

**B) Write Short Notes:**

1. The treatment of history
2. The treatment of women
3. The art of characterization
4. Subjugation of women
5. Protest of Souvalya
6. Escapism of Kunti
7. Lokavritta women



## Unit-4

### Trends in Indian English Poetry Selected Poets from Indian Poetry in English - ed by Makarand Paranjape

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#### Content

- 4.1.0 Objectives
- 4.1.1 Introduction
- 4.1.2 Trends in Indian English Poetry
- 4.1.3 Summary
- 4.1.4 Terms to Remember
- 4.1.5 Check Your Progress
- 4.1.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 4.1.7 Key to Check Your Progress
- 4.1.8 References to further study

#### 4.1.0 Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able to understand,

- modern Indian English Poetry and its salient features.
- the Role of Contemporary Indian English poetry in world poetry.
- the central ideas and themes in the prescribed poet.

#### POETS & POEMS

<b>Sri Aurobindo</b>	<b>From Savitri Book Eight, Canto III : Death in the Forest</b>
<b>Nissim Ezekiel</b>	<b>Poet Lover Birdwatcher, Enterprise A Time To Change</b>
<b>Dom Moraes</b>	<b>Letter to My Mother Song, Future Plans</b>

<b>Kamala Das</b>	<b>Ghanashyam</b> <b>My Grandmother's House</b> <b>The Sunshine Cat</b>
<b>A. K. Ramanujan</b>	<b>Breaded Fish</b> <b>A River</b> <b>Love Poem for a Wife I</b>
<b>Meena Alexander</b>	<b>Dream Poem</b> <b>House of a Thousand Doors</b> <b>From The Travelers</b>

### **4.1.1 Introduction**

In the previous unit 1, 2 and unit 3 you have studied trends in Indian English, Modern Indian English Drama and trends in Modern Indian English short stories. In unit No 4 we are going to study different trends aspects and characteristics of modern Indian English poetry by studying poems of Sri Aurobindo, Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, A. K. Ramanujan and Meena Alexander.

### **4.1.2 Trends in Indian English Poetry :**

Indian English poetry is now more than two hundred years old since the day of Henry Derozio's first volume Poems in 1827. The critics have divided the whole gamut of Indian English Poetry into two periods: pre-Independence and post-Independence poetry. One group condemns the poetry written before Independence and hails poetry written after 1947. Critics like P. Lal and Parthasarathy denounce early poetry while R. W. Desai denounces the post-1960 Indian poets in English. In the book Golden Treasury written by V. K. Gokak of Indo-Anglian Verse and in his studies in Indo-Anglian Poetry, traces the growth and progress of Indian poetry in English and showers praise on all the poets. According to him Sarojini Naidu is the Yeats of India and Sri Aurobindo a great innovator in the art of versification. He classifies the Indian poets in English before 1947 into two groups neo-symbolists and neo-modernists. The neo-symbolists dive deep into mysticism and the neo-modernists vision is coloured by humanism. E. D. Narasinhaiah showered praise on Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo. M. K. Naik regards Sarojini Naidu as a true nightingale of India. Naidu, Toru Dutt and Aurobindo helped in forming a poetic tradition worth the name. Their poetry is not fully imitative and derivative. They

have revealed poetic insights, originality of themes and styles and technical excellence.

In pre-Independence poetry, the poets are Derozio, Toru Dutt, M. M. Dutt, Aurobindo, Manmohan Ghose, Tagore, Naidi, Harindranath and R. C. Dutt. They have same Indianness, archaism and romanticism in their poetry. Early Indian poetry in English was romantic, narrative and imitative. Later it became more spiritual, lyrical and Indian. The modern Indian poetry is neither Indian nor English and realistic. According to V. K. Gokak Indian English poetry “Starts as romantic poetry simply because English Romantic Poetry became Victorian. It decided to go through a period of “Decadence” in English Poetry because the nineties was a period of “Decadence” in English poetry. After Decadence came Georgianism and Indo-Anglian Poetry, loyal as always, suddenly became Georgian. When English poetry went modernist, Indo-Anglian poetry had no alternative but to do the same”.

The obsession of 18<sup>th</sup> century English literature found in the poetry of Derozio, Kashiprasad Ghose, M. M. Dutt, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. They have linguistic and stylistic imperfections. Indian themes and Indianness predominates in the poetry. There is a national awareness in their poetry. The poets were imitative and derivative. The Pondicherry school of Poetry formed by G. K. Chettur, P. R Kalkim, V. K. Gokak, K. D. Sethna, M. N. Bhushan, M. S. Isvaran, B. Seal, N. K. Gupta, and Anand Acharya. In their poetry also we have lyricism, mysticism, Indianness, modernism and fine versification.

The common literary trends and patterns are visible in all these poets:

- Indian expressions in English
- Archaisms
- Influence of 18th century poetry, Romantic poetry and Milton
- Indian legends, myths and themes are dominate in them
- Linguistic and stylistic imperfections
- National consciousness and awareness of India’s rich cultural heritage.
- Indianness.

However some modern poets turned-anthologists and self-styled critics denounce the poetry of pre-Independence era. They have an axe to grind to win attention to post-Independence Indian English poetry.

Modern Indian English poetry begins in the 1960s. It has acquired a distinct character of its own. A large number of Indian poets in English appeared in the sixties and after. There are over three hundred poets writing today. The post-1960 Indian poetry in English has discovered its own character and voice. Modernity in post-1960s is essentially a break with the past. It has three manifestations:

- A past-oriented vision which is associated with a sense of loss and hopelessness, a sort of cultural pessimism
- A future-oriented vision, associated with a desire to remake the world.
- A present-oriented attitude, historical, amoral, neutral, stoic, ironic, ambivalent, absurdist. This modernity has two modes of expression:
- Turning inward going on one's "Voyage Within" and
- An ironic observation of reality in "Voyage Without",

Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, Dom Moraes, K. N. Daruwalla, Jayant Mahapatra, A. K. Ramanujan, A. K. Mehrotra, Kamala Das, R. Parthasarathy, Keshav Malik, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Pritish Nandy, Gauri Deshpande, Adil Jussawalla, Shiv K. Kumar, and Gieve Patel and others have enriched the post-Independence Indian English Poetry. They introduced new themes, new techniques, new styles and new tendencies in modern Indian English poetry. In fact, these poets are experimentalists, modernists and innovators.

A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy and Kamala Das turn inward to get into their roots. Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, K. N. Daruwalla, Margaret Chatterjee and Lila Ray take a different attitude, historical, amoral, neutral stoic and ironic. Jayant Mahapatra and O. P. Bhatnagar join them in making pointed, objective and thought provoking observations on the reality around them. Nissim Ezekiel is a trend setter. According to Bruce King, 'The opening up of Indian English Poetry to reality in its many guises is perhaps Ezekiel's most significant influence.' Indian poverty; the rituals and her people belonging to all walks of life attract the attention of the poet. He describes them in a cool, detached and matter-of-fact tone. He tries to catch the public ear with "a Poetry of Popular Impersonation". The idiom is colloquial and the tone is

conversational. The images of India pervade all through his poetry. Love and human relationship, the commitment to self, urbanity, and rural life are some major themes in his poetry.

Another dominant feature of post-1960 poetry is its confessional mode. The poets hark back upon the personal failures, losses and agonies of self. The love poetry of Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande and Shiv K. Kumar are the striking examples of confessional poetry. Other poets write unconventional love poems with ease. Kamala Das's poetry is written from the feministic viewpoint. Ezekiel, Daruwalla, Ramanujan, Shiv K. Kumar and O. P. Bhatnagar are the poets of love.

Some modern poets have shown mastery obverse in ironic social comment. Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Shiv K. Kumar, Daruwalla, Bhatnagar excel in this area. They are brilliant commentators on the Indian scene. Politics, marriage, love, black marketing, riots, joint family, rituals, brain drain and a number of social events come in for criticism in their poetry: Jayant Mahapatra, Ezekiel, Bhatnagar, Shiv K. Kumar, R. Parthasarathy, Kamala Das and a host of others underline the typical Indian sensibility in their poetry. B. K. Das is of the opinion that "Indian poetry in English is Indian first and anything else afterwards. Its has is pan-Indian and it has audience all over the country". Moreover, the Indian English poet is concerned with the "Indianness" of his experience. The validity of Indian English poetry depends on the creation of a new idiom, that is, Indian English Idiom. Indian poets have taken for their themes various Indian subjects from legend, folklore and contemporary Indian situations. They have developed Indian sensibilities. Indian poetry in English stands in comparison with the poetry of the Third World Countries. The future of Indian Poetry in English is very bright.

### **Major Contributors of Modern Indian Poetry in English:**

**Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2003)** : Ezekiel is one of the poets of Modern Indian English poetry. On the scenario of contemporary Indian English poetry, as a setter of standards and as one who by his vocation as a poet has raised the prestige of the very profession of poetry. He spent three and a half years in London. During his stay there he took a keen interest in the theatre, in the cinema and in art (namely painting). He also studied psychology and philosophy under Professor C. E. M. Joad. During his years in London he published his first volume of poems under the heading, 'A Time to Change' in 1952. It is very significant to note that this volume of poems was

published by an English firm of publishers. Ezekiel has published several volumes of poems over the years and volumes appeared with the headings: 'Time to Change'(1952), 'Sixty Poems'(1953), 'The Third' (1959), 'The Unfinished Man' (1960), 'The Exact Name' (1965), 'Hymans in Darkness'(1976), 'Later-Day Psalms' (1982). He is a widely travelled man, and has delivered lectures in the U. S. A. , Australia and England, as well as conducted poetry readings in those countries. The Government of India conferred upon him the title of "Padmashri" in recognition of his service to literature; and he is also a recipient of 'Sahitya Academy Award' for literature. Ezekiel's poems are as a rule lucid- a merit these days- and are splendidly evocative and satisfying sensuous".

**Kamala Das** (b. 1934) Das, is one of the three most significant Indian poets writing in English today, the other two being Nissim Ezekiel and Ramanujan. Her book of verse, 'Summer in Calcutta'(1965) is famous in the post- colonial era. She is also the fourth Indian English poet to win Sahitya Academy Award for her book, 'Collected Poems vol. I in 1958. Her poetic collections 'Summer in Calcutta', 'The Descendants' and 'The Old Play House and Other Poems' contain a wide range of themes, yet they are largely confessional in tone. Kamla Das confesses a number of things exclusively related to her own self-herself as a woman with her strong feminine sensibilities. Self as a person with powerful proclivities and antipathies caprices and whim-whams. She reveals her soul and self in her poetry, therefore, like Sylvia Plath, she is called a confessional poet. She grapples with ideas and abstractions, images of men and women on several planes. She may be regarded as a 'renowned feminist' presenting the kaleidoscopic images of women as wife, mother beloved, street-walker, prostitute, goddess etc. in her poems.

**P. Lal** (b. 1929) born in Calcutta, is emerged as a master of Modern Indian English poetry. His poetry is basically romantic in its nature and theme. His poetic works poetry are : 'The Parrot's Death' (1960), 'Loves The First And Other Poems' (1963), 'Change They Said' (1966), 'Drupadi And Jaydratha' 1967), and 'Calcutta : A Long Poem'. His translation of Mahabharata is a laudable which looks ten years to be completed. His other poems are 'The Golden Womb of Sun', Rigvedic songs in a new translation and 'Yakshi from Didarganj' (1969). As the leader of Writers Workshop group of poets, he had stared a modernist reaction against the romantic tradition of Indian poetry but he ended up as a romantic poet himself.

**A. K. Ramanujan** (b.1929) : He is the most prominent poet in Indian writing English who takes his place next to Ezekiel among the poets. He was not just a bilingual but a trilingual poet. He has written poems not only in the English language but also in Tamil and Kannada. Though his poetic output is meagre of only three volumes 'The Striders' (1966), 'The Relation' (1971), 'Second Sight' (1976) it is of enduring quality. A Collection of the Select Ramanujan was also brought out in 1976 by the Oxford University Press. He writes about parents, wife and children with insight and dedication. Major themes of his poetry are Indian men and women, Life and Death, Family and Relation, Family and Cultural conflicts etc. He is a minute observer of Indian Society particularly family, and even a minor incident can become a theme for his poetry.

**Dom Moraes** (b. 1938) : is another noted poet of Indo English Poetry who had the extraordinary power of expression and perception of ideas. He received his education from Oxford University and worked on poetry under the influence of British poets, namely Eliot, Auden, Spenser etc. His famous poems are: 'Letter to My Mother', 'This Island', 'The Prophet', 'Kahheri Caves', 'Being Married', 'A Man Dreaming' etc. The poetry Collections to his credit are 'The Beginning' (1957), 'Poems' (1960), 'John Nobody' (1965) and 'Selected Poems-1955-65'.

**Keki N. Daruwalla**: (b. 1937) He is the third Indian English Poet to have won the central Sahitya Akademi Award for his book of verse 'The Keeper of the Dead' in 1984. His poetry Volumes are 'Under Orion' (1970), 'Apparition in April' (1971), 'Crossing of Rivers' (1976), 'Winter Poems' (1980) and 'Landscape'(1986). He writes poetry in the ironic mode. He is retired I. P. S. Officer and is a versatile genius. His Decades of Indian Poetry 1960-1980 published in the year 1980 by Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi. Contemporary life has appealed to him most and he writes on various aspects of it.

**Prof. Shiv K. Kumar** : (b. 1921) Shiv K. Kumar is also one of the prominent contemporary Indian English Poets. He is honored by the Central Sahity Akademi for his fifth book of verse 'Trapfalls in the Sky' in 1987. Kumar began writing poetry long after he established himself as a distinguished Professor of English and critic. There are two strains in his poetry. First he writes poetry in the confessional mode, as he articulates on the themes of love and sex. He has composed poetry on various themes: Love, Sex, Taboo, Tradition, Religion, Morality, Social Milieu etc. His poetry collection, 'Broken Columns' is among the best known, although it is

autobiographical piece of work. Six volumes of verse published to his credit are: 'Articulate Silence' (1970), 'Cobwebs in the Sun' (1974), 'Subterfuges' (1976), 'Woodpeckers' (1980) etc. His latest publications are 'Wool Gathering' (1998), 'Thus Spake the Buddha' (2001) and the eighth collection of poems 'Losing My Way' (2003). Kumar's poem 'Indian Women' is written keeping the American audience in mind. Giving American imagery Kumar here describes Indian Women who patiently sit 'like empty pitchers on the mouth of the village well' waiting for their men's return.

**R. Parthasarathy** : (b. 1934) He more than anybody else, was instrumental in popularizing Indian English Poetry in mid-seventies. Parthasarathy's expatriate experience turned out to be of a different character, for his first visit to England in 1963 on a scholarship from British Council left him utterly disenchanted and his poetic and lyrical expectations deflated. He has not published any book of poetry after his 'Rough Passage' in 1976. However, he has published some scattered poems in different journals and poetry magazines in the post 1980 era. One of the most striking conceptions of Parthasarathy's 'Rough Passage' is the emotional and spiritual dilemma caused in the poet's mind as a result of being educated in a foreign language and its poetry. 'Exile', 'Trial' and 'Home Coming' form a triplex group of poems interlinked under broad-based title 'Rough Passage'.

**Arun Kolatkar**: (b. 1932) Kolatkar is a bilingual Maharashtrian poet, writes in Marathi and English. He received his early education in Bombay where he has continued to live and he worked professionally as a commercial artist. He has also translated a number of his Marathi poems into English. His poems in English include the 'boat ride' and 'Jejuri'. The latter poem published in 1976, which won him the Commonwealth poetry prize in 1977. *Jejuri*, is a collection of poems in thirty one sections. Apparently it is about the poet's irreverent odyssey to the temple to Khandoba at Jejuri, a small town in Western Maharashtra.

**Pritish Nandy** : (b. 1947) Pritish Nandy is one of the most prolific Indian Poets in English. Nandy has written many poems but a quite few poems are good. He works as an executive in an advertising firm, yet spares his precious time for creative works. His published works are 'Of Gods and Olives' (1967), 'On Other Side of Arrogance' (1968), 'I Hand You in Turn My Nebbuk Wreath' (1968), 'From the Outer Bank of Brahmaputra' (1970), 'Madness is the Second Stroke' (1971), 'The Poetry of Pritish Nandy' (1973), 'Dhritarashtra Downtown: Zero' (1974), 'Riding the

Midnight River' (1975), 'Lonesome Street' (1975), 'In secret Anarchy' (1976), 'A stranger Called I'(1976) etc. His poetry is based on variety of themes and ever changing moods.

**Jayantha Mahapatra** : (b. 1928) Another poet who has risen to heights of distinction among the new poets. He was born in 1928 in the city of Cuttack in Orissa. He began writing poetry in English at the age of forty. Mahapatra has lived in Orissa all his life. Naturally, therefore the Orissa landscape-with Puri and Konark occupying a conspicuous position as a strong presence in his poetry. As a poet, Mahapatra's poetic collection is 'Cloze the Sky, Ten by Ten'(1971), 'Svayamvara and Other Poems' (1971), 'A Father's Hours'(1976), 'A Rain of Rites'(1976), 'Waiting' (1979), 'The False Start' (1980), 'Relationship' (1980), 'Burden of Waves and Fruit'(1988) 'Temple' (1989). It is not only Orissa landscape which stamps his poetry as Indian, but also the mental, moral and spiritual life depicted in it.

**Dilip Chitre** : (b. 1938) Chitre has published a few collections of poems and short stories in Marathi, has also published a long poem in English, 'Travelling in a Cage', besides a number of short poems like 'Scattered the Mind', 'The Felling of the Banyan Tree', 'Ode To Bombay'. These poems show his typical poetic talent and genius. 'The House of My Childhood' and 'The Felling of the Banyan Tree' are known as memory poems. The proof of his talent and genius reflected in his Sahitya Akademi Award winning 'Says Tuka' (1991) a translation of poetry of the Marathi saint poet Tukaram. There is a reflection of modernity in his poetry. Like Kolatkar he too also practices experimental techniques in his poetry.

**A. K. Mehrotra** : (b. 1947) Mehrotra is also one of the contemporary Indian English Poets, who found a place in R. Parthasarathy's Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets in 1976. He has published three volumes of poems 'Statute Miles' (1982) 'Middle Earth' (1984) and 'The Transfiguring Places' (1998) in the as decade. He is an imagist poet. M. K. Naik and Shyamala Narayan while observing his later poetry comment: "Several poems offer reflections on life and art, reality and fantasy". His collection of poems 'Middle Earth' (O. U. P) has helped him to be among the front ranking Indian English poets of our time. Mehrotra is popular for his experimentation of surrealism in his poetry.

**Gieve Patel**: (b. 1940) another contemporary Indian English poet a medical practitioner by profession is also known as a renowned poet. He is very familiar with

pain, disease and death as a theme in his poetry. Patel has published two volumes of poems entitled as 'Poems' (1966) and How do you withstand Body (1976), 'On a Killing Tree' is Gieve Patel's most popular poem.

**Adil Jussawalla** : (b. 1940) Jussawalla spent a majority period of his time in England. When returned from England, he published 'Land's End' (1962). He is considered to be one of the most authentic and promising among the new poet. His 'Missing Person' (1976) is also popular collection of his poetry. The later poetry of Jussawalla shows greater social awareness.

**Imtiaz Dharker** : (Dharker's two collections of poems published 'Purdah' (1988) and 'Post Cards from God' (1994). She writes about victimized women in Indian patriarchal society. Her's is feminine sensibility. She explores and expresses the psyche of the exploited and victimized within the particular contexts of contemporary Indian-Socio-Political religious structure. In 'Postcards from God' she represents a society which is on the verge of annihilating itself, as forces of religious fundamentalism.

**Chote Lal Khatri** : (b. 1965) is a teacher, poet and literary critic. He is working as Associate Professor in English in T. P. S College Patna, Bihar. Khatri is a bilingual poet writing in English and Hindi. He has Published of two collections of poems 'Kargil' and 'Ripples in the Lake' in English and 'Gooler ke phool' in Hindi. He has authored/edited twenty books of criticism. His area of interest are poetry, Indian English Literature, Tribal literature, his other books are — 'Vivekanand' Speeches and Writings. A critical study', 'Indian Writings in English' and 'Indian Novels in English'. He is recipient of Michael Madhusudan Academy award.

### 4.1.3 Summary:

The term "Indo-English Literature" connotes literature written in English by Indian authors. The origin of Indo-English Poetry dates back to the twenties of the nineteenth century. Indo-English Poetry is generally divided into the following phases

1. The Age of Pioneers (1820-1870)
2. The Era of Indian Renaissance (1870-1900)
3. The Era of Political Awakening (1900-1947)

#### 4. The Era of Independence (1947 onwards)

20th century Indo-English Poets can be divided into “Neo-Modernists” and “Neo-Symbolists”. It is observed that the poetry of Indian English Literature of Post-Independence i. e. after 1960 shows much of experimental in its style, technique and themes. Ezekiel, plays the role pioneer of Post-Modern Indian English Poetry. So in a nutshell the poetry in this period appears in a new garb and innovative form. Though it is criticized as derivative and imitative, it preserves it’s typical Indianness which broadly highlights by all modern Indian English Poets. Modern Indian English Poetry reflects themes like search for roots, alienation, isolation, love and sex, depiction of urban life, presentation of rituals and ceremonies etc. Poems on Indian landscape are integrated with contemporary life in our society. It is also proved that by prize winning poets that modern Indian English Poetry is not merely local but it is more and more global, because it draws attention of Western critics and scholars.

Thus, Indian English Poetry is very different from its western counter part in the theme, language, style of writing, imagery etc. Every writer has source of inspiration of influence. It is this source that makes Indian English poetry ‘Indian’. Indianness is an element of the poem, which shows India through its language, imagery, sensibility or anything, which makes the Indian as ‘Indian’ Indianees in a poem is something that is not really definable yet remains a very remarkable character in Indian Poems. Indianness can be defined in terms of what and how Indians are and what makes them what they are.

#### 4.1.4 Terms to Remember

- **Indo-Anglian:** the term “Indo-English Literature” connotes literature written in English by Indian authors. Prof. Gokak thinks that the term “Indo-Anglian” has been coined as kind of cousin to “Anglo-Indian”.
- **Gamut :** Span
- **Denounce :** criticize
- **Strive :** attempt
- **Imitative:** marked by or given to imitation, acting as an imitative art.
- **Derivative:** derived from, based on or imitating something else.

- **Archaism:** a thing that is very old or old fashioned, especially an archaic word or style of language or art.
- **Decadence:** moral or cultural decline.
- **Grind :** reduced to particles
- **Impersonation:** an act of pretending to be another person for the purpose of entertainment or fraud.

#### 4.1.5 Check Your Progress

##### A) Answer in one sentence each.

- In which year Detozio's first volume of poetry was published?
- Who is treated as the first Indian poet in English?
- What charge is often brought against the Pre-Independence Indian poetry in English?
- Who is the first modernist poet in Indian poetry in English?
- Which volume of poems published by Ezekiel in 1952 in London?
- By whom did the collection of poetry 'Summer in Calcutta' published? And when?
- Who wrote the poem 'The Sun Temple of Konark'?
- Who wrote the poem 'My Grandmother's House'?
- Name any two poets dealing with confessional technique in their poetry.
- Who is the editor of Indian Poetry in English prescribed for study?

#### 4.1.6 Self Assessment Questions

##### A) Answer the following question in about 250-300 words.

- Write a critical note on the various aspects of modern Indian Poetry in English.
- Write a critical note on the contribution made by contemporary Indian English poets to Indian English poetry.

- Examine the achievement of post – 1960 Indian English poetry with reference to the poets prescribed for the study.

**B) Write short note in about 100-150 words each.**

- Features of Modern Indian Poetry in English.
- Confessional mode in Indian poetry
- Symbolic and imagistic technique in Indian poetry
- Postcolonial attitude reflected in Indian poetry

**4.1.7 Key to check your progress**

A)

- Derozio's first volume of poetry was published in 1827.
- Henry Derozio
- The Pre-Independence Indian Poetry in English is derivative and imitative.
- Nissim Ezekiel
- Ezekiel's first volume of poems entitled 'A Time to Change' published in 1952 in London.
- Kamala Das published her collection of poetry 'Summer In Calcutta' in 1965.
- 'The Sun Temple of Konark' is written by Shiv K. Kumar.
- The poem 'My Grandmother's House' is written by Kamal Das.
- Kamala Das and Gouri Deshpande are the two poets who practice confessional technique in their poetry.
- Makarand Paranjape.

**4.1.8 Reference for Further Study**

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**The Text**  
**Savitri - a Legend and a Symbol**  
**Part Two**  
**Book Eight**  
**The Book of Death**  
**Canto Three**  
**DEATH IN THE FOREST**

**Content**

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**4.2.1 Introduction**

Sri Aurobindo is regarded as the greatest Indian poet in English. In his poetic career of over fifty-five years he tried his hands in almost every genre - lyrics, sonnets, long narrative poems, dramatic poetry and epics. As the head of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry he founded an original school of thought and religious sect and evolved the Yoga Philosophy. His literary genius was versatile and unfolded itself in letters, essays articles, poetry, verse plays, philosophical and mystical prose and literary criticism. His lyrical poetry is suffused with a philosophical or mystical glow. Aurobindo's epic "Savitri" based on the legendary story of Savitri and Satyavana is The Crest-jewel of Indian writing in English. "The Life Divine" is his colossal work of mystical philosophy and "Savitri" is, in a sense, The Life Divine turned into poetry.

Sri Aurobindo's first collection of verse is *Songs to Myrtila and Other Poems* (1885). His poetic output consists of *Urvashi* (1896), *Ahana* and other poems (1915), *Love and Death* (1921), *Baji Prabhau* (1920), *Poems* (1941), *Six Poems* (1934), *Nine Poems* in *Collected Poems and Plays*. Vol. 11 (1942), *Poems Past and Present* (1946), *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* (1950-1951), *Last Poems* (1952), *More Poems* (1958), and *Ilion* (1957). As a lyric poet, Sri Aurobindo's range is of the widest and covers a period of sixty years. Juvenalia, songs, sonnets, recollections of Yogic experience, philosophical poems, mystic affirmations, mantric emanations, experiments of quantitative and stress meters, humorous or political slant, there is no question regarding the variety, richness and cumulative impressiveness of the achievement. He was equally at home in lyric, narrative, drama and epic. He is remembered today as a poet-philosopher than as a sociological thinker and a politician. Sri Aurobindo's poetry is a type by itself- poetry of the highest and rarest kind - the poetry of mystic vision, magical word and mantric vibration. Born out of deep spiritual experience and self-realization, Sri Aurobindo's poetry is "a call to spiritual adventure".

#### **4.2.2 The Poem**

##### **Savitri - a Legend and a Symbol**

##### **Part Two**

##### **Book Eight**

##### **The Book of Death**

##### **Canto Three**

##### **DEATH IN THE FOREST**

Now it was here in this great golden dawn.  
By her still sleeping husband lain she gazed  
Into her past as one about to die  
Looks back upon the sunlit fields of life  
Where he too ran and sported with the rest,  
Lifting his head above the huge dark stream  
Into whose depths he must for ever plunge.  
All she had been and done she lived again.  
The whole year in a swift and eddying race  
Of memories swept through her and fled away

Into the irrecoverable past.  
Then silently she rose and, service done,  
Bowed down to the great goddess simply carved  
By Satyavan upon a forest stone.  
What prayer she breathed her soul and Durga knew.  
Perhaps she felt in the dim forest huge  
The infinite Mother watching over her child,  
Perhaps the shrouded Voice spoke some still word.  
At last she came to the pale mother queen.  
She spoke but with guarded lips and tranquil face  
Lest some stray word or some betraying look  
Should let pass into the mother's unknowing breast,  
Slaying all happiness and need to live,  
A dire foreknowledge of the grief to come.  
Only the needed utterance passage found:  
All else she pressed back into her anguished heart  
And forced upon her speech an outward peace.

“One year that I have lived with Satyavan  
Here on the emerald edge of the vast woods  
In the iron ring of the enormous peaks  
Under the blue rifts of the forest sky,  
I have not gone into the silences  
Of this great woodland that enringed my thoughts  
With mystery, nor in its green miracles  
Wandered, but this small clearing was my world.  
Now has a strong desire seized all my heart  
To go with Satyavan holding his hand  
Into the life that he has loved and touch  
Herbs he has trod and know the forest flowers  
And hear at ease the birds and the scurrying life  
That starts and ceases, rich far rustle of boughs  
And all the mystic whispering of the woods.  
Release me now and let my heart have rest. ”  
She answered: “Do as thy wise mind desires,

O calm child-sovereign with the eyes that rule.  
I hold thee for a strong goddess who has come  
Pitying our barren days; so dost thou serve  
Even as a slave might, yet art thou beyond  
All that thou doest, all our minds conceive,  
Like the strong sun that serves earth from above. ”  
Then the doomed husband and the woman who knew  
Went with linked hands into that solemn world  
Where beauty and grandeur and unspoken dream,  
Where Nature’s mystic silence could be felt  
Communing with the secrecy of God.  
Beside her Satyavan walked full of joy  
Because she moved with him through his green haunts:  
He showed her all the forest’s riches, flowers  
Innumerable of every odour and hue  
And soft thick clinging creepers red and green  
And strange rich-plumaged birds, to every cry  
That haunted sweetly distant boughs replied  
With the shrill singer’s name more sweetly called.

He spoke of all the things he loved: they were  
His boyhood’s comrades and his playfellows,  
Coevals and companions of his life  
Here in this world whose every mood he knew:  
Their thoughts which to the common mind are blank,  
He shared, to every wild emotion felt  
An answer. Deeply she listened, but to hear  
The voice that soon would cease from tender words  
And treasure its sweet cadences beloved  
For lonely memory when none by her walked  
And the beloved voice could speak no more.  
But little dwelt her mind upon their sense;  
Of death, not life she thought or life’s lone end.  
Love in her bosom hurt with the jagged edges  
Of anguish moaned at every step with pain

Crying, "Now, now perhaps his voice will cease  
For ever." Even by some vague touch oppressed  
Sometimes her eyes looked round as if their orbs  
Might see the dim and dreadful god's approach.  
But Satyavan had paused. He meant to finish  
His labour here that happy, linked, uncaring  
They two might wander free in the green deep  
Primaeval mystery of the forest's heart.

A tree that raised its tranquil head to heaven  
Luxuriating in verdure, summoning  
The breeze with amorous wideness of its boughs,  
He chose and with his steel assailed the arm  
Brown, rough and strong hidden in its emerald dress.  
Wordless but near she watched, no turn to lose  
Of the bright face and body which she loved.  
Her life was now in seconds, not in hours,  
And every moment she economised  
Like a pale merchant leaned above his store,  
The miser of his poor remaining gold.  
But Satyavan wielded a joyous axe.  
He sang high snatches of a sage's chant

That pealed of conquered death and demons slain,  
And sometimes paused to cry to her sweet speech  
Of love and mockery tenderer than love:  
She like a pantheress leaped upon his words  
And carried them into her cavern heart.  
But as he worked, his doom upon him came.  
The violent and hungry hounds of pain  
Travelled through his body biting as they passed  
Silently, and all his suffering breath besieged  
Strove to rend life's strong heart-cords and be free.  
Then helped, as if a beast had left its prey,  
A moment in a wave of rich relief

Reborn to strength and happy ease he stood  
Rejoicing and resumed his confident toil  
But with less seeing strokes. Now the great woodsman  
Hewed at him and his labour ceased: lifting  
His arm he flung away the poignant axe  
Far from him like an instrument of pain.  
She came to him in silent anguish and clasped,  
And he cried to her, "Savitri, a pang  
Cleaves through my head and breast as if the axe  
Were piercing it and not the living branch.  
Such agony rends me as the tree must feel  
When it is sundered and must lose its life.  
Awhile let me lay my head upon thy lap  
And guard me with thy hands from evil fate:  
Perhaps because thou touchest, death may pass. ”  
Then Savitri sat under branches wide,  
Cool, green against the sun, not the hurt tree  
Which his keen axe had cloven,--that she shunned;  
But leaned beneath a fortunate kingly trunk  
She guarded him in her bosom and strove to soothe  
His anguished brow and body with her hands.  
All grief and fear were dead within her now  
And a great calm had fallen. The wish to lessen  
His suffering, the impulse that opposes pain

Were the one mortal feeling left. It passed:  
Griefless and strong he waited like the gods.  
But now his sweet familiar hue was changed  
Into a tarnished greyness and his eyes

Dimmed over, forsaken of the clear light she loved.  
Only the dull and physical mind was left,  
Vacant of the bright spirit's luminous gaze.  
But once before it faded wholly back,  
He cried out in a clinging last despair,

“Savitri, Savitri, O Savitri,  
Lean down, my soul, and kiss me while I die. ”  
And even as her pallid lips pressed his,  
His failed, losing last sweetness of response;  
His cheek pressed down her golden arm. She sought  
His mouth still with her living mouth, as if  
She could persuade his soul back with her kiss;  
Then grew aware they were no more alone.  
Something had come there conscious, vast and dire.  
Near her she felt a silent shade immense  
Chilling the noon with darkness for its back.  
An awful hush had fallen upon the place:  
There was no cry of birds, no voice of beasts.  
A terror and an anguish filled the world,  
As if annihilation’s mystery  
Had taken a sensible form. A cosmic mind  
Looked out on all from formidable eyes  
Contemning all with its unbearable gaze  
And with immortal lids and a vast brow  
It saw in its immense destroying thought  
All things and beings as a pitiful dream,  
Rejecting with calm disdain Nature’s delight,  
The wordless meaning of its deep regard  
Voicing the unreality of things  
And life that would be for ever but never was  
And its brief and vain recurrence without cease,  
As if from a Silence without form or name

The Shadow of a remote uncaring god  
Doomed to his Nought the illusory universe,  
Cancelling its show of idea and act in Time  
And its imitation of eternity.  
She knew that visible Death was standing there  
And Satyavan had passed from her embrace.

End of Book Eight  
End of Part Two

### **4.2.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

#### **From Savitri (1950-51)**

#### **Book Eight : Canto Three : Death in The Forest :**

“Savitri : A Legend and a Symbol’ is an epic based on the Mahabharata story of Savitri and Satyavan. It is in three Parts, divided into 12 Books or 49 Cantos. Part I comprises first three Books. Part II comprises Books 4 to 8 and Part III is made of Books 9 to 12. In this great epic Aurobindo deals with the theme of “Love Conquers Death”. The story of Savitri and Satyavan moves on two planes-physical and spiritual. On the physical plane there is the story of how Savitri wins back the un soul of Satyavan from Death. On the spiritual plane there is the progress of the co’ awakened soul through Life and Time to the bliss of divine.

Savitri is a great epic of mysticism. Philosophy and poetry in the tradition of Indian Vedic poetry. The key symbol of the epic is dawn which in an the Veda is Savitri. another name of Gayatri, the holiest of the Vedic mantras. Savitri herself is not merely the wife of Satyavan. but she is the incarnation of let the Divine Mother, the Creative of the Life Divine on earth.

The poem opens on the day when Satyavan is fated to die according to V Narad Muni’s prophecy. Twelve passionate months of conjugal love are over, It is the dawn of the fateful day, as also the “symbol dawn” of a new epoch ins, cosmic history. There is thus “double time” and “double action” in Savitri. As noted earlier, on the material plane the poem begins on the day Satyavan is to die and ends with the defeat of Death and the reunion of Satyavan and Savitri on earth. On the spiritual plane, it involves the issue between world annihilationl and world survival and ends with the defeat of a “partial and temporary darkness of the Soul and Nature”.

Book Eight: “The Book of Death” relates the death of Satyavan in the forest. It reminds of the symbol of Dawn. It is significant that the beginning of Canto of this book is numbered “Canto Three”. This Canto was compiled by the poet from an early version of Savitri in which it had been called Canto we Three. It was the third Canto of that poem, not the third Canto of any particular book.

On the fateful day Savitri gazed on her “sleeping husband”. She had a the panoramic view of the entire past of earth existence and had a vision of its IS, future. She offered her silent prayer because she had a dire foreknowledge of the coming grief. Savitri’s Yoga has armed her with vision and strength. She wanted to accompany Satyavan that day into the forest. She went to the Queen- Mother to seek her permission to do so. She expressed her strong desire to go with Satyavan and sought to be released and let her heart have the required rest. The Queen readily consents:

**“Do as thy wise mind desires”.**

Then Savitri and her doomed husband Satyavan walked hand in hand into the forest. Satyavan did not know his impending death. As Satyavan walked beside Savitri while going to the forest, she kept herself composed and silent. Satyavan was filled with joy as his spouse of celestial demeanour moved with him through the majesty and silence of the deep woods. He showed her all the riches of the forest. He spoke of all the things he loved - of his boyhood comrades and, close to companions in Nature and many things in the world of the woods. But Savitri had a grim spectre in her heart. She was not interested in what he said. She was pre-occupied with his near end and its aftermath. And Satyavan, quite unconscious of the dark fate, was filled with joy. Reaching the forest, he started collecting fuel. He wielded “a joyous axe” and sang. All of a sudden he felt in him the violent and hungry hounds of pain. He cried to Savitri for help. Savitri, then, drew his head close to her bosom. and strove to soothe tenderly “his anguished brow and body with her hands. All grief and fear left her, and she experienced within her a great calm and an uncountable certitude. Satyavan left his body as he lay in Savitri’s fond embrace. He called her thrice and died. Savitri discovers that they were not alone. She feels the presence of someone “vast and dire”. It is Death in visible form.

**There was no cry of birds, no voice of beasts**

**A terror and an anguish filled the world.** The world itself appeared to be an illusion: and all sense of permanence merely an imitation of eternity. Savitri saw Yama, the Lord of Death, who had come to take the soul of Satyavan. Thus the entire Canto is marked by tension and suspense.

## ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

In this brief canto which can be read in conjunction with the 1<sup>st</sup> canto (the Symbol dawn), Savitri knows the day had arrived when Satyavan must die. She accompanies her husband to the forest where he grew up and spends many joyful hours with him all the while being aware of his pending death. (This has to be understood that during the inner wandering the Subconscient and Inconscient plane in finding the secret of immortality and origin of Death, Satyavan met death. His link with Savitri made him again return to earth. This link is the Divine Love which grows through Sadhana. By breaking this link, Death can succeed in carrying human Souls to its home.)

Satyavan is overpowered by Death and his life force leaves him. Savitri becomes aware of the Inconscient godhead's presence and prepares herself to confront him.

The Death in the forest' gives an account of the death of Satyavan on the fateful day. As Satyavan walks besides Savitri while going to the forest, she keeps herself composed and silent. There is a grim spectre in her heart. She has an intense anguish within her, for her husband may die any moment. Reaching the forest, Satyavan starts collecting fuel, he wields 'a joyous axe' and sings 'high snatches of a sage's chant.' Soon death approaches him. He feels a piercing pain in his head, and cries to Savitri,

Such agony rends me as the tree must feel

When it is sundered and must lose its life.

He lays his head upon her lap and urges her to guard him from "evil fate". He expresses that hope that death "may pass" because she touches him. She tries to soothe his anguished brow and body with her hand. Presently he calls her thrice and dies. She now feels the presence of someone near her. It is Death in visible form. She knows well that her husband has passed from her embrace. This part of the story is marked by tension and suspense.

This canto was earlier writings of Sri Aurobindo and it does not represent his comprehensive vision but the seed and essential truth of his vision. The external narration are symbols of inner world and inner journey of conquest of death. We have to understand Satyavan in the context of Sri Aurobindo's departure of earthly

body. Death sees the world as a limitation of eternity , not an unfolding of eternity in time.

**To sum up** : Sri Aurbindo’s poetry is the poetry of mystic vision and mantric quality . His poetry is born out of deep spiritual experience and self –realization. Savitri remains the largest spiritual epic written in English. He has started a new Vedic and Upanishadic era in Indian English poetry.

#### **4.2.4 Glossary and notes**

- lain : laying
- plunge : to cast or thrust forcibly or suddenly into something
- swift : moving
- eddying : whirling motion
- swept : remove, to clear
- fled : to move swiftly, fly, speed
- irrecoverable : incapable of being recovered or regained
- shrouded : hidden
- tranquil : calm, serene
- betraying : deceive abandon
- slaying : to kill violently, to strike down
- dire : exciting horror, oppressive
- utterance : something uttered
- emerald : a rich green variety of beryl prized as a gemstone
- peaks : a sharp
- rifts : clear space or interval
- enringed : encircle
- seized : overwhelmingly
- trod : proceed along
- scurrying : to move around in a agitated, fluttering manner
- sovereign : held to possess supreme political power
- barren : lacking interest or charm
- doomed : fate, unavoidable ill for lane
- grandeur : the quality or state of being grand

- communing : to converse
- clinging : to hold tight, embracing
- creepers : a plant that grows upon or just beneath the surface of the ground
- plumaged : the entire feathery covering of a bird
- boughs : a branch of a tree
- comrades : companion, friend
- coevals : of the same age
- cadences : rhythmic flow of a sequence of sounds
- jagged : rough, uneven quality
- edges : a line or border at which a surface terminates
- moaned : in articulate sound uttered from
- primeval : aboriginal, primitive, native
- verdure : greenness
- assailed : to attack vigorously
- emerald : a rare variety of beryl that is coloured green by chromium and valued as a gem
- sage : a profoundly wise person
- pantheress : a female panther
- cavern : cave
- besieged : to lay siege to
- hewed : to strike forcibly with an axe
- poignant : affecting, impressive, moving
- clasped : a holding or enveloping with or as if with the hands or arms
- piercing : cutting
- sundered : break apart or in two, separate by
- cloven : cling, stick
- strove : past participle form of strive
- soothe : to tranquilize
- tarnished : to grow dull, lose luster
- luminous : radiating or reflecting light
- chilling : causing or likely to cause a chill

- annihilation : an act or instance of annihilating
- formidable : causing fear, apprehension or dread
- disdain : to look upon, despise, scorn
- illusory : causing, illusion
- eternity : infinite time
- embrace : to take or clasp in the arms

#### **4.2.5 Check Your Progress**

Q.1 A) Answer the following questions in one sentence / phrase / word

- In which year Savitri the masterpiece of Sir Aurobindo published ?
- Who is Satyavan ?
- Who is Gayatri ?
- What is the symbol of dawn ?
- Whom did Savitri seek the permission?
- What is in visible form?
- Who is the Lord of Death ?
- In which book 'Death of forest' appeared ?
- What is the origin of the epic 'Savitri'?
- Who is the divine in the poet 'Savitri'?

#### **4.2.6 Key to Check Your Progress**

- 1950 – 1951
- He is the husband of Savitri
- Gayatri is another name of Savitri
- It is the dawn of the fateful day and new epoch in cosmic history.
- Savitri went to the Queen Mother to seek her permission.
- Death
- Yama
- Book eight canto three
- The legendary story of Savitri and Satyavana is the origin of the epic Savitri.
- Savitri

#### **4.2.7 Self – assessment questions**

##### **A) Long Answer Questions**

- Attempt a critical estimate of Sri Aurobindo's 'Savitri'.
- Discuss the distractive features of Aurobindo's Poetic art from your reading of Savitri, Death in the forest.
- Explain Savitri, Death in the forest' is an epic with a spiritual action and a cosmic significance.

##### **B) Write short notes**

- Sri Aurobindo as a poet.
- Theme of Death in the forest.
- Title of Death in the forest.
- Savitri
- Savatyan

#### **4.2.8 Further Reading**

- Das, Manoj, Sri Aurobindo, New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1972.
- Dwivedi, A. N. , A Study of Sri Aurobindo's Savitri and Other Select Poems, Bareilly Prakash Book Depot, 1977.

## POET, LOVER, BIRDWATCHER

Nissim Ezekiel

### Content

- 4.3.1 Introduction
- 4.3.2 The Poem
- 4.3.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem
- 4.3.4 Glossary and notes
- 4.3.5 Check Your Progress
- 4.3.6 Key to Check Your Progress
- 4.3.7 Self – assessment questions

## POET, LOVER, BIRDWATCHER

Nissim Ezekiel

### 4.3.1 Introduction

**Nissim Ezekiel** : (b. 1924 – d, 2003) Nissim Ezekiel is known as the pioneer of contemporary Indian English poetry. He is also considered foremost among the modern Indian poets writing in English. He comes of a Jewish family who had long ago migrated to India and settled down in Mumbai. He was born in 1924 in Mumbai. Both his parents were teachers at the time, the father in a college and the mother in a primary school for a short period he worked as a lecturer in English in Khalasa College, Mumbai. Then he went to England for higher studies for three and half years. He also studied psychology and Philosophy under Professor C. E. M. Joad. It was during his years in London, he published his first volume of poems appeared in 1953 under the heading of sixty poems. He was also appointed as the editor of magazine called quest and the poetry page of the illustrated weekly of India. His other volumes of poetry are *The Third* (1959). **The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exact Man (1965) Hymns in Darkness (1976) and Later-Day Psalms (1982)**. He

has also written three plays which were published in 1969. More over Ezekiel is also known as a very good critic.

**Poet, Lover, Bird watcher (The Exact Name) (1965)** : ‘Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher’ is a compact poem from *The Exact Name*. It is about Ezekiel’s search for poetics. It is also the best example of his creativity. It gives an analysis of the creative process and beautifully expresses about Ezekiel’s own method of composition.

### 4.3.2 THE POEM

#### **Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher**

To force the pace and never be still  
Is not the way of those who study birds  
Or women. The best poets wait for words.  
The hunt is not as exercise of will  
But patient love relaxing on a hill  
To note the movement of a timid wing  
Until the one who knows that she is loved  
No longer waits but risks surrendering-  
In this the poet finds his moral proved,  
Who never spoke before his spirit moved .  
The slow movements seems, somehow, to say much more.  
To watch the rarer birds, you have to go  
Along deserted lanes and where the rivers flow  
In silence near the source, or by a shore  
Remote and thorny like the heart’s dark floor.  
And there the women slowly turn around ,  
Not only flesh and bone but myths of light  
With darkness at the core and sense is found  
By poets lost in crooked, restless flight,  
The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight.

### 4.3.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem

**Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher** is one of the finest poems of Ezekiel. The poem is about the definition of the poet in terms of the lover and the birdwatcher. The poem

taken from volume *The Exact Name* (1965). The message of the poem is clear, the best poets wait for words, the best poets begin to write poetry only when they are truly inspired or when they experience a moment of enlightenment only then do the right poetic words come.

The poem opens with a comparison among the poets, lovers and birdwatchers. There is a close resemblance among them in their search for word, love and bird. The lovers and ornithologists have patience. In the similar manner, the poet waits for words. There is no action, no exercise of will but patient waiting. The patience of the bird-watcher is rewarded when the timid bird is caught in the net. The patience of the lover is rewarded when the beloved surrenders to him. Similarly the poet waits till the moment of inspiration.

Thus the slow movement is productive and it brings a reward. In order to watch the rarer birds, the bird-watcher has to go to distant places just as the lover has to discover love in a remote place like the “heart’s dark floor”. It is there that women are something more than body. They appear like “myths of light”. In the same way a poet imagines himself as flying through the air and waits restlessly till his mind is illuminated by light and he can produce a poem.

It is the most correct and original poem that describes Ezekiel’s poetic art.

The thought-pattern is well-compressed and the choice of the words is appropriate. Paul Verghese says, “What is striking about the use of images in this poem is that the transition from one image to the other is so unobtrusive that the poet, lover and bird-watcher lose their separate identities for once and merge into one another to carry the poem forward to its end”. There is also musicality in the poem. Ezekiel handles both metrical verse and free verse with equal ease. In the poem, there are three images of a bird-spirit. They gain by waiting.

#### **ANALYSIS OF THE POEM**

The present poem is taken from Nissim Ezekiel fourth volume of poems, the exact name which was published 1965. the poem appears the crowing dome to the edifice that is the Exact Name in a sense the dome of Nissim Ezekiel poetry. The present lyric epitomizes Ezekiel search for a poetics. The present lyric shows how the poet has travelled a long way since the romantic idealism of a time to change, tells us the secrets of poetic creation. The title remind us the song of Shakespeare. The lunatic, the lover and the poet from his play, *A Midsummer Nights Dream*. The lyric

is poets attempt to illustrate his view by comparing a poet to a lover and a birdwatcher. In this lyric Ezekiel has tried to define the writing of poetry in terms of mans love for a woman and in terms of bird watchers watching birds especially the rarest of the birds.

To force the pace and never to be still  
Is not the way of those who study birds  
Or women. The best poets wait for words  
The hunt is not an exercise of will

Ezekiel meditatively observes very close resemblance among poet, the lover and bird watcher. The poet also solemnly believes that writing of poetry is not a matter of the will but a matter of inspiration and may take prolonged time to come. Poet is like the beloved, unless the body wakes to lover or unless the spirit is moved neither love nor poetry is possible.

In the second stanza of the poem the poet tries to draw the attention of the readers towards the fact that slow movement is effective in all the three cases. In search of rarer birds, a bird watcher has to go to remote places just as one has to discover love in a remote place like the hearts dark floor. According to the poet there is close resemblance among the bird watcher, lover and the poet, all the three of them have to wait patiently in their pursuits. A woman, or at least sensible woman does not begin to reciprocate a mind love as soon as she finds that the man is feeling drawn towards her. The poet never speaks before his mind urges him to speak. In other words, a poet never begins writing a poem till he experiences an urge from within to write a poem. Patience and silent atmosphere is an essential key of success for lover, poet and birdwatcher. The birdwatcher must have a lot of patience. The poet suggest that the truth that success is not our command but we will successful if there will be patience and waiting in us. Sometimes the birdwatcher also waits patiently and undergoes a lot of trouble in order to trace out the proper location where he might be able to see a rare kind of bird. Thus labor and best efforts are the key to success in all these three spheres. The poet is successful in bringing together sense and sound in very appropriate manner. For example the line the deaf can hear, the blind lover sight, very apply suggest sense and sound.

Thus the poem effectively reveals the nature of the poetic perception through the network appropriate use to metaphor. The birds or woman symbolizes freedom,

imagination, love and creativity. A poet looks for his inspiration the layer for the secret corner of the lovers heart and the bird watcher for a rarer bird. While writing about this poem a critic I. N. Kher, calls it a net work of highly fecund metaphor in which images merge into each other like lovers in the act of love. Thus in the present poem three images are so fused that they become one. The unification not only brings out necessary qualities of a poet, but also makes a compact poem. The poem has twenty lines divided into two stanzas of ten lines each. The poem before us is highly pleasing are become of its lyrical quality, its choice of the most appropriate words, its felicities of word and phrase, its obvious spontaneity, its undoubted sincerely and its structural compactness.

#### **4.3.4 Glossary and notes :**

to force the pace	:	to walk hurriedly , to make haste
is not the way	:	is not the method
of those who study birds	:	of birdwatchers
the best poets wait for words	:	the best poets wait for words to come to the tips of their pen
the poem of the best authors are written spontaneously	:	the writing of a poem should never be a laborious task because a good poem is never written
the hunt	:	the search for rarer birds or desire to win a woman's heart.
is not an exercise of will	:	is not a matter of determination
a timid wing	:	a bird fluttering its wings in a timid or hesitating manner
patient love	:	metaphorically, it means love requires a lot of patience
no longer waits but risks surrendering	:	if a man waits long enough, the woman would feel convinced that he lover her and then she would no longer wait but would herself surrender to him even though she may think that she is taking a certain risk.

- the poet finds his moral : these two examples (that of birdwatcher and of the lover) the poet would find the right parallels and would be able to draw moral for his own guidance
- proved : watcher that patience for words finally rewards
- his spirit moved : the poet never hastily begins to write a poem unless his inner soul urges him to write
- deserted lines : untrodden paths. here the word “lane” does not mean a city street but a country pathway
- by a seashore : near a seashore
- remote and thorny like the heart’s dark floor : a remote and thorny seashore is here compared to a human’s hearts. it is the inner, unexpectored depths of human heart the conscious and sub-conscious layers of mind, the hidden regions where emotions of well. there is silence, remoteness, darkness as well thorny (difficult, complex) parts to touch with a bird watcher has to take a difficult to reach his destination.
- woman slowly : a woman never immediately says yes until she herself feels
- turns around : a like (love) she takes her time to determine
- myths of light : when the woman does respond her lovers love she is no longer a woman made of flesh and bones but has become a myth of light. the phrase myths of light means a radiance which does not really exist but which is something mythical or imaginary or a product of fancy.
- sense is found : poets find meaning and significance in things even when they have been previously been unable to understand anything. the poets’ mind would be illumined only if he has the patience to wait for

the right moment.

- crooked, restless flight : puzzled or confused nature of life
- the deaf can hear, the blind recover sight : when the moment of illumination comes, the man who was deaf would now be able to hear, and the man who was previously blind would acquire the capacity to see. the faculties of hearing and seeing would be restored to the man who had lost them; but they would be restored only if a man waits long enough for such a reawakening.

### 4.3.5 Check your progress

Answer the following in one word / phrase /sentence each

- For what did the best poet wait?
- What did birds or women symbolize?
- Where did one has to go to watch rarer birds?
- According to Ezekiel, what is essential thing for Poet, Lover Birdwatcher?
- What is the indication of expression "The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight".
- What do the best poets wait for?
- Are the three in a hurry?
- How and why does the birdwatcher wait patiently?
- What does a lover do when he gets the right opportunity?
- When does a poet express himself?

### 4.3.6 Key to Check Your Progress

- Words
- Symbolizes freedom, imagination love and creativity.
- Along deserted lanes
- Patience

- The faculties of hearing and seeing would be restored only if a man waits long for such reawakening.
- Words
- No, but at the same time they are never still.
- He waits with relaxation on a hill even to watch a wing movement of a timid bird.
- A lover risks surrendering
- When he finds something which moves his spirit.

#### **4.3.7 Self – assessment questions**

- What is the theme of the poem “Poet, Lover, Bird – Watcher”? How is it realized in the poem? Explain the parallelism between the poet, the bird watcher comment upon the use images and the structure.
- Write a critical appreciation of the poem “Poet, Lover, Bird-Watcher”.
- Which qualities of the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel does the poem, ‘Poet Lover, Bird-Watcher bring into focus?

## ENTERPRISE

(Nissim Ezekiel)

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### 4.4.0 ENTERPRISE

(Nissim Ezekiel)

#### 4.4.1 Introduction

Enterprise is one of the best lyrics by Nissim Ezekiel. The poem is taken from ‘The Unfinished Man’. It was written in 1959. It is a short poem in six stanzas of five lines each. It has thirty lines in all with a well marked rhyme scheme. It revolves around a metaphorical journey of man on this earth followed by hardships and failures which man is subjected to by the very nature of the earthly life that he leads.

#### 4.4.2 The Poem

##### *Enterprise*

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

Observed and put down copious notes  
On things the peasants sold and bought.  
The way of serpents and of goats,  
Three cities where a sage had taught.  
But when the differences arose  
On how to cross a desert patch,  
We lost a friend whose stylish prose  
Was quite the best of all our batch.  
A shadow falls on us—and grows.  
Another phase was reached when we  
Were twice attacked, and lost our way.  
A section claimed its liberty  
To leave the group.  
I tried to pray,  
Our leader said he smelt the sea.  
We noticed nothing as we went,  
A straggling crowd of little hope,  
Ignoring what the thunder meant,  
Deprived of common needs, like soap.  
Some were broken, some merely bent.  
When, finally, we reached the place,  
We hardly knew why we were there.  
The trip had darkened every face,  
Our deeds were neither great nor rare.  
Home is where we have to earn our grace.

#### **4.4.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

The poem, *Enterprise*, begins with a group of people which includes the poet himself travelling to a holy place. They started their journey with a lot of vigor and excitement, sure enough that they can easily overcome all the difficulties that they face. The travelers were full of enthusiasm and reached the second stage of their journey. When they reached to the second stage, they confronted the adverse natural difficulties, symbolizing the blazing sun. But nothing could detain them from reaching their destination. They were reaching their destination. They were passionate to reach their destination. The heat of the sun is symbolic of Mother

Nature being hostile towards human ambitions. The more the human beings aspire, the more the nature tries to put up a hindrance to beat them down.

The group of travelers continues and to their journey put up very well with dangers and difficulties for sometime. The pilgrims kept a record of the events that they witnessed goods being bought and sold by the peasants and the ways of serpents and goats. The travelers passed through three cities where a sage has taught. But they were, unconcerned about what thought.

The third stanza of the poem is description about the differences that cropped up among the members which made a hole in their units as they continued their journey. As they reached a desert, differences arose among on the question of how to cross the challenging landscape. One of the members, an excellent prose writer, left the enterprise. He was considered the most intelligent among the group. Hence, a shadow of discord fell into their enterprise and continue to grow as one of the members parted from the group.

In the fourth stanza the poet describes the hindrances that follow that enterprise. The travelers are attacked twice in the next stage of their journey. They lose their ways and forget the noble ambitions which had motivated them to come so far. The enterprise slowly breaks into two. Some of them were claiming their freedom, they quit the journey and went their own ways. The poet bevels helpless and upset at the breaking of the do was to pray after looking at the disorganized lot of pilgrims. And why do you think we pray? The answer is that the act of praying implies sealing the help of a divine person a hits when human efforts go in vain.

In the fifth stanza, the leader of the group assures them that the sea was at hand. The members have lost their enthusiasm and hope as they see nothing as they move forward. Now the pilgrims have turned into a crowd of aimless wanders instead of being bounded by a well – focused goal. They were not bothered about the roar of the thunder, some of them were too exhausted to stand erect.

In the final stanza of the poem the poet tells us that they did reach their destination in total disorder exhausted and frustrated and without any sense of satisfaction. The journey had brought them frustration. They now started to doubt the importance of their journey and they began to find it futile and meaningless. They found nothing heroic in their achievements.

They realized that such a journey was already undertaken by others before them and would be repeated in the near future. This gave them a sense of disillusionment and they felt the journey was futile. Thus, they feel that staying back home would have been better.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE POEM**

Enterprise is a satiric poem by Nissim Ezekiel. The poem is about the pilgrimages which serve no useful purpose. According to the poet, the religious pilgrimages are a waste and snobbish. The poem has two central metaphors one is pilgrimage and other one is home Ezekiel reveals his attitude of commitment. Besides, according to him, to please God one need not go on pilgrimages as God is within. The narrator of this poem is poet himself and the poet has narrated how he and others started on a pilgrimage. They are full of noble ideas and ideals, and they hope to reach their destination of noble achievement. It started as a pilgrimage Exalting minds and making all the burdens light. The second stage explored but did not test the call. The sun beat down to match out rage.

The aim of the pilgrimage was to ennoble the minds and to make the burdens light. The pilgrimage had no hitch, to start with. Their rage their passion for their mission is as hot as the heat above their head. 'The sun beat down to match our range'. It was very hot and they were unable to beat the heat. Thus they were physically unfit for the pilgrimage.

The pilgrims are able to put up very well with dangers and difficulties for sometime. They hopefully march on taking down copious notes of what they observe. We stood is very well, I thought, observed and put down copious notes on things the peasants scold and bought. The way of serpents and of goats three cities where a sage had thought.

The division in the group grew day by day. Their idealism and their single mindedness of purpose soon vanish. There are cracks in their unity. They show their differences of opinion and gruel over trivial matters. The pilgrims have lost faith in the leadership and tried to form a separate group. The leader was helpless and he said that he was 'Smelling a sea of problems. The speaker try to pray in such critical times to seek divine assistance and blessings. He feels that they have reached a dead end, and must go back and their enterprise must end. They are no more a disciplined

group of idealist but only a struggling crowd of a few defeated, tired and hopeless survivors. They are broken in spirit and bent down physically:

We noticed nothing as we went,  
A stragglng crowd of little hope,  
Ignoring what the thunder meant,  
Deprived of common needs, like soap,  
Somewhere broken, some verily bent.

The end of all human enterprises is miserable. This is the essential truth of life. They are aimless. Exekiel, thus, stresses the extreme hopelessness of man at the end of life's journey. Disillusionment pervades all. All hopes of inner illumination on spiritual regeneration are lost. All pilgrims are disillusioned. There disillusionment is total. They even doubt the very worth significance of their journey. There is sorrow and suffering on every face. They are aware of the fact that their actions have neither been great nor rare.

When, finally, we reached the place,  
We hardly know why we were there,  
The trip had darkened every face,  
Our deeds were weather great nor rare.

Home is where we have to earn our grace. The concluding line contains the moral of the poem. The poet suggests that all efforts to escape from life is realities are futile. The purpose of human life is to accept heroically our lot in life and to do out best to earn grace by serving God and humanity.

“Home is where we have to earn our grace”. The poet concluded that the pilgrims should have stayed at home and tried to gather love and respect of others. Doing good to the mankind makes more sense and its better way than going to a pilgrimage to gather God's grace.

The last line also reflects some of Ezekiels commitment to well defined attitudes. The first is to stay where he is. He seeks his identity in the country. Exekiel is basically an urban poet, the city spilling over his verse. His poetry is confessional in the literal sense, in that it is littered with a records of his failures.

The poem ‘Enterprise’ written in a conventional form. The poem consists of six stanzas each having five lines. The pattern is iambic tetrameter with rhyming scheme

ababa that is the first line rhymes with the third and fifth, while the second rhymes with the fourth. 'Enterprise' is a symbolic poem. Symbolism refers to the use of symbols used in Enterprise for examples pilgrimage in the poem symbolizes life, the crowd of pilgrims symbolizes group of men, who undertake to achieve common goal which begins with excitement and hope but ends with disillusionment and frustration. The 'Sun' is the symbol of hostility of nature towards human aspirations and ambitions. A 'desert patch' is symbolic of the differences in opinion that leads to a discord in the enterprise and consequently, a member leaves the group and disharmony grows.

'A straggling crowd of little hope'

Symbolizes a group of people who had a well focused goal and during the course of their journey loses their zeal and becomes a crowd of aimless and frustrated wanderers.

'Thunder' is symbolic of man's inner voice. 'Home' symbolizes remaining rooted to the soil or remaining true to oneself.

The poem 'Enterprise' is allegorical in nature. The group of men all set for the journey, enthusiastic and full of vigor set out for the spiritual quest. The journey here is a metaphor of life. The poem is a stark depiction of the condition of men on this earth who are subjected to such failures, hardships and disillusionment during their course of journey of life.

#### 4.4.4 Glossary and notes

**enterprise** : something new difficult and important that one does or tries to do.

**pilgrimage** : a journey someone makes to a holy place for a religious reason.

**exalting** : raising to a higher position by an intense feeling of joy and happiness.

**explored** : tentatively assess.

**rage** : intense anger / frenzy

**copious** : detailed / in large numbers

**sage** : wise knowledgeable man

**liberty** : freedom

**straggling** : wandering away from the path when they are walking along with a group.

#### **4.4.5 Check Your progress**

- From which collection the poem 'Enterprise' is taken ?
- How did the group start their journey?
- What was the question raised in the first stanza?
- What is the purpose of life?
- What is the concluding line of the poem?
- Where did the group want to go?
- What is the symbol of Mother Nature ?

#### **4.4.6 Key to Check Your progress**

- The Unfinished Man.
- The group started their journey with a lot of vigor and excitement.
- was the journey worth all that struggle.
- The purpose of human life is to accept heroically and do best to earn grace by serving God and humanity.
- Home is where we have to earn our grace.
- holy place
- The heat of the sun

#### **4.4.7 Self – assessment questions**

- Give an account of the hardships and conflicts that the pilgrims had to face in various.
- How does the poem 'Enterprise' symbolize different stages of man's life.
- Ezekiel's 'Enterprise' represents a metaphorical journey. Explain.
- Describe the challenges faced by the pilgrims at every stage in Enterprise.

## A TIME TO CHANGE

(Nissim Ezekiel)

### Content

- 4.5.1 Introduction
- 4.5.2 The Poem
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- 4.5.7 Self – assessment questions
- 4.5.8 References for Further study

### 4.5.0 A TIME TO CHANGE

Nissim Ezekiel

#### 4.5.1 Introduction

The poem “**A Time To Change**” is the first poem of his first collected volume published in 1952. It was the time for him to change and switch over from philosophy to poetry. Since then, he dedicated his mind to the cultivation of poetry with zeal and determination. Ezekiel treated poetry as a way of life, as a continuous flow and as something which is inextricably related to existence. This poem shows Ezekiel's passion for the body, God and poetry – the three major constituents of his essential self.

The poem has the epigraph from revelation (3:16)

#### 4.5.2 The Poem

Nissim Ezekiel

*A Time to Change*

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I  
will spue thee out of my mouth.

**Revelation 4, 16.**

We who leave the house in April,  
Lord, How shall we return?  
Debtors to the whore of Love,  
Corrupted by the things imagined  
Through the winter nights, alone,  
The flesh defiled by dreams of flesh,  
Rehearsed desire dead in spring,  
How shall we return?  
The juice of life is in us still  
But when the mind determines everything  
The leap is never made,  
The music Never quite completed,  
Redemption Never fully won  
From what has been, but always  
And anywhere, in London or in Rome,  
The amputated gestures, eyes turned away,  
Incomplete absorption in the common scene,  
Cramped, sedentary, in silent rooms,  
Marking time on unknown ground  
With faults concealed.  
Witness to the small rain and sundry mists,  
Half-hearted birds, uncertain dawns,  
Here in April we are waiting  
For passages of pure creation or simply  
Girls, lightly dressed and light of heart,

**4.5.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

**In the poem 'A Time to Change**, the poet is treated poetry as a way of life and a continuous flow related to human existence. The poem has five sections. It starts with part of the message of the spirit to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans, the physical rejection. of the indefinite and uncommitted man. (Revelation 4. 16) The poem is a description about man's departure from the home, desolation and the

search for a new life, and a final recognition of the need for exposure of secret faults. The first section of the poem is description of introspection. It has pointed out that the mind itself is a source of everything. The change has discussed in terms of sex and love. The hero could not rely on his past for help because the past is a pattern of servitude to the whore of Love on barren winter nights. The traveler in the spring of the year leaves with only sexual response, promising no fruit. The persona finds that redemption is an impossible dream if the faults are concealed. It could be won through the harmony in life and a 'leap' which is a decision of mind and body in unison.

The second section has expressed Ezekiel's frustration and his search for identity. Redemption is to be sought not outside life but in it.

**“Love of life can always be renewed”**

The third section is about the desired pattern for the future. In his life fulfillment could be sought from two sources: happiness in married life and human age relationships. The first aspiration is

**To own a singing voice and a talking voice,**

**A bit of land, a woman and a child or two**

It refers to marital and material bliss. This personal ideal is contrasted with has the social ideal according to which one has to acquainted with the lives and dreams of other people.

In the next section, Ezekiel says that a poet lives on dreams because

**“Flawless doctrines, certainty of God,**

**These are merely dreams.**

Poetry is the religion of the poet. The poet has to make poetry out of this stuff. As the peasant produces fruits by plugging the soil, so the poet creates his, metaphors by the grace of God.

The final section ends on a deeply remorseful note.

The poem has revealed the vocation of the poet-pilgrim. The title of the poem is suggestive, the dilemma of the poet who was then in his twenties. The poet's self is

in quest of an ideal that cannot be found in the past or the present. The hope lies only in future. The optimistic view of the poet is presented in the poem.

But the poet's unwillingness to depend upon philosophy has described in the poem. The poet has turned to poetry. The poetry helps him to resist the temptation to bypass his family tradition on the one hand, and maintain his relationship with the world on the other hand. The Poetry helped him to sympathize with the inconsistencies between his urge for redemption and his intense passion for the world. Hence, he writes:

**The pure invention or the perfect poem,**

**Precise communication of a thought.**

### **ANALYSIS OF THE POEM**

The poem 'A Time to Change' is taken from a common prayer book. Taking the spirit of Renaissance and Twentieth Century in Indian sub – continent, the poet wants to change himself and the whole mankind. The opening poem of Nissim Exekiel's A Time To Change is a plea for one to change from the position.

In the opening stanza of the poem the speaker and his fellows many faults; have imagined, their flesh is defiled by the dreams of flesh, and they are debtors to the where of love. But since they want to attain redemption with their faults concealed, they are not going to get it. So long on the mind determines every thing, the leap is never made and the music is never completed. That signifies that he regards one's resolving to change oneself and then, achieve harmony in one's life to be the two very significant steps in life.

The speaker and his fellows are witnessing the usual things; small rain, Sunday mists, half – hearted birds and dawns. But it is very likely that there will occur surprises and they will discover cities fresh as brides, new arches or unimagined seas. Life offers infinite novelties and even if one has stopped taking interest in them one may restart doing that any stage.

A man of God needs no creed more than having a singing voice, a talking voice, a bit of land, a woman and a child or two and the capacity to accommodate himself to the needs and moods of his woman and children. With his able hands, knowing eyes and the instructions he has received from his parents, ancestors and friends altered slightly here and there to suit his strength, he can build something. He has to go

abroad to know the lines and dreams of man and show his deep affection for the world by speaking in such a way that he is genuinely remorseful.

The persona poem wins redemption in the private country of his mind where the worse part presides. Dreams keep the world going. For example, the stone, loosen the soil, sow seed in it and then, wait patiently for the fruit. It is when he gets the fruit that his dreams are realized.

The poem falls into five sections, outlining a man's departure from the home; consequent desolation and the search for a new life; a look into the desired pattern of the future; a statement of the means of attaining this; and a final recognition to of exposure of secrets faults. The poem is about an association of an initially secular departure from the house with a finally religious striving in the journey; the journey becomes a pilgrimage.

At the beginning the persona finds himself lost in temptations of the flesh and he is not able to compose. However, he begins to realize his infirmities and defects in his approach.

When the mind determines everything.

The leap is never made, the music Never quite completed, redemption

Never fully won

From what has been.

He also realizes the need of one's observing things endlessly and remaining engaged in a never ending quest.

### **TO SUMP UP**

Ezekiel is a Modern Indian Poet. He has opened a new era and trend in Indian English poetry. He is the pioneer and father of modernity in Indian English poetry. The Indian contemporary scene, modern urban life human relationship, love and sex and spiritual values are the major themes of his poetry.

He has experimented endlessly with form and craft. Flawless craftsmanship makes his poetry unique.

#### 4.5.4 Glossary and Notes

debtors	:	borrower, mortgagor
defil	:	damaged the purity or appearance of
rehearse	:	Practice
leap	:	jump with great force
amputate	:	cut off
cramp	:	painful involuntary contraction of a muscle or muscles
sedentary	:	tending to spend much time seated

#### 4.5.5 Check Your Progress

- What is the title of the first volume and Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry?
- What is the name of the church?
- What is the poetry according to the poet?
- What could be renewed ?
- In what way change is discussed in the poem?

#### 4.5.6 Key to Check your Progress

- A Time to Change.
- The Church of Laodiceans
- Poetry is the religion of the poet.
- Love of life could always be renewed
- The change is discussed in terms of sex and love.

#### 4.5.7 Self – assessment questions

Q.1 Give a detailed critical appreciation of Nissim Ezekiel's poem 'A Time to Change'.

Q.2 Write a note on quest for self, reflected in the poem.

### **4.5.8 Further Reading**

Reference for further study

- Paranjape, Makrand. (ed. ) Indian Poetry in English. New Delhi; Trinity Press. 2016. Print.
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## LETTER TO MY MOTHER (DOM MORAES)

### Content

- 4.6.1 Introduction
- 4.6.2 The Poem
- 4.6.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem
- 4.6.4 Glossary and notes
- 4.6.5 Check Your Progress
- 4.6.6 Key to Check Your Progress
- 4.6.7 Self – assessment questions

### 4.6.0 Letter to My Mother

(DOM MORAES)

#### 4.6.1 Introduction

Dom Moraes is one of the best new poets of Indian poetry. He has published several volumes of poems such as ‘A Beginning’ Poems, John Nobody, ‘The Brass Serpent’, ‘Later Poems’ and ‘Serendip’. He went to Oxford for higher education. His idea was, as he tells in his autobiography ‘My Son’s Father’, “to use the University, not let the University use me”. His poems have a confessional mode and a subjective approach. He has attempted to turn the personal into the universal. Dom Moraes is a perfect artist as well as a lyricist.

#### 4.6.2 THE POEM

##### *Letter to My Mother*

**I**

I address you only,  
My lonely mother.  
Where seven islands squat  
In a filthy sea,  
You say your rosary.

The seven hills of Rome  
Loom daily over the deaths  
Of the weepers in the bazaar,  
Equally without hope,  
In the shape of your home  
Which was also on a hill.  
My small prosperous grandfather  
Built a house there. He died  
Mourned by you, from me  
Farther even than Rome.  
Holy he rode to heaven.  
He would be ashamed of me  
Who attend to no virgins.  
You are not ashamed.  
In the corroding sun  
You sit alone with your Church  
And the memory of the son  
You have scarcely ever seen.  
You pray he may be spared  
For the arms of the blue wife  
God raped in an orchard.  
You do not understand me.  
I am tidying my life  
In this cold, tidy country.  
I am filling a small shelf  
With my books.  
If you should find me crying  
As often as when I was a child  
You will know I have reason to.  
I am ashamed of myself  
Since I was ashamed of you.

## II

Your eyes are like mine.  
When I last looked in them

I saw my whole country,  
A defeated dream  
Hiding itself in prayers,  
A population of corpses,  
Of burnt bodies that cluttered  
The slow, deep rivers, of  
Bodies stowed into earth  
Quickly before they stank  
Or cooked by the sun for vultures  
On a marble tower.  
You pray, you do not notice  
The corpses around you. so  
Sorrow has stopped your eye.

Your dream is desolate. It calls me every day But I cannot enter it You know I will not return. Forgive me my trespasses.

#### **4.6.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

Letter to my Mother 'is one of the famous poems written by Dom Moraes. . His poetry is not about personal choices, moral relationships, and the active self in society. His poems are about the sensitivity of the poet as artist in contrast to the insensitivity of others. In 'Letter to My Mother', he has attempted to turn the personal into the universal. Besides, the poem is concerned with the East. He has love for India. From 'Cold, tidy' England he strives to see India.

In a sense, it is 'Any Son to Any Mother'. Dom Moraes lyrics have a vibrant suggestiveness. The familiar is touched with the allusive light of romance and the unusual is rendered intimate through understanding. The poet has address to his mother who is beyond seven islands and seas from England. His mother is a follower of Roman Catholic Christianity. The poet has remembered the small home on a hill built by his grandfather who is died. When he died, the poet's mother mourned but the poet himself was in England. The young poet has taken unhappy decision to stay in England because of his psychological situation. He has remained undeterred even by the repeated requests of his mother to stay longer in India. He was feeling restless for his 'adopted country'. But he has remembered his mother praying for him, for

sparing him from the arms of the blue wife. But he was not happy but sad in England. He was shamed of himself.

Dom Moraes has become nostalgic , by remembering India compering with his mother's eyes . The description of his 'defeated dream' which has subtle hints to the cultural plurality of India with different funeral rites of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsees. Dom Morase is a Goan Catholic but he had a very unhappy childhood. He says,

I am ashamed of myself

Since I was ashamed of you.

#### 4.6.4 Glossary and notes

filthy	:	Dirty
rosary	:	a string of beads for keeping count in a rosary
loom	:	an apparatus for making fabric by weaving yard
mourned	:	person who weeps feel or show sorrow for the death
rode	:	past participle form of ride
virgins	:	Chaste
corroding	:	destroy or damage
scarcely	:	rarely, seldom, infrequently
spared	:	give, provide
orchard	:	a piece of enclosed land planted with fruit trees
tidying	:	bring order to arrange neatly
corpses	:	dead body, cadaver

#### 4.6.5 Check Your Progress

- To whom does the poet write the letter?
- Why does not the poet want to stay in India?
- How does the poet recalls his country India?

- How does the poet express his sense of guilt?
- How was the poet's childhood?

#### **4.6.6 Key to Check Your Progress**

- To his mother
- The poet does not want to stay in India because of his psychological situation.
- The poet recalls his country India by remembering his mother's eyes.
- The poet is gripped by a sense of guilt and says I am ashamed of my self since I was ashamed of you.
- very unhappy.

#### **4.6.7 Self – assessment questions**

Q. 1) Write a critical note of 'Letter to my Mother'.

Q. 2) Describe the world of anxieties in the poem 'Letter to my Mother'.

**SONG**  
**(DOM MORAES)**

**Content**

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- 4.7.2 The Poem
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- 4.7.6 Key to Check Your Progress
- 4.7.7 Self – assessment questions

**4.7.0 SONG**

**DOM MORAES**

**4.7.1 Introduction :**

Dom Moraes is a unique poet in Indian English poetry. The poem Song is an account of his personal life. The poem is about pessimistic attitude towards life.

**4.7.2 THE POEM**

**Song**

I sowed my wild oats  
Before I was twenty.  
Drunkards and turncoats  
I knew in plenty.  
Most friends betrayed me.  
Each new affair  
Further delayed me.  
I didn't care.

I put no end to  
The life that led me  
The friends to lend to,

The bards who bled me.  
Every bad penny  
Finds its own robber.

My beds were many  
And my cheques rubber.

Then, with the weather worse,  
To the cold river,

I came reciting verse  
With a hangover.  
You shook a clammy hand.  
How could I tell you  
Then that wild oats died and  
Brighter grain grew?

Now, once more wintertime,  
We sit together.  
In your bright forelock Time  
Gives me fair weather.  
Then will a summer break  
Well worth the having.  
Then shall our hearts awake  
Into our loving.

### 4.7.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem

The poem 'Song' is one of the best poems by Dom Moraes. It is prose, shows control of verse language and feeling. This poem does not help the reader to grow in terms of deeply felt experience. There are some clichés, i.e. 'Give me fair weather', 'Well worth the having' and 'Our hearts awake'. Yet the romantic quality is worth noticing. Sometimes Moraes turns the personal into the universal. 'Song' is an autobiographical poem. The poet was easily startled before twenty because of friends who were drunkards and selfish. Some of his friends betrayed him but he did not

care. In spite of this he led his life and spent money lavishly. But when the financial condition became worse, he started to recite poems. And the undeserving and selfish friends were replaced by new friends. To the poet winter is hard time but it will be replaced very soon by the summer. Afterwards, he will enjoy life in a real sense. This poem remarkable for symbols. Winter and summer stand for sufferings and pleasure respectively. However there is a note of pessimism in the poem.

#### **4.7.4 Glossary and notes**

sowed	:	spread, scatter
wild oats	:	an old world grass which is related to the cultivated out and is commonly found on a weed of other cereals
turncoats	:	Deserter
betrayed	:	deceive, cheat
reciting	:	repeat a line, speak
clammy	:	moist, sticky
forlock	:	a lock of hair growing just above the forehead

#### **4.7.5 Check Your Progress**

- When did the poet start to recite the poems?
- Who betrayed the poet?
- What is the symbol for suffering?
- What is the symbol for pleasure?
- Who are the selfish in the poem?

#### **4.7.6 Key to check your progress**

- He started recite the poems when he poet's financial condition worsen
- Some of his friends
- Winter
- Summer
- friends

#### **4.7.7 Self – assessment questions**

- Q. 1) Explain autobiographical element in the poem 'Song'.
- Q. 2) Write a critical note on the poem 'Song'.

## **FUTURE PLANS (DOM MORAES)**

### **Content**

- 4.8.1 Introduction
- 4.8.2 The Poem
- 4.8.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem
- 4.8.4 Glossary and notes
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- 4.8.7 Self – assessment questions
- 4.8.8 References for the further study

### **4.8.0 FUTURE PLANS**

#### **DOM MORAES**

#### **4.8.1 Introduction :**

The poem 'Future Plans' is a confessional poem by Moraes. The poem dwells on the perfect understanding that the poet developed with Leela Naidu who was his wife. She had been sharing his turbulent days for pretty long time.

#### **4.8.2 THE POEM**

##### *Future Plans*

Absorbed with each other's flesh  
In the tumbled beds of our youth,  
We had conversations with children  
Not born to us yet, but named.  
Those faculties, now disrupted,  
Shed selves, must exist somewhere,  
As they did when our summer ended:  
Leela-Claire, and the first death.

Mark, cold on a hospital tray  
At five months: I was away then  
With tribesmen in bronze forests.  
We became our children, my wife.  
Now, left alone with each other,  
As we were in four continents, 15  
At the turn of your classic head,  
At your private smile, the beacon  
You beckon with, I recall them.  
We may travel there once more.  
We shall leave at the proper time,  
As a couple, without complaint,  
With a destination in common  
And some regrets and memories.  
We shall leave in ways we believed  
Impossible in our youth,  
A little tired, but in the end,  
Not unhappy to have lived.

### **4.8.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

Moraes was left only with his wife Leela who had been sharing his turbulent days for a pretty long time. The poet cites the final poem of Serendip titled Future Plans as dedication for his latest work Never At Home. It shows a perfect understanding and appreciation the Moraes couple have developed for each other over the years. The poem begins on a nostalgic note. In youth both were absorbed in each others flesh. They conversed with their children yet to be born. But they named their unborn children as Leela Claire and Mark. There is a tinge of pathos, almost Lambian in its intensity. They themselves became their children. The poem is marked by an unusual simplicity as frankness stirred from the hearts admits of no ambiguities.

The Moraes couple plans to live without complaint and happily. The quantum of regrets and memories' has rendered the couple 'a little tired' though they have no complaints against their earthly existence.

In “Not unhappy to have lived”, the pair of negative modifiers is used to underscore the quality of experience.

### **TO SUM UP**

The critics are often confused over the theme of Moraes poems. He is neither subjective nor objective in true sense of the term. We find a dominant confessional gesture in his poems. The theme of alienation, depression and frustration has been presented with ease and simplicity. The struggle of man for his survival in this world is one the themes of his poetry. The sense of him from his native land. India throughout his life remained the country of his mother hated as much as he dreaded her. This connection between his mother and his discomfort with India is expressed in the poem. Thus, Dom Moraes is a unique poet in Indian English.

### **4.8.14 Glossary and Notes**

absorbed	:	take in or soak up
tumbled	:	fall suddenly, collapse
selves	:	Self
continents	:	any of the world’s main continuous expanses of land
beacon	:	a fire, bonfire, smoke signal

### **4.8.5 Check your Progress**

- From which collection the poem 'Future Plans' is taken?
- What is the name of the poet’s wife?
- Who is Mark?
- What are the plans of Moraes couple?
- How does the poem begin?

### **4.8.6 Key to Check your Progress**

- \* Serendip
- \* Leela
- \* unborn child
- \* they plans to live without complaint and happily.

\* on the nostalgic note

#### **4.8.7 Self – assessment questions**

Q. 1) Write a critical note on Future plans of the poet Dom Moraes.

Q. 2) ‘Not unhappy to have lived’ ..... . Discuss with reference to the prescribed poem.

#### **4.8.8 References For Further Study**

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## **GHANASHYAM**

### **KAMALA DAS**

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- 4.9.8 Further Reading

### **4.9.0 GHANASHYAM**

#### **KAMALA DAS**

##### **4.9.1 Introduction**

Kamala Das (Kamala Suraiya) is an eminent Indian English poet. She was born into a conservative Hindu family, Punnayurkulam in Malabar in Kerala in 1934 and converted to Islam at the age of 65. She had completed her education from St Cecilia's school in Calcutta and schools at Punnayurkulam and Trichur. Kamala Das is one of the three most important Indian poets in writing English the other two being Nissim Ezekiel and A. K. Ramanujan. She writes in Malayalam under the pen name Madavikutty.

Kamala Das's poetic output consists of three volumes of poetry: Summer in Calcutta (1965), The Descendants (1967) and The Old Playhouse (1974). Her poems have appeared in magazines and journals – Young Commonwealth Poets' 65, New Writing in India, Commonwealth Poems of Today. She is represented in many anthologies including Contemporary Indian Poetry in English and Ten Twentieth Century Poets. Her autobiography, My Story, published in various books, specially short story collections in Malayalam.

## 4.9.2 THE POEM

### *Ghanashyam*

Ghanashyam,

You have like a koel built your nest in the arbour of my heart.

My life, until now a sleeping jungle is at last astir with music.

You lead me along a route

I have never known before

But at each turn when I near you

Like a spectral flame you vanish.

The flame of my prayer-lamp holds captive my future

I gaze into the red eye of death

The hot stare of truth unveiled.

Life is moisture

Life is water, semen and blood.

Death is drought

Death is the hot sauna leading to cool rest-rooms

Death is the last, lost sob of the relative

Beside the red-walled morgue.

O Shyam, my Ghanashyam

With words

I weave a raiment for you With songs a sky

With such music I liberate in the oceans their fervid dances

We played once a husk-game, my lover and

I His body needing mine,

His ageing body in its pride needing the need for mine

And each time his lust was quietened And he turned his back on me

In panic I asked Dont you want me any longer dont you want me

Dont you dont you

In love when the snow slowly began to fall

Like a bird I migrated to warmer climes  
That was my only method of survival  
In this tragic game the unwise like children play  
And often lose in  
At three in the morning  
I wake trembling from dreams of a stark white loneliness,  
Like bleached bones cracking in the desert-sun was my loneliness,  
And each time my husband,  
His mouth bitter with sleep,  
Kisses, mumbling to me of love.  
But if he is you and I am you  
Who is loving who  
Who is the husk who the kernel  
Where is the body where is the soul  
You come in strange forms  
And your names are many.  
Is it then a fact that  
I love the disguise is  
And the name more than I love you?  
Can I consciously weaken bonds?  
The child's umbilical cord shrivels and falls  
But new connections begin, new traps arise  
And new pains  
Ghanashyam,  
The cell of the eternal sun,  
The blood of the eternal fire  
The hue of the summer-air,  
I want a peace that I can tote  
Like an infant in my arms  
I want a peace that will doze  
In the whites of my eyes when

I smile  
The ones in saffron robes told me of you  
And when they left to  
I thought only of what they left unsaid  
Wisdom must come in silence  
When the guests have gone  
The plates are washed  
And the lights put out  
Wisdom must steal in like a breeze  
From beneath the shuttered door  
Shyam O Ghanashyam  
You have like a fisherman cast your net in the narrows  
Of my mind  
And towards you my thoughts today  
Must race like enchanted fish

#### **4.9.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

Kamala Das has given several names to Krishna namely, Vitthal, Hari, Vishnu, Narayan, Rama, Puroshottam, Mohan and Ghanashyam. In 'Ghanashyam', she expresses the feeling of love, ardour and self-surrender. Kamala Das sublimates her sexual desire by regarding herself as a seeker of Lord Krishna's love just like Mirabai.

The poem begins with an image of a "Koel". She appeals to Ghanashyam that like a Koel he has built a nest in the garden of her heart, so her life which was a sleeping jungle is stirred with music. She says that when she comes near to him, he disappears. To her life is moisture, water, semen and blood. Death is crouched, the hot sand bath and the last sob of the relative. She says that she is weaving a garment for him with words and composing songs to produce music by which the oceans would dance.

Kamala Das, then, describes her married life and her sufferings. Her husband used her body to satisfy his lust and then turned his back on her. Like a bird she

reconciled to her desolation and loneliness. When her husband kissed her and made love to her, she imagined of Ghanashyam making love to her. She consoles herself with the thought that Ghanashyam comes to her in strange forms and many names. When any other man, besides her husband, makes love to her, she feels that it is Ghanashyam.

There is a sublimation of Das's sexual longings. She feels Ghanashyam making love to her in disguise. She is disillusioned about her casual lovers. She feels cleansed of the desires of the flesh and needs only Ghanashyam as her lover. Kamala Das mingles her complete self with the self of Lord Krishna and it is her self-surrender. At the end of the poem, there is a superb image of fisherman's net and the fish. Her final appeal to Ghanashyam is that he has cast his net around her mind and her mind is just like an enchanted fish coming into the net. Lord Krishna is a fisherman and she herself is the fish tempted to his net.

#### **ANALYSIS OF THE POEM**

In the poem 'Ghanashyam', Kamala Das is addressing Lord Krishna and, in the course of this monologue, she speaks of the relationship between her husband and herself in terms of disappointment and frustration, saying that she had once played a husk – game because her husband had needed her body to satisfy his lust for her and because, each time his lust had been satisfied, he used to turn his back on her to indicate that he did not want her that night. The husband's lack of real affection for her had led her to believe that, each time he had pressed his mouth against hers. She used to imagine that it was Ghanashyam in disguise who was making love to her.

Kamala Das's poem 'Ghanashyam' is a long verse. In the poem she says that the divine thought of the 'Koel' (Krishna) has changed the 'Sleeping jungle' into a magical world of music. The spectral flame is relating itself to the flame of the prayer lamp, a symbol of her shining devotion. Here the flame of the lamp is also the flame of the funeral pyre and therefore "the red eye of death". Death is experienced as heat. The body is dissolved in the heat but the soul is released into the cool rest room of immortality.

The devotion to Lord Krishna has eventually made her happy and contented and she never forgets Lord Krishna. Kamala Das conveys all the love and devotion towards Lord Krishna through symbols.

She narrates that whenever her lover desired her, it was only because of lust for her naked body. He wanted to use her body. He want perform intercourse with her and then turn his back to her, leaving her unloved, and thirsty for the spiritual love and appreciation. The miseries are not only by her husband but her family also contributes to them.

I want peace ----- whiles of my eyes when I smile.

Kamala Das has compared the peace with the pleasure that a mother enjoys with her newly born baby and prays to Gahanshaym to give her such a peace that should glow in her eyes when she smiles. There lines depict for state of mind. She is restless and she desires peace to glow in her eyes which signifies that her smile is not real as it has hidden thousands of miseries behind it.

In the poem 'Ghanashyam', she expresses this act of being openness with Ghanashyam, the supreme. Kamala Das's poetry presents Indian woman in a way that has outraged the usual male sense of decency and decorum.

'Ghanashyam' depicts vividly the transformation that was wrought in Radha and by extension Das herself by her relentless search for love. She realizes that her husband can never, establish a rapport with her soul, because each time his lust was quietene, and he turned his back on me - -" what she seeks is a total merger in her lover. But since it is not feasible in the actual world, she searches for Ghanashyam, the ideal lover.

The mythological character of Lord Krishna, also called Ghanashyam, literally meaning black could as he was dark complexioned, she raises some basic questions about love.

We played once a husk game, my lover & I,  
His body needing mine  
His ageing body in pride needing the need for mine  
But if he is you & I am you  
Who is loving who  
Who is the has who the kernel  
Who is the body who is the soul?

With Krishna, we don't find the egoist, feminist, man-hater Kamala, but a devotee of idealized and platonic love.

In the poem 'Ghanashyam' the poetess has compared Lord with a koel who has built her nest in the arbor of poet's heart. Until now the poet's life was like a calm, lovely and satiate any jungle which was made moving in excitement of love by the sweet music of koel that is God. This koel fills her heart with delight and pain as it fills the heart of lovers when they are separated from each other. The koel leads her to the route of pure love. The poetess repents because she has missed though the chance to be one with God. He is near her. The poet says.

Ghanshaym

You have like

Like a spectral flame you vanish

Through out the life Kamala Das tried to search her 'self' in her poetry. Her poetry is a mirror of her own life and experiences.

Thus, Kamala Das explains the love she has for Ghanshaym. She has mentioned her relationship with her husband. She believed in the spirit of 'Ghanshaym' which exists in every man. She has suffered from the pain which was created out of love.

#### 4.9.4 Glossary and notes

spectral	:	ghostly, shadowy, phantom
captive	:	prisoner, inmate
moisture	:	wetness, humidity
semen	:	sperm, seed
drought	:	a prolonged period of abnormally low rain fall
sauna	:	a treatment of using steam and cold punch
sob	:	cry noisily, weep
arbour	:	Bower
astir	:	make energetic
morgue	:	Mortuary
raiment	:	Clothes
fervid	:	Energetic

husk	:	Lusty
climes	:	climates here new places where love is available
red eyes of death	:	death is taking away life and here death is the cruel one
unveiled	:	come out
eternal	:	ever lasting
enchanted	:	Attracted
umbilical cord	:	placenta which connects the child in the womb with the mother

#### 4.9.5 Check your Progress

- Who is Ghanashyam?
- Who is fisherman and the fish in the poem?
- How does the poetess weaving a garment for Ghanashayam?
- Who build a nest in the garden of heart?
- Who is in disguise making love to the poetess?

#### 4.9.6 Key To Check Your Progress

- Lord Krishna
- Lord Krishna is a fisherman and the poetess herself is the fish
- The poetess weaving a garment for him with words composing songs to produce music by which the ocean would dance.
- Like a koel the poetess has built a nest in the garden of her heart
- Ghanashyam

#### 4.9.7 Self – assessment questions

Q.1 Evaluate Kamala Das As A Confessional Poet

Q.2 Write a critical note on the poem 'Ghanashyam'

## MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

KAMALA DAS

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- 4.10.1 Introduction
- 4.10.2 The Poem
- 4.10.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem
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### 4.10.0 MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

KAMALA DAS

#### 4.10.1 Introduction

My Grandmother's House is taken from **Summer in Calcutta**, in 1965. In the poem Kamala Das recalls her ancestral home and her dead grandmother. The poem is about her present broken state with that of being unconditionally loved by her grandmother. She had showered her love and affection on Kamala Das. The grandmother is remembered in a number of lyrics, and both the family house and the summary grandmother are closely identified. In the present poem she remembers both the house and the grandmother who once lived in it, now dead.

#### 4.10.2 THE POEM

##### *My Grandmother's House*

There is a house now far away where once  
I received love. That woman died,  
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved  
Among books I was then too young  
To read, and, my blood turned cold like the moon.  
How often I think of going

There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or  
Just listen to the frozen air,  
Or in wild despair, pick an armful of  
Darkness to bring it here to lie  
Behind my bedroom's door like a brooding  
Dog. . . you cannot believe, darling  
Can you, that I lived in such a house and  
Was proud, and loved. . . I who have lost  
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to  
Receive love, at least in small change?

#### **4.10.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

Kamala Das remembers her childhood in her grandmother's house in Malabar in the poem *My Grandmother's*. The poem has depicted her nostalgic yearning for the house where Kamala Das had spent her happiest childhood. When she was a girl, she lived in the family house. Her grandmother loved her very much. Her grandmother died and the house shared her grief. The poetess was too young to read at the time, and the books in the house seemed to her as horrible and repulsive as snakes. The death of her grandmother sent a chill through her and her blood seemed to freeze. It became as cold as the moon.

The poetess lives in different city and the memory of her grandmother and her house made Kamala Das sad and almost heartbroken. Her desire is to go to that house and look once again through its windows. The windows are called blind because the house is deserted. She would have liked to sit there all alone and listen to the blowing of the cold winter wind. The wind would have revived memories of past. She would have given free expression to her grief and despair once again. At the end of her visit, she would have liked to return to her new home with a handful of dark, sad and painful memories. The memories of past would have been her constant companion which would have followed her like a dog. Addressing to her husband, Kamala Das says that he would not believe that she had lived in such a house, of which she was proud. She got love and affection in that house. She lost in life because she does not receive such love from anybody. She does not get it even in small change or coins. Her love- hunger remains unsatisfied. Now she seeks love like

a beggar from strangers. It becomes clear that her husband does not love her, and she tries to seek love from strangers. Her despair is intense.

The window in Kamala Das's poetry is link between the past and the present. In 'My Grandmother's House', the house is presented with concern and pathos. In the poem the 'windows' and 'air' are 'blind' and 'frozen', respectively. Her heart itself is like a dark window where the fresh air does not blow. The window where she sits and enjoys the cool refreshing breeze of the past is her favourite image.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE POEM**

My Grandmother's house is a beautiful poem by Kamala Das. The poem has only 16 lines, very short poem. The opening line of the poem tells the readers about the grandmothers house, where she lived when she was very young. The house is far away from the poetess's new house. In that house she enjoyed much love and pleasure. She lived as a girl and her grandmother showered affection on her. Though, she was too young to remember those happy moments, still she recollects her experiences.

But those happy life did not last for long as her grandmother died. The house of grandmother had shared the grief of her death.

Kamala Das was reminded of her grandmother's house where she spent her memorable childhood. It was the only place where she could get love from her grandmother. In the poem, the poet describes the suffering of herself because of the death of her grandmother. The poet says that even the house was filled with grief, and she accepted the seclusion with resignation. The dead silence haunted the house, feting desolation wandering throughout. But Kamala Das was too young to read the books at that time. In the house the books seemed to her as horrible as snakes and her blood turned cold like the moon.

Kamala Das was thinking of going to her grandmother's house again, she wanted to look through the windows of the house. The poet has depicted the windows blind because there was no one inside the house to look through the windows. She was longing to listen the music of blowing cold winter wind; which could recollect memories of her beloved, dead grandmother. Her heart was itself like a dark window where the fresh air did not blow.

Kamala Das told her darling that it would be difficult for to believe that she had lived in such a wonderful house. she was very proud of the house but now her grandmother was not there for her. The grandmother's house was a place of security unlike her miserable city life with her husband.

The poetess addresses to her dear husband that he can never believe the intensity of love that she received from her grandmother. Her husband can never realize that she was extremely proud of her grandmother house where she was deeply loved by grandmother. She has lost her way in search of selfless love and became a beggar for love who knocks helplessly at strangers' doors to receive at least in a small change.

Thus, the poem is about hopeless marital relationships the poetess. It shows the agony and humiliation of a married woman who is forced to search extra marital relationships to get love for her emotional satisfaction. She reminded of her grandmother's house where received love in her childhood. She has lost all her identity and freedom in her loveless relationship.

#### **4.10.4 Glossary and notes**

- That woman – The poet's grandmother
- peer – look in
- Blind eyes of windows – probably the windows had no glasspanes but wooden panes.
- Despair – complete absence of hope
- Armful of darkness – A little darkness
- Brooding dog – sleeping dog

#### **4.10.5 Check your Progress**

- What happened to the house after the grandmother died?
- Why was the poet not able to read the books?
- Which words tell you that the poet is talking to some one?
- What is she telling him / her?
- What is she begging for?
- What does she mean by small change?

- Why is the air in grandmother's house described as frozen?
- Which house is the poet talking about?
- Why did the poet's blood turn cold?
- Why was the poet not able to read the books?

#### **4.10.6 Key to Check Your Progress**

- The house withdraw into silence.
- Because she was too young.
- "You cannot believe, darling".
- That she lived in such a house and was proud and loved.
- She is begging for love
- Love in small quantity.
- The house is absolutely silent No one lives there. Even the air does not seem to be moving.
- The poet is talking about her grand mother's house where she grew up as a child.
- The poet's blood turned cold at the sight of snakes among her grandmother's books.
- The poet was too small to read books at the time.

#### **4.10.7 Self – assessment questions**

- What drives the poet to go back to the grandmother's house?
- The poet thinks of her past, how is her present different from the past?

## **The Sunshine Cat**

**KAMALA DAS**

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- 4.11.6 Key to Check Your Progress
- 4.11.7 Self – assessment questions
- 4.11.8 References for the further study

### **4.11.0 The Sunshine Cat**

**KAMALA DAS**

#### **4.11.1 Introduction**

**The Sunshine Cat** is a poem written by Kamala Das. The poem was published in **Summer in Calcutta** in 1965. It shows the difference between lust and love. The poetess has approached the tragic consequences of the life of lust wherein there is no space for the emotional satisfaction. The poem is about the sexual humiliation and exploitation the poetess had to suffer.

#### **4.11.2 THE POEM**

##### *The Sunshine Cat*

They did this to her, the men who knew her, the man  
She loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish  
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor  
Used her, but was a ruthless watcher, and the band  
Of cynics she turned to, clinging to their chests where  
New hair sprouted like great-winged moths, burrowing her

Face into their smells and their young lusts to forget,  
To forget, oh, to forget . . . and, they said, each of  
Them, I do not love, I cannot love, it is not  
In my nature to love, but I can be kind to you . . .  
They let her slide from pegs of sanity into  
A bed made soft with tears and she lay there weeping,  
For sleep had lost its use;  
I shall build walls with tears,  
She said, walls to shut me in . . . .  
Her husband shut her  
In, every morning; locked her in a room of books  
With a streak of sunshine lying near the door, like  
A yellow cat, to keep her company, but soon,  
Winter came and one day while locking her in, he  
Noticed that the cat of sunshine was only a  
Line, a hair-thin line, and in the evening when  
He returned to take her out, she was a cold and  
Half-dead woman, now of no use at all to men.

### 4.11.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem

‘The Sunshine Cat’ is a poem about the sexual humiliation of Kamala Das.

She has depicted a story of a suffering woman who was subjected to humiliation by her own husband as well as other sexual partners. She loved her husband in the hope that he would love her too. But he proved to be selfish and coward. He was a ruthless watcher. He watched her going through the sexual act with other men whom she acquired as her sexual partners. She was upset with her husband and finally went to other men. He neither loved nor used her for sex. Even he did not resent her sleeping with other men. On the other hand, he was interested in watching her in bed with the band of cynics.

But the other men, were also lustful and selfish. She has tried to create genuine feeling of love in other lovers by clinging to their bosoms. She clung to their bosoms as if wanting to hide her face in their hair. Those lovers were younger than she herself. She tried to make them forget everything except the act of love-making. But

they frankly told her that they could not love her, but they would be kind to her. She longed for love, not for kindness, and her love-longing was never satisfied, She shed tears over her disappointment. She could not enjoy sound sleep. On the other hand she wept. She could have built walls with her tears.

Kamala Das's husband was so cruel to her that he locked her in a room containing books every morning. A ray of sunshine which fell at the door of that room was her only companion. That ray of sunshine looked like a yellow- cat. Very much like the yellow-cat, she reconciled herself to the prison of domesticity that her husband built for her. She has become a domestic cat, very much like the yellow sunshine cat of her heated imagination. She has played the traditional role of a wife who waits within the four walls of her home for the return of her husband in the evening.

When winter came, the suns lost its brightness because of the cloudy sky. It was reduced to a thin line, as thin as a hair. The poetess gradually pined away in secret grief, became thin, a mere shadow of her former self. She became a hair thin line, very much like the sunshine cat. She became cold and half-dead, withered and faded. She lost all her charms, her youth and beauty. She was no longer of any use to men. Kamala Das throws light upon the fate of a woman in male-dominated world.

Kamala Das has presented her own frustrations. The image of the sunshine cat, thin like a streak of light, is used to point out her pains and sufferings.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE POEM**

The Sunshine cat is the poem about the speaker's sexual experiences with her husband and with other men and expresses her feeling of disillusionment with all her sexual partners. The speaker of the poem is Kamala Das herself; and she tells to the readers that, though she had loved her husband in the hope that her husband would love her too. The speaker no longer loves him because he proved to be a selfish man. Her husband did not love her at all and did not even make use of her as a sexual partner in the right manner. The husband showed himself to be a keen observer when, in sheer desperation, she acquired other lovers for sexual pleasure. She then wants to forget the bad memories of her husband, seeks love in others but they are also like her husband. Love is only sex for them, spiritual satisfaction does not mean anything for them.

The poetess did her utmost to excite some genuine feeling in those other lovers by clinging to their bosoms on which there was a thick growth of hair, and she clung to their bosoms as if wanting to hide her face in their hair. The lovers were younger than herself, and she tried to make them forget everything except the act of love making. But she could not get real love and she could only shed tears over her disappointment with those lovers. She wept so profusely that she could have built walls with her tears, walls to hold her like a prisoner.

In the poem, the poetess' husband was so cruel to her that he used to lock her in a room containing books every morning and used to unlock the room only when he returned home in the evenings. A ray of sunshine fell at the door of that room, and this ray of sunshine was the only company she had. That ray of sunshine looked like a yellow – coloured cat; and that was the poetess's only companion. The sun's ray lost its brightness because of the cloudy skies in the winter. The sun's ray was now reduced only to a thin line, as thin as a hair. By the time he returned home in the evening to take his wife out of confinement, he discovered that she was cold and on the verge of death. She had lost her youthful appearance, charm. She had lost the very urge to participate in the sexual act due to the non stop sufferings and humiliations which she had undergone at the hands of her cynical husband. She had become useless as an object of sexual exploitation.

'The Sunshine Cat' is a poem about the pathetic condition of a woman who suffered much sexual humiliation in her life. Her husband as well as other men with whom she had intimate contacts used her sexually but none of them loved her. She loved one of them but he was not interested in love but indulged in sex with her. The man whom she loved was selfish and cowardly. On the other, the woman's husband was beastly and brutal, and the woman in her suffered and felt humiliated. He was a 'ruthless watcher', kept watch on her and curtailed her freedom of movement. He could not prevent her from turning to other men, and having intimate relations with them. But the woman soon found that they were no different.

The image of swallow and flight is appropriately used to express her feminine experience particularly as a wife. She is bound by the rules of her husband and that of the society. She is trapped in a cage of her husband like a bird. She becomes the victim of male lust.

The poetess's failure in married life, her extra – marital relationship, her revolt and pathos is depicted in the poems through images. Her sex experience with each one of them is unsatisfactory.

### **THE SUM UP**

India has a long tradition of women poets from Toru Dutt onwards. Kamala Das is a major Indian woman poet in English hailing from Malabar, a coastal region of South India. She reveals her soul and self in her poetry, therefore, like Sylvia Plath, she is called a confessional poet. Besides, Kamala Das is essentially a poet of love and tenderness. She is aware of the world around her and gives a living expression to modern Indian woman's thoughts and feeling. There is also a kind of restlessness in her poems. The two main themes of her poetry are love and the woman's identity. In Kamala Das's poetry two aspects of love have been described: the real fulfilling love and pure carnal or unfulfilment in love. Hence her poetry is saturated with images and symbols of love and lust. Most of Das's poems are autobiographical. Kamala Das is one of our significant poets writing in English today.

#### **4.11.4 Glossary and notes**

**A ruthless watcher** – a merciless observer (i. e. the husband)

**The band of cynics** – The group of crazy people

**Sprouted** – Shot forth, put forth

**Burrowing** - hiding, concealing

**Pegs of suites** – drinks of rational lit (i. e. so far she was a sensible woman)

**A streak of sunshine** – a ray of the shining sun.

#### **4.11.5 Check Your Progress**

- Who is the persona of this poem?
- Who is cruel in the poem?
- Who is selfish and coward?
- How does the ray of sunshine look like?
- Who becomes domestic cat?
- How does the image of the sunshine cat used in the poem?

- How does the poetess recall herself?

#### **4.11.6 Key to Check Your Progress**

- Kamala Das
- Husband
- Husband
- A yellow – coloured cat
- Kamala Das
- It is used to point out the poetess pains and sufferings
- The poetess recalls herself ‘a yellow cat’, a ray of sunshine fell at the door of that room, and the ray of sunshine was the only company she had.

#### **4.11.7 Self – assessment questions**

- Q. 1) Write a critical note on the poem 'The Sunshine Cat'.
- Q. 2) Discuss Kamala Das as a confessional poet.
- Q. 3) Evaluate critically Kamala Das’s concept of love.
- Q. 4) Discuss Kamala Das as a poet of the Indian Women sensibility.

#### **4.11.8 References for the further study**

- Abdi S. Z. H. Studies in Indo – Anglian Poetry, Bareilly : Prakash Book Depot, 1978.
- Dwivedi A. N. Kamala Das and Her Poetry. New Delhi : Atlantic Pub. And Distributors, 2000.

## **Breaded fish**

### **A. K. Ramanujan**

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#### **4.12.0 Breaded fish**

### **A. K. Ramanujan**

#### **4.12.1 Introduction**

Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan (1929-1993) also known as A. K. Ramanujan is an Indian poet and scholar of Indian literature who wrote both in English and Kannada. Ramanujan was poet, scholar, a philologist, folklorist, translator, and playwright. He was born in Mysore, Karnataka. He received BA and MA degrees in English language and literature from the University of Mysore. Ramanujan taught at various colleges in South India in 1950s. In 1958 he went to the United States for his Ph.D. at Indian University. In 1962 Ramanyjan was appointed to the University of Chicago where he remained for about thirty years. At the age of thirty his first collection of poems titled the striders was published in (1966). His later collections were Relations (1971), Second Sight (1986) and The Collected Poems in 1995. He was awarded the “Sahitya Academy Award” posthumeously in 1999 for his ‘The Collected Peoms’ Ramanujan’s translations from Tamil, Kannada and Telegu made him internationally popular. Some of his translation are Interior Landscape (1967), Speaking of Siva (1973), Hymns for the Drawing (1981) and Poems of Love and War (1985). For the next forty years he wrote on subjects like. The Indian Oedipus, On Folk Mythologies and, Folk Puranas’ and Who Needs

Folklore? These have been collectively published in *Collected Essays* in 1999. The last book to be published was *Folklore of India* in 1991.

Ramanujan has been represented in *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*. The *Penguin Book of Love Poetry*, *Young Poets of the Commonwealth*, *New writing in India* and many others. His awards include Padmasri by the Government of India and Mac Arthur Award. As an Indo-American writer Ramanujan had the experience of the native as well as of the foreign milieu. His poems such as the “Conventions of Despair” reflected his views on the cultures and conventions of the East and the West. A. K. Ramanujan died in Chicago, on 13 July 1993.

**Breaded fish** is a tiny lyric by A. K. Ramanujan from the *Pume the Striders*. The *striders* was published in 1966 by O. U. P. Breaded Fish is a poem of 12 lines and the theme of the poem is not the breaded fish, but the memory evoked by it.

A. K. Ramanujan’s poem ‘Breaded fish’ is loaded with idea memory is like a snake and it may sting at any time. The poet presents the association of thoughts between the past and present. In this short poem the poet and depicts the psychology of the persona of the poem. Thoughts cannot be totally eliminated. It lies in a corner of the mind.

#### 4.12.2 THE POEM

Specially for me, she had some breaded  
fish; even thrust a blunt-headed  
smelt into my mouth;

and looked hurt when I could  
neither sit nor eat, as a hood  
of memory like a coil on a heath

opened in my eyes: a dark half-naked  
length of woman, dead  
on the beach in a yard of cloth,

dry, rolled by the ebb, breaded  
by the grained indifference of sand. I headed  
for the shore, my heart beating in my mouth.

### 4.12.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem

This autobiographical poem of twelve lines is from Ramanujan's first volume of poetry *Striders*. He has rightly named this volume after a water insect. It points out "the impossible inter-connection between a Tamil Mysore Brahmin and a new England water insect"

The poem is based on the poet's personal experience in childhood. His mother had put a piece of breaded fish into his mouth, but he could not eat it because of his memory of a half-naked dead woman lying on the beach. In *Breaded Fish* the poet speaks not only of his inability to eat breaded fish on "a blunt-headed smelt" thrust into his mouth but also of the memory it evokes in him", The poet's desire to eat the fish is mingled with the memory. The poet's mother had prepared some breaded fish for him. But he could neither sit nor eat because of a sudden memory. The poet uses a simile in "as a hood of memory like a coil on a heath". The memory has horrifying picture of a half-naked, dead woman lying on the beach. Because of fear, he ran towards the shore with his heart beating in his mouth. He ran to avoid the sight of the dead woman. In the simile the memory is compared with a hooded snake. Most of us are afraid of a snake with its hood raised. The poet succeeds in presenting an awful picture of a dead woman, the sea-beach and a snake. Besides he recalls his affectionate mother.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

*Breaded fish* is one of the best poems of A. K. Ramanujan. The poem has 12 lines divided into four stanzas pictorial imagery which evokes memories which horrify the poet. It is also nauseating and disgusting memory, so he is unable to eat the breaded fish and turns away from it in utter disgust. Ramanujan's treatment of nature in his poems has a revolting nature and is never pure. In this poem, nature is first represented by the fish meant for consumption and later by an extended metaphor of the cobra and its horrible nature bent on action.

According to the poet, the sight of the fish was as horrible as the sight of a dark half – naked woman lying dead on the beach which he had witnessed on a previous occasion. The poet's intention to sketch a horrid picture of the breaded fish assumes greater dignity when he describes the flashing image of the dead woman screening his memory in terms of the hood of a cobra. The breaded fish thus starts a stream of

consciousness in the mind of the speaker. The poet is emotionally moved by the memory.

The poem 'Breaded fish' is a small poem. The poet has uses a couple of poetic devices to bring the meaning clearly.

In 'Breaded fish' the poet speaks not only of his inability to eat breaded fish on "a blunt headed / smelt" thrust into his mouth but also of the memory it evokes in him. There are two person in the poem, the poet and woman. The poet is invited to eat the breaded fish but the appearance of the fish at once reminds him of certain memories of the past. The poet describes what happens and then tell us of its effect on him. The woman pushes the breaded fish in the mouth and looks hurt because he could neither eat nor sit still. The poet could not digest the idea of eating the fish because an old, hideous memory crowds his mind. He remembers the sight of a dead woman, half naked, covered in sand, as the waves had pushed her body to the shore. The breaded fish reminds him of the sand covered body of the woman and of nausea he can neither sit nor eat. The poet is thus emotionally moved by the memory.

#### 4.12.4 Glossary and notes

breaded	:	coated with bread crumbs and then fried
thrust	:	push suddenly or violently in a specified directions
blunt headed	:	lacking sharpness
hood of memory	:	association of ideas
coil on a heath	:	an area of land that is not used for growing crops, here snake
half naked	:	only partly clothed
ebb	:	the movement of the tide out to sea
grained	:	in difference of sand

#### 4.12.5 Check your Progress

- What is meant by 'Breaded Fish'?
- With whom the memory of the dead woman has compared?
- How was the body of the woman covered?
- What was the horrifying picture?

- Where was the dead woman lying?

#### **4.12.6 Key to check your progress**

- The fish which was covered with crumbs of bread.
- The memory of the dead woman has compared with the food of a cobra.
- The body of the woman was covered in fine sand.
- A half -naked, dead woman lying on the beach
- Lying on the beach

#### **4.12.7 Self – assessment questions**

- What memory is evoked in the poem 'Breaded Fish'? What brings the memory up?
- Explain the dramatic element in 'Breaded Fish'.
- Comment on the use of imagery in 'Breaded Fish'.
- Analyses the poem 'The Breaded Fish' as an example of the use of the stream of consciousness technique.

**A RIVER**  
**A. K. Ramanujan**

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**4.13.0 A RIVER**

**A. K. Ramanujan**

**4.13.1 Introduction**

“A River” is one of the finest poems of Ramanujan, appeared in *The Striders* in 1966. It is a poem on the river Vaikai which flows through Madurai, a city of temples and poets who sang of cities and temples. The poem is an evocation of a river. The poet clearly reveals the attitudes of both old and new Tamil poets who have shown utter indifference and callousness to human suffering at the time of devastating flood.

**4.13.2 THE POEM**

*A River*

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

every summer  
a river dries to a trickle  
in the sand,  
baring the sand-ribs,

straw and women's hair  
clogging the watergates  
at the rusty bars  
under the bridges with patches  
of repair all over them,  
the wet stones glistening like sleepy  
crocodiles, the dry ones  
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun.  
The poets sang only of the floods.

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

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

He said:  
the river has water enough  
to be poetic  
about only once a year  
and then

it carries away  
in the first half-hour  
three village houses,  
a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda  
and one pregnant woman  
expecting identical twins  
with no moles on their bodies,  
with different-coloured diapers  
  
to tell them apart.

#### **4.13.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

In the poem 'A River' the poet ironically contrasts the relative attitudes of the old and the new poets to human suffering. The poet has come to the conclusion that both the groups of the poets are indifferent to human sorrow and suffering. The river Vaikai in Madurai dries to a trickle every summer in the sand. The water – gates get blocked by straw and women's hair. The bridge has patches of repair all over them. The wet stones shine like sleepy crocodiles and dry stones look like shaven buffaloes walking lazily in the sun.

There is also the picture of the river in the floods. The poets sang only of the floods. The poets sang only of the floods. They wrote about the rising of the river inches by inches from time to time. They remember how the stone steps of the bathing place are submerged one by one. The poets see how three village houses were damaged and carried off by the floods. The river carried away two cows named Brinda and Gopi, one pregnant woman was also drowned in the river during the flood. The new poets quoted the old poets with perhaps a bit of change in details. But the way they have described these things in their way they have described these things in their poems shows that were not concern with human suffering.

## ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

In the poem 'A River' the poet ironically contrasts the relative attitudes of the old and the new Tamil poets and exposes both of them for their indifference to suffering. Madurai is a city of temples and poets who sang of cities and temples. A river named Vaikai flows through this city. It dries in every summer in the sand. The Watergates having rusty bars get clogged by straw and woman's hair. The bridge has patches of repair all over them. In stanza two, the poet speaks of the river in flood in the rains. He was there once and saw what happened. He found that a flood in the river imminent. The wet stones shine like sleepy crocodiles and the dry stones look like shaven buffaloes walking lazily in the sun. but the poet sang only of the flood. The old poets came to the river when it was in flood. People talked about how water was rising inch by inch. They know the exact number of cobbled steps run over by water. The dry river is then contrasted with the river in flood which.

“Carried off three village houses  
One pregnant – Woman  
and a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda

Following the tradition of old poets the poets sang of the floods. They did not express any concern for the pregnant woman carrying twins in her. For them the river in flood is the only topic for poetry. They are indifferent to human suffering.

The poet did not speak of the pregnant woman expecting identical twins with no males on their bodies to tell them apart but only different – coloured baby's napkin's. before their birth, she was drawn in the flooded river. At the time of dawning, most probably the twins must have kicked the sides of her womls. She must have gat much pain out of this. Both the new poets and old poets did not refer to all thesemiseries of the woman in their poetic creations. The poet has depicted a harrowing picture of human struggle and its tutilots. The twins also drown along with their mother. The drowning of the pregnant woman signifies the drowning of hopes and aspiration about the ordinary people which are scalloped by the flood.

The poet places line 16 and the last line separately which gives ironic effect to the poem.

Thus, the poem is about the insensitive attitude of the city poets towards the tragic situation of human suffering. The poet makes effective use of repetitions to

heightens the effect of irony. The tone of the poet ironical itself. The poet evokes the indifferent altitude to human suffering of poet through metaphor and irony.

#### 4.13.4 Glossary and notes

trickle	:	blow in small stream
bar v	:	a long rigid piece of metal or similar material
ribs	:	each of a series of slender curved bones articulated in pairs to the spine
clog	:	block or blocked with wet matter
glisten	:	shine with a sparkling light
crocodile	:	a large predatory semi agnatic reptile with long laws long tail
water buffaloes	:	a large black domesticated buffalo with heavy swept black horns.
lounging	:	stand sit in a relaxed way
cobbled steps	:	a small round stone used to cover road surfaces
pregnant	:	having a child
Mole	:	a small often slightly raised blemish on the skin made dark by a high concentration of melanin
Diapers	:	a nappy

#### 4.13.5 Check your Progress

- What does the opening line of the poem present?
- How is Madurai described in line 2 of this poem?
- What are the names of the cows?
- Who quoted the old poets?
- Who shines like sleepy crocodiles?
- Who look like shaven buffaloes?
- What did the new and old poets?

- What is the charge against the poets in the poem?
- What did river carry in the flood?
- What did people talk about the river?

#### **4.13.6 Key to check your progress**

- The opening line presents the main physical setting of the poem by mentioning the city of 'Madurai'.
- In line 2, Madurai is described as a city of temples and poets, making it sound like a place of great spiritual significance and associating with creativity and beauty.
- Gopi and Brinda are the names of the cows.
- The new poets quoted the old poets.
- The wet stones shine like sleepy crocodiles.
- The dry stones look like shaven buffaloes walking lazily in the sun.
- The new and old poets sang only of the floods.
- They did not bother about the pregnant woman having twins in her. They sang only of the floods.
- The river carried of three village haves, are pregnant woman and a couple of cows.
- People talked about how water was rising inch by inch.

#### **4.13.7 Self – assessment questions**

Q. 1) Write a critical note on the poem 'A River'.

Q. 2) Explain the themes of the new and old poets as discussed in the poem 'A River'.

## LOVE POEM FOR A WIFE-I

A. K. Ramanujan

### Content

- 4.14.1 Introduction
- 4.14.2 The Poem
- 4.14.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem
- 4.14.4 Glossary and notes
- 4.14.5 Check Your Progress
- 4.14.6 Key to Check Your Progress
- 4.14.7 Self – assessment questions
- 4.14.8 References for the further study

### 4.14.0 LOVE POEM FOR A WIFE-I

A. K. Ramanujan

#### 4.14.1 Introduction

#### 4.14.2 THE POEM

##### *Love Poem for a Wife-I*

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

In the transverse midnight gossip  
of cousins' reunions among  
brandy fumes, cashews and the absences  
of grandparents, you suddenly grow  
nostalgic for my past and I

envy you your village dog-ride  
and the mythology

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

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

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

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

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

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

really nowhere as the two of you  
got down to the floor to draw  
blueprints of a house from memory  
on everything, from newspapers  
to the backs of envelopes  
and road-maps of the United States  
that happened

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

tree next to it. Probably  
only the Egyptians had it right:  
their kings had sisters for queens

to continue the incests  
of childhood into marriage.  
Or we should do as well-meaning  
hindus did,

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

#### **4.14.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

Love Poem for a Wife I is a poem by A. K Ramanujan . The poem is an account of his married life and the reasons of the failure of marriage. He has described his wife , himself and the relatives.

The poet has become nostalgic in the poem. The memories of past clash and come in conflict. The tension of the memories provide us with a peep into the poet's soul. The poet has told his wife about the reason of disharmony in their married life. The reason was their emotional alienation. They did not share each other's childhood experiences. His father had been dead for the past several years and the wife's father was no longer irritable. He could not meet his wife's father and she could not meet his. The poet has so many memories of the past. He recalls an evening along with his cousins as well as of his wife's cousins. They had met and gossiped till late at night; sipping brandy and chewing cashew nuts. The wife wanted to know of his past. The husband envied her for her village dog-tide and for her having seven crazy aunts. They looked into the albums containing the photographs of the members of their families. The wife was eager to know how he looked as a boy from the album. She was interested in his brothers' stories about the noise which his father used to make while bathing and rubbing soap on his back. The husband has a foolish expression on his face when he has shown his wife the picture of his father taken on his wedding day. His father wore a turban while his mother wore silver rings on her toes.

The husband has expressed his opinion that of late he has become a unique being perhaps in obedience to the wise percepts in his late father's diary. Then he spoke about his wife's father. Her father has become very old. He has tried very hard to mould the behaviour of his daughter when she was still young. He does not believe that there can be any, wickedness in any past action. Her father did not find wicked in his daughter's coming late at night, after having spent the evening with a nice Muslim friend. The Muslim friend of her had been trying to touch her amorously but had gone no further. The wife has not changed in her life. the poet was disturbed with memories of past. He could not find emotional fulfilment in marriage.

The poet has remembered how she and her brother James had started fighting about the location of a bathroom in their grandfather's house in Alleppey. Jame's wife did not participate in the discussion. His wife and James had also decided upon a wager as to what the uncle in Kuwait would say about the bathroom. She had offered to give James her family heirlooms and her husband's earnings in case she lost the bet.

There is a clash of memories in the consciousness of the poet. His soul is the theatre and his memories are the actors which come together, clash and separate. He goes onto say that his wife and he could have had a successful marriage if he had married his own sister because then he could have shared his childhood with her. The poet's marriage had failed because he had not shared his childhood experiences with his wife. The ancient Egyptians marry their own sisters so that the throne should not pass into the hands of any foreigners. On the other hand, for successful marriage is to follow the ancient Hindu tradition of child marriage in which children were betrothed even before their birth.

Love Poem for a Wife I is not a love poem. It is about conjugal life. The poet has ridiculed his wife and her father as well as himself and his own father. The nostalgia of the speaker in the poem for his wife's "unshared childhood" springs from his need to overcome the alienation which keeps them "apart! at the end of years".

## **ANALYSIS OF THE POEM**

### **LOVE POEM FOR A WIFE, I**

"Love Poem for a Wife, I" is taken from Ramanujan's second anthology, Relations : Poems, 1971. The poem is about the poet's yearning for emotional

fulfilment through family-relationships, especially with wife. The self of the poet becomes the theatre in which the drama of another's past—his wife's—is enacted. The poem is about as in the poem is a criss-cross of memories, some about his own past, and some about his wife's. The memories plays important role in the poem.

The poet is in a nostalgic, reminiscent mood. He has not been able to find emotional fulfilment in his relationship with his wife, and he tries to analyse the causes of this alienation by analysing his memories of his own past and also that of his wife. They have been married over a number of years, still they have been apart emotionally. This emotional alienation has resulted from the fact that they have not been able to share each other's childhood experiences. The early years of life are the formative years, and unless the husband and wife live together childhood onwards and share each others experiences, there can be no real emotional and spiritual coming together. The two are bound to remain separate emotionally, even if they become one physically.

The poet has recalled the experiences which they have unshared. For example, she could not meet his father, and he could not meet hers, at least as he was when was a girl, for since then he has matured and 'Lost his temper'. Lost his temper means either that he is not so short tempered as he once was, or that because of old age he has grown ill-tempered. The poet has remembered an evening when a number of cousins, both his and hers, had met together and kept gossiping till late at night. They had brandy and cashew nuts, and could talk freely as their elders were not present. She wanted to know of his past, she had a nostalgic yearning to share his early experience. He on his part envied the way in which she used to enjoy dog-rides, and the wonderful stories she told of her seven crazy aunts. He would like to share the thrilling experiences with her. She was eager to know how he looked as a boy, and was glad to form an idea of his boyhood from their family album, and from the stories told to her by the members of his family. Particularly was she delighted to learn how noisily his father bathed and slapped soap on his back. In mocking tone the poet remarks that she was much pleased to see the wedding photo of his parents, for there in she could find the source of the foolish look on his face. If the poet could achieve anything unique in life, it was just the result of Fate or God's . Her father would acknowledge the wickedness of no reminiscence, and would pretend that he did not remember the evenings when she came late after enjoying the company of a

Muslim friend, “who only hinted at touches”. The poet ironically considered such evenings ‘innocent’.

The poet was jealous when he came to know his wife's affair with the Muslim boy. The poet has revealed the real cause of the failure of his marriage. But her father has considered such reminiscences to be wicked and pretended that he had no knowledge of the doings of his daughter and the late hours she kept. But all these memories of the past—both of his own past and that of his wife—continued to trouble the poet, and he was unable to find emotional fulfillment in marriage. He has remembered how she and her brother James started a ‘drag-out-fight’ regarding the location of a bathroom in their grandfather’s house in Alleppey. As they continued to quarrel and hotly discuss the matter and sketch the house on newspapers and back of envelopes, he and his sister-in-law were brother ignored. They were ‘blank cut outs as far as his wife and her brother were concerned. The readers are much amused to read that the poet and his sister-in-law were both fitted “to our respective slots in a room”. On the other hand the two would wager to give their most precious possessions—her husband’s earnings, and his heirlooms—If they were proved wrong, regarding the opinion of their uncle in Kuwait about the bathroom, the well and the dying, “by now dead tree” next to it.

The clash and counter-class of memories in the consciousness of the poet presented in the poem. His soul is the theatre and his memories of his own past, as well as of the past of his wife, are the actors which come together, clash and separate, as the poet yearns for emotional fulfillment which he is unable to find in his marriage. Sharing of childhood experiences is essential but how can it be made possible ? The poet has suggested two alternatives, the example of the Egyptians who married their own sisters or they may follow the ancient Hindu custom of child marriage daughter among whom children were betrothed even before their birth. In A. K. Ramanujan’s poetry, family is the central metaphor, but the familial is always linked up with the historical and in this way the individual and the particular is universalised. Ramanujan is a poet in the ‘confessional mode’ and his poetry is intensely autobiographical and his objective. Ramanujan has achieved the impersonality by universalising the personal and the particular. The poem has illustrated the poet’s use of ‘the negative which of caution’ to guard the readers against stock-phrases and responses, of the as in the following:

he will acknowledge the wickedness  
of no reminiscence : no, not grid  
the burning end of the cigarette  
in the balcony.

The speaker's nostalgia for the wife's "unshared childhood" springs from his need to overcome the alienation that keeps them "a part at the end of ac years." But the criss-cross of memories, the enactment of the drama of another's past in one's own consciousness, only serves to accentuate the narrow limits in which the relationship appears to survive with its explosive insecurities and tensions. The intended progression of the theme is covertly suggested, as the speaker's attempt to divine the cause of emotional separation turns into a "you-me" drag-out fight with subtle insinuations involving family matters and relatives on both sides (my family album your ancestral house; your father-my father; your brother-my sister-in-law; the source of my sheep-mouth look in my parents' wedding picture; your love affair, etc.) The poem has concluded with the problematic uncertainty with which it begins, implying that the speaker's desire to enter another life is brought with disillusionment. The ironic twist at the end of the poem has confirmed the stasis underlying the relationship as also the persisting acrimony and jealousy that have been responsible for the speaker's own emotional aridity.

To sum up: A. K. Ramanujan is one of the prominent poet's of Indian Poetry in English. His poetry shows how an Indian English Poet can derive strength from going back to his roots. Family is the center of his poetry. Ramanujan's memories of the past, and family relations in love poem for a wife-I. In Breaded Fish, memories recall as a half-Naked woman dead on a beach. The poem River' evokes on nostalgia and at the same time the realization of the atmosphere to which the poet belongs.

#### **4.14.4 Glossary and notes-**

- mellowed : make or become mellow  
transverse : situated or extended across something  
fumes : Smoke  
nostalgic : feeling ,evoking or characterized by nostalgia

anecdotes	:	story, tale, narrative
sepia	:	reddish-brown colour
reminiscence	:	a story told about a past event rembered by the narrator
wager	:	bet, gamble
Forestalling	:	prevent, intercept, check, block

#### **4.14.5 Check your progress**

- From which collection 'Love Poem for a Wife-I' is taken from ?
- What is the theme of the poem?
- Who was eager to know about the boy from the album?
- What is the name of wife's brother?
- Where is the grandmother's house situated?
- What was the ancient Hindu tradition?

#### **4.14.6 Key to check your progress**

- Relations
- The poet's married life and the reasons of the failure of marriage
- Wife
- James
- Alleppey
- child marriage in which children were betrothed even before their birth .

#### **4.14.7 Self – assessment questions**

Q.1 Bring out the personal and autobiographical elements, in Ramanujan's poem which you have studied.

Q.2 "It is 'a poetry in which memory plays an important role". Discuss with reference to Ramanujans 'A River'.

#### **4.14.8 References for the further study**

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## **DREAM POEM**

**Meena Alexander**

### **Content**

- 4.15.1 Introduction
- 4.15.2 The Poem
- 4.15.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem
- 4.15.4 Glossary and notes
- 4.15.5 Check Your Progress
- 4.15.6 Key to Check Your Progress
- 4.15.7 Self – assessment questions

### **4.15.0 Dream Poem**

**Meena Alexander**

#### **4.15.1 Introduction**

Meena Alexander is one of the popular poets of Indian writing in English. Dream Poem is the Poem about the life of the poet. Her volumes of poetry are “Stone Roots” (1980), House of a Thousand Doors (1988) and The Storm (1989) FAMOUS FOR HER STYLE. She is from Christian community. She is a university English teacher. Alexander has written obscure poems in a private symbolism based upon images of the Indian landscape. She writes a new, puzzling and obscure kind of poetry. Her poetry is filled with private symbols and is concerned with other kinds of feelings than those usually felt in social situations. In her poetry landscape often figures prominently as she is concerned with the problematic or fragile nature of the self and its relationship to external reality. She regards a poem as a construction which reflects the act of making poetry. She also writes about the memories of childhood and family relations.

#### **4.15.2 THE POEM**

##### ***Dream Poem***

Each woman has a daughter  
touched in a mirror

there is ash at the edges of disaster

by crimson water  
trees sip, kneeling . . .

You cup a sparrow in your palms  
raise it to the sun, crying

at the edges of your window  
trees catch fire.  
Your daughter is older now  
she shakes her head in the sun  
she dries her hair without crying.

Each night  
she passes through water.

You ride by in a cart without turning  
your throat is the colour of ash  
ahead of you  
through darkness  
a sparrow, burning . . .

### **4.15.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

This poem is about the expression of feminine sensibility. A woman is writing about a woman and her search is for her self. The poet says that each woman has a daughter touched in a mirror and there is ash at the end of disaster. The poem is obscure one because of symbols and images of ash, sparrow, crimson water, and window. The poet 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. In Meena Alexander's poetry the feminist experience and feeling of rootlessness go hand in hand. In the poem 'Dream Poem' she says . .

Each woman has a daughter

touched in a mirror there is ash  
at the edges of disaster 'Dream Poem'

#### **4.15.4 Glossary and notes**

Crimson : A rich deep red colour inclining to purple

#### **4.15.5 Check your progress**

- Who has a daughter?
- How is the water?
- What are the images and symbols of the dream?
- From which collection 'Dream Poem' is taken?
- What is the theme of the 'Dream Poem'?

#### **4.15.6 key to check your progress**

- Woman
- Crimson
- Ash, sparrow,crimson,water,and window
- From stone roots
- The feminist sensibility and feeling of rootlessness

#### **4.15.7 Self – assessment questions**

Q. 1 Discuss feminist sensibility in the poem 'Dream Poem'.

Q. 2 Critically appreciate the 'Dream Poem'.

## HOUSE OF A THOUSAND DOORS

Meena Alexander

### Content

- 4.16.1 Introduction
- 4.16.2 The Poem
- 4.16.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem
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- 4.16.6 Key to Check Your Progress
- 4.16.7 Self – assessment questions
- 4.16.8 References for the further study

### 4.16.0 HOUSE OF A THOUSAND DOORS

Meena Alexander

#### 4.16.1 Introduction

The poem, *House of a Thousand Doors* (1988) has reflected her interlocked relationship with her origins, her ancestral home in Trivuella and her grandmother. The poetess tries to reorient her true self by welding her forgotten native roots against an agitating history of displacements a highly active transnational world.

#### 4.16.2 THE POEM

##### *House of a Thousand Doors*

This house has a thousand doors  
the sills are cut in bronze  
three feet high  
to keep out snakes,  
toads, water rats  
that shimmer in the bald reeds  
at twilight

as the sun burns down to the Kerala coast.

The roof is tiled in red  
pitched with a silver lightning rod,

a prow, set out from land's end  
bound nowhere.

In dreams  
waves lilt, a silken fan  
in grandmother's hands  
shell coloured, utterly bare as the light takes her.

She kneels at each  
of the thousand doors in turn  
paying her dues.

Her debt is endless.  
I hear the flute played in darkness,  
a bride's music.

A poor forked thing,  
I watch her kneel in all my lifetime  
imploring the household gods  
who will not let her in.

### **4.16.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

The poet remembers a house of a thousand doors. The sills are at three feet high to keep out snakes, toads and water rats. The house is nearby the Kerala coast. The roof of the house is tiled in red. The poet remembers her grandmother's hand nostalgically. 'She kneels at each door with a feeling of gratitude'. She hears flute played in darkness and she kneels before the household gods throughout her life. The poet remembers her grandmother who had lived in that house. The poem 'House of a Thousand Doors' uses the title metaphor to describe the variety of forces that operate on the speaker: heritage, gender, language, experience, ideology and search for meaning. The speaker's early life is the figure of her grandmother, a powerful

member of the family who learned to control. The poem is about the tradition of India particularly Kerala. The coastal Kerala has its own significance in the poem.

The beginning of everything is from Kerala. There is a new heritage and culture. The poet has described the Kerala coast with surroundings true to its nature. The poet has debts to the tradition of the place. She has reached to the new doors and entered into new rooms. The new room with its new culture and she was influenced by the culture of it.

The poetess has implored the gods to get accommodated in a new room as a perfect native. In this poem, the poetess has created diasporic experience. The title of the poem signifies that India as a nation imparted significance to both individuality and a feeling of community. The poet has criticised the westernization of India as a land of snakes and snake charmers. The woman stands for India who stands kneeling before colonial powers, her back bent by oppression.

#### **4.16.4 Glossary and notes**

Sills	:	slab of stone
shimmer	:	Shine with a soft ,glisten
Tiled	:	Cover with tiles
Forked	:	separated

#### **4.16.5 Check your progress**

1. Where is the house situated?
2. About which tradition the poet is talking?
3. What is used as a metaphor in the poem House of Thousand Doors?
4. How is the roof of the house?
5. Who was living in the house?

#### **4.16.6 Key to Check your progress**

- Kerala
- the tradition of India particularly Kerala
- life

- the roof of the house is tiled in red
- grandmother

#### **4.16.7 Self – assessment questions**

Q.1 Write a note on the significance of the title of the poem 'House of a Thousand Doors'.

Q.2 Discuss, the tradition of India particularly Kerala with reference to the poem 'House of a Thousand Doors'.

## FROM THE TRAVELERS

Meena Alexander

### Content

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- 4.17.2 The Poem
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- 4.17.7 Self – assessment questions
- 4.17.8 References for the further study

### 4.17.0 FROM THE TRAVELERS

Meena Alexander

#### 4.17.1 Introduction

The poem 'From the Travelers' is written by Meena Alexander. She clarifies her and her position as a transcultural and transcontinental poet.

#### 4.17.2 THE POEM

##### *From The Travelers*

Consider us crawling forward  
in thunder and rain,  
possessions strewn through airports  
in dusty capitals,  
small stoppages in unknown places  
where the soul sleeps:

Bahrain, Dubai, London, New York,  
names thicken and crack

as fate is cut and chopped  
into boarding passes.

German shepherds sniff our clothes  
for the blind hazard of bombs,  
plastique knotted into bars  
grenades stuffed into a child's undershirt.

Our eyes dilate  
in the grey light of cities  
that hold no common speech of us,  
no bread, no bowl, no leavening.

At day's close we cluster  
amidst the nylon and acrylic  
in a wilderness of canned goods,  
aisles of piped music  
where the soul sweats blood:

Migrant workers stripped  
of mop and dirty bucket,  
young mothers who scrub kitchen floors  
in high windowed houses  
with immaculate carpets,

Pharmaceutical salesman in shiny suits,  
night nurses raising their dowry  
dollar by slow dollar,  
tired chowkidars eking their pennies out  
in a cold country  
Students, ageing scholars,  
doctors wedded to insurance slips,  
lawyers shovelling their guilt  
behind satin wallpaper.

Who can spell out  
the supreme ceremony  
of tea tins  
wedged  
under the frozen food counter?

Racks of cheap magazines  
at the line's end  
packed with stars

Predict our common birth  
yet leave us empty handed  
shuffling damp bills.

#### **4.17.3 Summary and Analysis of the Poem**

The poem 'From the Travelers' is written by Meena Alexander. The poem is about the journey of the people from one place another.

People on journey crawl forward with their possessions through airports in dusty capitals in thunder and rain. On the way they stop at unknown places and their souls sleep there. The capitals are Baharain, Dubai, London and New York. All these names thicken and crack just like the fate is cut and chopped into boarding passes. There is also a reference to German shepherds, bombs, and grenades. Their eyes dilate in the grey light of cities. At night these travellers dressed in nylon and acrylic enjoy music but their souls sweat blood. There are migrant workers. The young mothers scrub kitchen floors. Pharmaceutical salesmen are in bright suits while the nurses on night duty increase their income dollar by dollar. The chowkidars are tired in a cold country. Students and aged scholars and doctors are interested in insurance slips. The lawyers feel guilty. There are so many cheap magazines filled with stars that predict the birth of all. Finally they are empty handed and shuffling with damp bills.

#### **TO SUM UP**

Meena Alexander finds her roots in Kerala, the Southern State of India. In recent year, 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. She claims the multi – cultural and multi – lingual experience. Her exile is not only physical but also psychological.

#### 4.17.4 Glossary and notes

crawling	:	creep
stoppages	:	halting
dilate	:	larger
acrylic	:	Made from polymers of acrylic acid
immaculate	:	Perfectly clean
pharmaceutical	:	Realtng the medicinal drugs
eking	:	save
shovelling	:	Move shift
shuffling	:	Walking by dragging one’s feel along
hyenas	:	A dog like African mammal
guttural	:	Husky,throaty
clawed	:	Having a curved pointed horney nail
prelude	:	preliminary
to ruin	:	Decay,

#### 4.17.5 Check your progress

- Where did the people stop?
- How did the travellers dress?
- Who were doing night duty?
- Who are interested in the insurance slips?
- Who is guilty in the poem?

#### **4.17.6 Key to Check your progress**

- Unkown places
- Nylon and acrylic
- Nurses
- Students ,aged scholars and doctors
- Lawyers

#### **4.17.7 Self – assessment questions**

Q.1 Describe the Journey in the Poem.

Q.2 Write a critical appreciation of the poem 'From The Travelers'.

#### **4.17.8 References for the further study**

- Alexander, Meena (1996) : The shock of Arrival : Reflections on Post Colonial Experiences : South End Press, Baston.
- Alexander, Meena (2002) : 'Poetics of Dislocation' : Harithom.
- M. K. Rukhaya (2014): Poetry Analysis: Meena Alexander's 'House of a Thousand doors' rukhaya. com ,A literary Companion.

#### **Summary of the Unit**

Sri Aurbindo's poetry is the poetry of mystic vision and mantric quality. His poetry is born out of deep spiritual experience and self –realization. Savitri remains the largest spiritual epic written in English. He has started a new Vedic and Upanishadic era in Indian English poetry.

Ezekiel is a Modern Indian Poet. He has opened a new era and trend in Indian English poetry. He is the pioneer and father of modernity in Indian English poetry. The Indian contemporary scene, modern urban life human relationship, love and sex and spiritual values are the major themes of his poetry. He has experimented endlessly with form and craft. Flawless craftsmanship makes his poetry unique.

The poetry of Dom Moraes is interesting. The critics are often confused over the theme of Moraes poems. He is neither subjective nor objective in true sense of the term. We find a dominant confessional gesture in his poems. The theme of

alienation, depression and frustration has been presented with ease and simplicity. The struggle of man for his survival in this world is one the themes of his poetry.

India has a long tradition of women poets from Toru Dutt onwards. Kamala Das is a major Indian woman poet in English hailing from Malabar, a coastal region of South India. She reveals her soul and self in her poetry, therefore, like Sylvia Plath, she is called a confessional poet. Besides, Kamala Das is essentially a poet of love and tenderness. She is aware of the world around her and gives a living expression to modern Indian woman's thoughts and feeling. There is also a kind of restlessness in her poems. The two main themes of her poetry are love and the woman's identity. In Kamala Das's poetry two aspects of love have been described: the real fulfilling love and pure carnal or unfulfilment in love. Hence her poetry is saturated with images and symbols of love and lust. Most of Das's poems are autobiographical. Kamala Das is one of our significant poets writing in English today.

A. K. Ramanujan is one of the prominent poet's of Indian Poetry in English. His poetry shows how an Indian English Poet can derive strength from going back to his roots. Family is the center of his poetry. Ramanujan's memories of the past, and family relations in love poem for a wife I. In Breaded Fish, memories recall as a half-Naked woman dead on a beach. The poem River evokes on nostalgia and at the same time the realization of the atmosphere to which the poet belongs.

Meena Alexander finds her roots in Kerala, the Southern State of India. In recent year, 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. She claims the multi – cultural and multi – lingual experience. Her exile is not only physical but also psychological.



## Unit-1

### Gender and Politics in Postcolonial SAARC Fiction Taslima Nasrin - *Lajja*

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## 1.1 Objectives:

After studying this unit you will be able,

- to get an overview of Postcolonial Literature of SAARC Nations
- to introduce the themes commonly emerged in SAARC Fiction
- to study the effects of religious fundamentalism on common people in general and on the minority community in Bangladesh in particular
- to explain how human and national identity are shrunk to religious identity leading to identity crisis
- to identify the theme of feminism in the novel, '*Lajja*'

## 1.2 Introduction

### 1.2.1 SAARC Nations:

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is a body comprising of countries of South Asia including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. SAARC was founded in Dhaka on December 8, 1985 to promote regional integration and strengthen cultural connectivity through dialogue and discussion for peace in the region. This was in addition to work for economic development of the member nations.

The FOUNDATION OF SAARC WRITERS AND LITERATURE is a body in the SAARC Region launched in 1987 with an aim to nurture and promote cultural integration and create cultural connectivity through literary and cultural interactions among the SAARC nations.

### 1.2.2 Postcolonialism:

Postcolonialism is a field of study that incorporates many fields including history, anthropology, culture and literature. It is a body of literary and cultural theory which studies the impact of imperialism on countries ruled by British and French colonisers.

It is an umbrella term which encompasses issues ranging from creation of new nations, arousing the feeling of nationalism, cultural hybridity, racial identity and gender issues.

C L Innes in his book 'The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literature in English' has distinguished between the term postcolonial and post-colonial. According to Innes, the hyphenated word **post-colonial** refers to the period after a country, state or people became independent from a colonial power such as Britain or France. Whether hyphenated or not **postcolonial** refers to the cultural, political and racial consequences of colonialism.

The European powers ruled over vast regions of the Asian, African and South American continents until the mid-twentieth century. There was political governance, economic exploitation and cultural domination. Struggle for independence began in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the mid twentieth century. These struggles resulted in political independence for many countries in Asia and states in Africa, Australia, South America and Canada.

### **1.2.3 Post-Colonial Literature:**

Post-colonial literature is the literature by people from formerly colonized countries. The postcolonial studies are not confined to mark an era after colonialism or post-independence, but are concerned with challenges of reviving native culture; rejecting Western norms and legacy of colonialism. The study encompasses areas of history, anthropology and literature. Post-colonial literary studies have given significance to the struggle between the colonial and colonized culture. The three phases through which new literatures developed were the phase of imitation, resistance and development of a distinct identity.

In the first phase the Indo-English writers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century writers imitated the great works of the imperial power- for eg Shakespeare and the writers of the Romantic Age.

In the second stage, writings were related to protest or rejection of the colonial culture and substituting it with native culture.

In the final phase the writers worked to develop regain identity for the natives which was lost identity in the colonial culture and reign.

### **1.2.4 Post Colonial Literature of SAARC Nations:**

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (**SAARC**) as the regional inter governmental organization and geopolitical union of nations in South Asia was established in December 1985. However, the literatures of its member

countries in the twentieth century can be divided into two halves. The first half of the 20th century was the period of struggle for independence in most regions in South Asia. The themes reflected in the literature of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and other SAARC nations related to pre and post independence political and social upheavals.

In the history of South Asia. the Partition of India, the emergence of Bangladesh, and the Civil War in Sri Lanka after its Independence in 1948 were major events. Not only were these events of political and economic significance, but they also influenced the social, religious, cultural and ethnic outlook of these countries. These events have impacted much of the literature produced in the South Asian countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The second half of the century -The Post-Independence era in India, saw the advent of the Big trio of Indian Writings in English- Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao who laid the foundation for the growth and progress of the novel in English in India In Pakistan the novels of Ahmed Ali and Zulfikar Ghose paved the path for writers like Hanif Kuerishi, Mohsin Hamid, Sara Suleri and many more to follow. The legacy of Bangladeshi writings in English can be traced back to the Pre-Independence undivided Bengal with writers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Michael Madhusudan Dutt. In Sri Lanka, the writings of Tissa Abeysekara and Jean Arasanayagam explored a new age in the field of Sri Lankan fiction. Some writers like Bapsi Sidhwa, Taslima Nasrin, Salman Rushdie, Shyam Selvadurai, Vikram Seth and Michael Ondaatje focused on Partition, communal violence, civil wars, ethnic conflict and World Wars leading to displacement and identity crisis. Other writers like Rohinton Mistry, V.S Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Rao Badami, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jumpha Lahiri emphasized the diaspora and the resulting identity crisis in their works.

Literary works written in English and other vernacular languages by writers belonging to different South Asian countries have many similarities because they grew up in countries which share historical and cultural connection, which in turn binds the various diversities and subsumes the political conflicts of the region. South Asia which is home to diverse religions, cultures and languages has made valuable contribution to World literature. The writers belonging to South Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka or having

South Asian descent but residing in countries other than the country of their origin have contributed towards the creation of South Asian literature.

The different genres used by writers to express their thoughts were Novels, plays, autobiographies, inspirational songs and poems about freedom and nation building. Subjects such as suppression, resistance, migration, gender were the focal points of postcolonial literary studies. During the colonial era the history of natives was depicted as black, blank and insignificant. Unmasking social injustice was one of the objectives of post colonial writers. Literary space was used by the colonized to speak out their silenced position. The autobiographical mode of expression has been after effects and the trauma of the Partition have been the subject matter of many novels and short stories both of SAARC writers especially of writers of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Civil War that took place for independence from Pakistan figures in literature of Bangladesh. In addition, gender bias, religious fanaticism, identity crisis of individuals in an unstable yet politically independent nation was also the themes of South Asian literature extensively used by women in South Asia in order to voice their opinion.

### **1.2.5 Themes of SAARC Fiction:**

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan), Sri Lanka and Nepal are the countries covered under the title of South Asia.

Most of these are newly emerging nations, gained freedom from British colonial power around the late 1940s or so. The themes reflected in the fictions of SAARC nations -India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan relate to pre and post-independence political and social upheavals. The colonial encounter is the foremost determinant for emerging literatures in English in the Asian subcontinent. Additionally, the process through which the new nation comes into being; the trauma of partition, the formation of national identities in a situation of political instability all contribute to the vast body of literature, not just in English, but in the regional languages as well. Some of the best South Asian fiction in English by including Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Arnitava Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Michael Ondaatje *The English Patient* reflect and refract these urgencies and preoccupations.

**The common themes that emerge in most of SAARC fiction in English include:**

- The East-West encounter

- A sense of Pride in one's own culture
- Issues of identity and nationhood
- After effects of partition
- Religious fanaticism
- Gender bias

The fiction of these South Asian countries has some salient features. In the writings of Indian and Pakistani writers, the recurrent themes are struggle for independence, the agony of Partition and the violence that followed etc. In the literature of Bangladesh, the writers wrote about the aftereffects of Civil War that took post partition and for independence from Pakistan. In Sri Lankan literature, the ethnic tension between the Sinhala and Tamil Tigers, violence and bloodshed it caused and displacement of around 1.5 million People from their homes. Ideas of nationalism and ways to define the new nations were prominent topics of the writers of SAARC nations.

Further, these writings also focus on the issue of identity. South Asian writers writing in English largely favour a secular humanist perspective. The notion of identity was concerned with people who were forced to leave their homeland and displaced. Many writers who have left their homelands described their immigrant experiences.

Diaspora literature emerged as a genre of writing for studying the psychology of the migrants. Writers wrote about the experiences undergone by diaspora like problems related to geographical displacement, socio cultural adjustments in the host country, yearning to go back to the homeland.

The writers of post-colonial SAARC literature also wrote to restore the lost dignity of their nation and give due consideration to the facts of cultural assimilation and convergence taking place during the post-colonial period. In their works issues like conflicts between cultures, values, the social, political, and historical aspects of the two nations are emphasized.

Representation of terror, trauma and violence transcend national and geographical boundaries thus find place in the novels originating from all the countries of Asia. The themes and issues central to today's Indian Writing in English

often turn to middle-class issues. In some instances the focus is on marginal groups in Indian society, groups that are discriminated against because of their caste, class or religion. The focus of the English novel in Pakistan is very centered on the trauma of partition, the history of nationalism and the problems of a new nation while Sri Lankan writers in English are seriously engaged with the political and social tensions caused by the ethnic conflicts burning in their country. In spite of the variety of themes, the fictions of this region address the problems of an imperial past and the conflicts typical of the post-independence period.

During the period 1920 to 1950 Indian writers in English R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao wrote on the themes of religious and mythical Indian traditions. The novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya deal with the themes of social criticism and political emancipation. They protested against imperialism of the period. Whereas, in the works of post-independence writers psychological and social tensions are exposed.

Khushwanth Singh is considered a novelist of 'Partition theme.' Though his *Train to Pakistan*, (1956) is published in the post-independence period, it deals with the theme of pre-independence era.

Notable recent novels from Pakistan include *The Thirteenth House* by Adam Zameenzad where desire is mixed with horror, astrology and mysticism with history. Also worthy of mention are Tariq Ali's novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* and Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days*, Zulfikar Ghose's novel *Figures of Enchantment*. Themes in the fiction of Bapsi Sidhwa such as the partition crisis, expatriate experience, social idiosyncrasies of the small minority community are presented in her novels *The Pakistani Bride*, *Ice-Candy-Man*.

The experience of relocation and expatriation among many Sri Lankan writers in the 1950s and 1960s served to foreground questions of personal identity and themes of nostalgia and exile. These themes are reflected in the Michael Ondaatje's novels *The English Patient*, *Running in the Family* and *Anil's Ghost*.

### **1.3 Gender and Politics in Post-Colonial SAARC Fiction-The Novel:**

In fiction, the novel become a vehicle for social change and literary expression of the people of a new nation where expressions on the themes of anticolonial movements were commonly used. In the eyes of the colonizers the image of the

colonized Asian countries was associated with timelessness and backwardness. To prove them wrong the postcolonial writers of South Asia projected the true native culture and the glorious history of precolonial era in their writings. Novel as a literary genre is used as a postcolonial tool to culturally reconsider the distorted image of the colonized. Colonization, ethnic strife, Partition, migrations to the West in search of better life styles and the struggles to move towards democratic forms of government are the pointers which indicate the common political background of these nations. These pointers also have a direct bearing on the literature of the region. Consequently, it is observed that in the works of South Asian writers, the themes, settings, communities and characters bear much semblance. Their writing predominantly deals with the British Empire and its legacy, struggle for independence, the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan, the Bangladeshi war for independence from Pakistan, racism, caste system and life as immigrants in new countries. Hence, it can be claimed that South Asian literature interrogates notions of nationalism, home and homeland, the collision of the ancient and the modern culture as well as both individual and collective identity.

Development of a sense of pride in one's own culture led to the building of a national identity. Works of Indian novelists -Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* depicts the traditions, myth and legends of a small Indian village which serves as microcosm of the whole nation. Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich like Us*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* portray themes which dominated the contemporary political situations and also carry anti colonial message. Further, Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* , and Saadat Hasan Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*, Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend In Ganges* and *Distant Drum*, *The Rape* by Raj Gill, *Sunlight in Broken Column* by Attia Hossain, *Twice Born Twice Dead* by Kartar Singh Duggal, *Shadow of Time* by Mehar Nigar Masroor and *Ice Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa. Taslima Nasrin's novel *Lajja*, and Durrani's novel '*Blasphemy* reflect the ambiguity of political independence, expressing the identity crises of individuals in an unstable world.

Politically, the post colonial novelists portray the contemporary political issues like the independent movements, dismantling colonial culture and promoting native culture, struggle for independence and post independent political issues.

The interrelation between political and cultural resistance is advocated by nationalists in post colonial SAARC novels. This resistance is addressed by

dismantling the dominant culture of the colonizers and substituting it with native culture.

Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and many more, have been the writers of post- colonial literature. Raja Rao in his works has brought out various facets of native traditions, local histories, cultural roots, rituals, icons and belief systems. The impact of colonialism on native cultures brought about endless debates. The social realists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandya, V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiong' O have shown the fabric of changing society in their literary output.

### **1.3.1 South Asian women writers:**

South Asian literature is important also because of the literary output of its women writers. Women writers of South Asia have experimented with various forms of literary expression, such as fiction, poetry, autobiography etc., to give vent to their anguish and break the silence imposed on women by the patriarchal society and raise questions regarding caste oppression, gender-discrimination and control of women's sexuality.

One of the main thematic orientation of the novel is around the concept of women – their position, their integrity, the moral responsibility of the society towards them, and their victimization at the hand of men who treat women similarly as they treat their lands, reducing them to mere objects and properties.

Some of the writers who have contributed to the corpus of South Asian literature are Mahasweta Devi, Jyoti Lanjewar, Ajeet Cour, Sukrita Paul Kumar, etc. (India), Kishwar Naheed, Zaheda Hina, Feryal Ali Gauhar, Bano Qudsia, etc. (Pakistan), Taslima Nasreen, Rizia Rahman, Selina Hossain, Jahanara Imam, etc. (Bangladesh), Manju Kanchuli, Banira Giri, Benju Sharma etc. (Nepal), Kunzang Choden Roderetc. (Myanmar), Latifa, Batya Yagur etc. (Afghanistan) and Jean Arasanayagam, Kamala Wijeratne etc. (Sri Lanka).

Iqbalunnisa Hussain, another Muslim Indian English novelist of the pre-independence period she protests against the Muslim tradition of wearing purdah in the novel *Purdah and Polygamy*, According to her it is an excuse for suppressing women.

Attia Hosain, the first pre-independence Muslim woman writer in English, was known for her national politics. She criticized British Government for its policy of

divide and rule. This is seen in her novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. Her novel deals with the event of partition and its evil impact.

The exploration of the 'self,' either through the medium of fiction or autobiographical writings, is a major theme in their works. These writers have portrayed women as they are "caught in the flux of tradition and modernity, bearing the burden of the past and the aspirations of the future. There is a search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self (Dass 11). The issues involved in women's struggle for survival in this part of the world are different from those of women belonging to other subcontinents. In this region, women are victims of multiple forms of oppression which has its basis in gender, caste, religion and class. Out of these factors, caste and religion have a huge impact on the lives of women in South Asian countries. Therefore, the feministic concerns of women in South Asia are different from those of women in the West. Naturally enough, this difference also has a bearing on the literature of the South Asian region.

#### **1.4 Overview of the Novel under study:**

**‘Lajja’ by Taslima Nasreen**

**(English translation by Anchita Ghatak from the Original Bengali )**

##### **1.4.1 Background:**

The novel is set up against the backdrop of the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 and its repercussions in Bangladesh. The ripples of the demolition of the Babri Masjid led to violence not just in different states of India, but in neighbouring Bangladesh too. Religious fanatics destroyed temples and attacked the Hindu minority community who became victims of insensate and barbaric violence. Women were raped, men were beaten up, their property destroyed and looted and their lives were made miserable. It also resulted in mass exodus of Hindus into India.

The story moves back and forth into the political history from 1947 to 1971 involving of the making of nations of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and culminates in the effects of the demolition of the mosque on the people in Bangladesh. The narrative is fast paced with numerous newspaper reports, infiltrating into the story which involves the Dutta household from 1947 to 1992. Nasrin takes the pain of keeping a record of numerous newspaper articles related to persecution of Hindus by

Muslim in 1947, 1952, 1964, 1971, 1978, 1988, 1990 and 1992, incorporating them within the narrative to show the shame on religion and politics.

The novel 'Lajja' by Taslima Nasreen is a protest against the atrocities faced by Bangladeshi Hindus in times of communal riots in Bangladesh during December 1992. Originally written in the native Bangla language (Bengali) in 1993, Lajja was translated in several Indian languages. The book was banned by the Bangladesh government two months after the book was published. The Muslim fundamentalists issued a fatwa against her as a result of which she had to flee from her own country and take refuge in other countries.

#### **1.4.2 Plot of the novel:**

The plot of the novel "Lajja" revolves around the Dutta family who decide to stay back in spite of millions of Hindus from Bangladesh going away to India in search of peace and safety. It is the story of Sudhamoy, Kironmoyee and their two children Suranjan and Nilanjana, fondly called Maya. The Duttas - Sudhamoy, Kironmoyee, and their two children, Suranjan and Maya - had lived in Bangladesh all their lives. For generations they have been land owners near Myemsingh, in what is now Bangladesh. They had stayed back through the partition in 1947, through the Independence struggle in 1971, and even when Bangladesh became an Islamic state in 1978. Despite being part of the country's small Hindu community, that is terrorized at every opportunity by Muslim fundamentalists, they refuse to leave their country, as most of their friends and relatives have done. Over the years Sudhamoy and his family suffered severely as a result of their refusal to leave their country. Among other things, they had to sell their ancestral land for a pittance, and move to Dhaka where they live in a small house with no servants and little money.

The fictional plot of the novel is woven around historical facts which finely blend with the story. Though 'Lajja' is the story of the Duttas, they are reverted to the background, and the newspaper reports and eye-witness accounts, with facts and figures about the number of people killed, temples destroyed, properties looted and women raped, becomes the theme of the book.

Dutta family represents a large number of Hindu families which also victimised for their religion. How they behave in the wake of communal riots in Bangladesh, after the demolition of the mosque in Ayodhya, is what forms the story of "Lajja". The Duttas, are divided on the question of staying on in the land they have always

thought of as their home. Sudhamoy Dutta, the head of the family, is an atheist and staunch nationalist. His belief was that he was Bengali first and a Hindu later. Sudhamoy Dutta's ideas his principles were courageous and blatantly patriotic and is of the opinion that one should live or die in one's own motherland.

Suranjon, his son had similar ideas, or rather his ideas about nationalism were stronger than his father. Despite being deprived of opportunities due to his religious background, Suranjan, very much like his father, loved his motherland. Religion was the last thing he considered during his daily endeavors and he believed himself to be no different from any of his Muslim friends and acquaintances. Suranjan in a rebellious mood argues "Why should he flee his home simply because his name was Suranjan Dutta? Is it really necessary for his family—Sudhamoy, his father, Kironmoyee, his mother and Nilanjana, his sister—to run away like a refugee just because of their names and religion? It was against their principle that one should live or die in one's own motherland and against his uncompromising faith in the country he lived and loved.

This adamancy of Sudhamoy and Suranjan to stick to their principles, their decisions to stay back and put the family on a dangerous trial forms the crux of the plot.

After a long and torturous battle with himself, with his uncompromising faith in a country he loved and lived for, Sudhamoy acknowledged the inevitable migration to India but at a very high price—the loss of his daughter Maya. It is quite tragic that Maya, a young girl with a zest for life, was humiliated, dragged along by a group of young men and gang raped, murdered and thrown into the water where her bloated body floats unclaimed. The strong mountain that he had built inside him unfortunately crumbled.

### **1.4.3 Summary:**

'Lajja' is the story of the Datta family- the protagonist of the story is Suranjan, a Bengali Hindu who lives in Dhaaka with his father Sudhamoy, mother Kironmoyee and sister Nilanjana (Maya).

The novel dates back to 7<sup>th</sup> of December, 1992, a day after the demolition of Babri Mosque at Ayodhya and spans over a period of thirteen days. It deals with the repercussions of the demolition on the people of Bangladesh, especially those belonging to the Hindu community. The incident of demolition of the mosque

takes a communal turn leading to a mass exodus of Hindus into India. However, Sudhamoy and his son Suranjan, the men of the Dutta household, decide to stay back despite the persistent requests of the women in the family.

The different parts of the novel take us back and forth to the political events which affect the life of the Dutta family which represents the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh.

The novel opens straight into the living room of the Dutta family where we find Maya urging her brother Suranjan to move to a safe place to protect the family from attacks on Hindus by religious fanatics in Bangladesh after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. “Something as something terrible might happen if we wait too long”, she pleaded in vain. She was concerned about the safety of her family at a time when her family’s religion had become their biggest enemy. Suranjan does think that the safety of his family is at risk because he considers Bangladesh as his motherland and believes that he is safe in his homeland. Like his father he refuses to leave the country, inspite of the plea made by his mother and sister, because he was born and educated here. He had an attachment with his home and friends. In spite of millions of Hindus from Bangladesh going away to India in search of peace and safety, he was resolved to stay back regardless of all the odds. Religion was the last thing he considered during his daily endeavors and he believed himself to be no different from any of his Muslim friends and acquaintances.

However, Suranjan is critical of the failure of the government to protect Hindus and in his case young girls and women.

At this stage, the novel goes back to the past to demonstrate how the abduction of Hindu girls was common in Bangladesh as a result of which most of the Hindus sent their daughters to India for their education and security.

“Manju Rani Seal, a student in the ninth standard...was abducted at 8 p.m., on the evening of 4 December 1988 by Abdur Rahim and his goons. A case was registered the next day at the Laksam police station by her distraught family. There is no trace of Manju Rani. Her abductors threatened Premanand Seal and his family but the police took no action when informed. Hindu families in the area are now terrified of sending their daughters to school. . . . In Parkumira village of Tala subdistrict in Satkhira, Rabindranath Ghosh’s young daughter, Chhanda, a third standard student. . . her School teacher abducted her with the help of some young hooligans. They took

the terrified little girl to garden nearby and raped her...a case was filed...no one was arrested.” (Lajja 48-49)

The abduction of Maya as a child of six illustrates the same. This incident terribly traumatizes the girl and has such a negative effect on the psyche of the girl child that she is not able to behave normally for two months. She would sleep fitfully and would wake up abruptly in the middle of the night. The family is never safe thereafter as they keep receiving threatening through anonymous extortion letters that aimed at kidnapping Maya again.

Back into the present Maya addresses the situation with a practical outlook against the decision of her father Sudhmoy and brother Suranjon to stay back and not leave the country. She chooses to take refuge in the household of a Muslim friend and follow the path of safety. Maya takes shelter in the house of Parul, one of her Muslim friends, to pursue her dreams for a better life ahead. Her decision to take shelter in the house of a Muslim, hurts the pride of her brother Suranjan, who withdraws from the family even than before, leaving his ailing father unattended.

However, Maya returns home after she learns that her father Sudhamoy suffered a stroke soon after she had left the house. Along with her mother Kironmayee she nurses her father.

Incidences of attacks on Hindu families burning their houses, raping women and torturing men continue. In spite of several warnings from locals and neighbours to leave the house, Suranjan continues to stay back during troubled times. However, this time he is let down when the nightmare inevitably arrives at his own doorstep.

On the ill-fated day 11th December 1992 A group of seven hooligans entered the house . The young men in the name of Islam, ravaged and attacked the house and forcefully kidnapped Maya right under the nose of her parents. Sudhamoy and Kiranmoye tried their best but they could do nothing against seven hooligans who very quickly took Maya away. Maya was crying for help but nobody came forward to help her because she was a Hindu girl and the abductors were Muslims. She only screamed to her mother for help saying: “ ‘Ma . . . please help me, Ma . . .’ She fought with her captors as she was dragged away, looking back in pain and terror, hoping against hope that her mother would be able to save her” (Lajja 148)..

The shocking abduction of Maya, left Suranjan highly helpless and frustrated. In an attempt to trace his younger sister and free her from the kidnappers, he seeks

the help of his close friend Haider, but is shocked to find that he was of no help at all. All attempts to find his sister were fruitless.

The legal system also turned a blind eye on the family as they were Hindus. The wails and shrieks of the young girl Maya went in vain as there was none who could come forward and help the family in finding her and taking action against the male predators who abducted her.

Out of sheer pain of helplessness, misery and frustration, Suranjan began to drink wine and abuse Muslims. Time and again he was haunted by the pain of losing his sister who was innocent. Suranjan kept abusing the system and his own incapability to retaliate. He even thought of committing suicide but thought that it would be so cowardly an act. He was haunted with the idea of what the abductors must be doing with Maya; and was traumatized with the idea of Maya being gangraped by them. He wondered whether she would be alive or dead.

The abduction of Maya brought about a total change in the character of Suranjan and a twist in the development of the story which is gripping and the climax is extremely poignant.

Filled with anger and hatred for the Muslims Suranjan developed a strong desire to avenge the honor of his sister by using the tit for tat strategy. He rushed out and went to a Bar council where he met Shamima, the young prostitute. A poor woman who sold her body to feed herself and her family. Firing with rage Suranjan did not look at Shamima as a 'whore'-he saw her as a Muslim woman and raped her brutally. He reduces the Muslim girl to mere object of sexual desire with a view to avenge his sister's rape by the Muslims. To quote from the text:

"He turned off the lights in the room. He threw the girl on the floor and stripped her of all her clothes. Suranjan took quick, deep breaths, as he dug his nails into the girl's flesh. He bit her breasts, one part of his mind understanding that what he was doing was certainly not love. Relentlessly he pulled her hair; bit her on the cheek, neck and breasts. He scratched her waist, her stomach, her buttocks and her thighs with his sharp nails . . . the girl moaned with pain, screaming occasionally, 'O my God! I am dying of pain. . . .' Suranjan laughed with savage satisfaction." (Lajja 200-01)

After a long and torturous battle with himself, Suranjan acknowledged the inevitable migration to India with his aged parents, though after paying a very high price - the life of Maya whose bloated body was found floating in the nearby water.

The novel ends with the decision of Sudhamoy to leave the country with the notion that humanity was the only religion for them

## **1.5 Gender and Femenist issues in Lajja:**

With the process of Industrialization, Modernization and Globalization showing its deep impact on the human society all over the world, the role and responsibilities of Women has attained new definition and perspective.

### **1.5.1 Oppression of women in patriarchal society:**

Oppression and injustice towards women were equally significant themes of Nasrin's works. For an instance, in the novel, "Lajja", being a woman Taslima revealed how the women are dominated by the men. The intention was to oppress the women and turn them into a subservient individual without any free will, freedom, and choice of their own.

The society depicted in the novel 'Lajja' is patriarchal where the men had a patriarchal mindset. The author has portrayed the female protagonists who were oppressed in the patriarchal society not only by the men but also due to the political and religious conflicts. Taslima Nasreen's main focus was on the mistreatment of women under the patriarchal institutions including society, and family. The writer has highlighted how patriarchal mindset of the individual people in Bangladesh challenges the self-respect of the woman.

One of the most important feminist issues that has been dealt with in the novel is the treatment of women at the hands of various patriarchal institutions like family, society and state, headed by a patriarch who either looks down upon women or marginalizes them.

### **1.5.2 Potrayal of women as objects of physical and psychological violence:**

A feminist writer denounces treatment of women as objects of physical and psychological violence. Nasrin does the same with tremendous vehemence as she depicts in Lajja how women are sexually harassed, abducted and subjected to varied kinds of torture that may even result in their deaths. The novelist demonstrates how

the abduction of Hindu girls has been common in Bangladesh and how the hooligans do not have any kind of fear. Whenever they wished, they would abduct a woman and rape her brutally. That was the reason that most of the Hindus sent their daughters to India for their education and security. To quote an instance from the novel:

“Manju Rani Seal, a student in the ninth standard...was abducted at 8 p.m., on the evening of 4 December 1988 by Abdur Rahim and his goons. A case was registered the next day at the Laksam police station by her distraught family. There is no trace of Manju Rani. Her abductors threatened Premanand Seal and his family but the police took no action when informed. Hindu families in the area are now terrified of sending their daughters to school. . . . In Parkumira village of Talasubdistrict in Satkhira, Rabindranath Ghosh’s young daughter, Chhanda, a third standard student. . . her School teacher abducted her with the help of some young hooligans. They took the terrified little girl to garden nearby and raped her...a case was filed...no one was arrested.” (Lajja 48-49)

Thus, the females as portrayed in the novel are nothing more than objects to be used by the male predators to satiate their lust. In an attempt to retaliate the Babri Masjid demolition in India, women’s bodies are defiled and desecrated as they become extensions of the geo-political entity called India for religious fundamentalists in Bangladesh. The emotional trauma that victims like Maya felt were same as that of the pathetic plight of their families, like that of the Duttas, no matter what their religion was.

Anxiety for the safety of young women was experienced by families, Hindus as well as Muslims. It was the case of the strong men tormenting the weak. The conformist insight of the roles of gender in the political, social and cultural set-ups have cast men as the strong, protective, decisive and rational beings whereas, the women were depicted as nurturing, submissive and emotional.

### **1.5.3 Projection Gender issues through women characters:**

The women protagonists of the novel “Lajja” - Kironmoyee, Maya and Shammima Begum, were all victims of gender bias, oppression, suppression and obliged to work following the patriarchal norms.

### 1.5.3.1 Kironmayee Dutta:

Kironmoyee Dutta, wife of the Sudhanmoy, head of the family, mother of Suanjan and Maya, is projected as the epitome of selflessness. A very gentle, polite and understanding mother and wife, Kironmoyee Dutta, remains poised to keep her family together during all moments of crisis. She is portrayed as a traditional woman who upholds the patriarchal setup and lives with a sole aim of maintaining the family bond.

Kironmoyee invests all her resources, monetary and mental, in keeping her family together. She gives a tough fight to her daughter's abductors. Her second act of assertion manifests in her refusal to accept the financial help offered by her son after her husband has a paralytic attack, which apparently depicts her as a victim of patriarchy.

The patriarchal norms do not let women fulfill their aspirations. Caught between the demands of her husband and her son, she continues to remain submissive and self-sacrificing to keep her family happy and together. Her innate desire to move to her relatives in India after the riots that hit Bangladesh after the demolition of the Babri Masjid remained unattended because of her husband's wish to remain in Bangladesh, their homeland. All she could do was secretly shed tears and behave submissive to the patriarchal setup in which the family is led by a male member, who is supposed to be all powerful and centralized. Further, she does not utter a single word of complaint when her urge to take lessons to sing Rabindra Sangeet was suppressed. She stopped singing in public due to criticism from social elements who said that "Hindu women have no sense of shame and that's why they learn to sing. Then they show their bodies off in front of me". (Lajja 52). However, Kironmoyee did hum songs when she was with her husband. Despite her reluctance, she is submissive enough to cook beef to make her husband happy and is even willing to accept her son's Muslim girlfriend Parveen as her daughter-in-law. Likewise "her latest sacrifice involved selling a pair of her gold bangles to Dr. Haripada's wife. After all, gold was not so precious that it could not be sold if the need arose" (Lajja 113) also presents the case of sacrifice and understanding on her part for family sake. Issues like her husband's infertility, physical ordeals, and extreme hunger, are accepted and humbly enacted by her in order to keep the family intact: "Kironmoyee did not eat herself, but kept Maya's share of food for her" (Lajja 100).

Thus, Nasrin portrays Kironmoyee as a polite, selfless and self-sacrificing wife/mother who is submissive to the demands of her husband and son, for her main concern is only the well being of her family and her personal choices are a non-issue in the environment she is born and brought up in.

#### **1.5.3.2 Neelanjona Dutta (Maya):**

Maya is the young women potagonist in the novel 'Lajja'. She was a lively young woman of twenty one full of life and a strong desire to live life to the fullest. She was self reliant with a sense of responsibility who not only sponsored her own studies in Eden College, Dhakka but also supported her family.

Maya had a knack to addresses the situation with a practical outlook and adjust herself to circumstances for survival. "Ever since she was old enough to understand things, she had seen that her country had Islam as its state religion and that she and her family were members of a minority community, which had to keep making compromised....Maya was prepared to take any step that would let her carry on living." (Lajja 18). The abduction of Maya as a child of six left her terribly traumatized and had a negative effect on her psyche as a child . She never felt safe thereafter as the family keep receiving threatening through anonymous extortion letters that aimed at kidnapping Maya again. Therefore, against the wishes of her father and brother, Maya preferred to follow the path of safety by leaving her home which was unsafe. Her zest for life and her desire to live and survive the riots urges her to leave her home and take shelter in the house of Parul, one of her Muslim friends.

However, Maya's attempt to pursue her dreams for a better life ahead are hampered in light of the communal violence and riots that broke in Bangladesh as an aftermath of Babri Masjid Demolition. She pays the highest price for being a minority, a woman of Hindu origin. When Maya grew up as a young girl of 21 she was abducted, on 11th December 1992, by a group of seven hooligans in their twenties. The wails and shrieks of the young Maya went in vain as there was none who could come forward and help the family in finding her and taking action against the male predators who abducted her. Despite his best efforts, Suranjan, could not locate his sister, Maya. The legal system also turned a blind eye on the family as they were Hindus.

Her double abduction, as a child and as a young woman throws light on sexual and physical violence against women who had to bear the brunt of the political blunder, may it be partition of 1947 or the Babri Masjid Demolition of 1992. Like Maya, many women were abducted, tortured, raped and killed brutally.

### **1.5.3.3 Shamima :**

Shamima Begum, daughter of Abdul Jolil from Rongpur is the young prostitute who falls victim to Suranjon's rage and fury. She is a poor woman who sold her body to feed herself and her family. Suranjon did not look at Shamima as a 'whore'-he saw her as a Muslim woman and so was raped. Though a streetwalker, Shamima startled with Suranjan's behavior that night. "He kept hurting her, ravaged and raped her....she had never before had such a violent customer, who had torn her to bits" (Lajja295). Suranjan's inability to save his sister Maya from the abductors had left him frustrated. Her death had totally shattered him. Out of frustration Suranjan decides to retaliate by violently raping Shamima, a Muslim prostitute. What satisfies him is the fact that he had avenged his sister's death by torturing a Muslim women. He wanted to show that "Hindus know how to rape.."(Lajja 297). He knew that Shamima was a harmless woman but a Muslim, nevertheless.

Thus, we see that how in a patriarchal system women are easy victims of men's fury, an instance of the strong tormenting the weak.

### **1.6 Politics, religion and identity crisis in Lajja:**

In the Preface of the novel Taslima Nasreen has written that the novel is a protest against the violence, hatred and killings that are going on in the world in the name of religion.

"I wrote Lajja when I saw Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh attack the Hindus. It all happened during December 1992. The Hindu fundamentalists of India destroyed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The Muslim fundalists of Bangladesh avenged the destruction of the Babri Masjid by attacking the blameless Hindus of Bangladesh, burning their homes, destroying their temples and shrines and raping Hindu women. I had protested this terrible violence in Lajja."(Preface)

The novel is dedicated by the writer to the people of the Indian Subcontinent. It starts with the statement "Let humanity be the other name of religion" During the Bangladeshi War of liberation, the people of Bangladesh, irrespective of the Hindus

and the Muslims fought together against the oppressive rule of Pakistan. Independence was the fruit of their united efforts. However, things were different than initially conceived and the gap between two communities widened leagues apart ignited by the powerful spark of the Babri Masjid demolition.

The novel revolves around the concept of Bangladeshi nationalism. Such was the patriotism and sense of nationalism of Hindus in Bangladesh that they never accepted that religion could be the foundation of national identity. According to Sudhanmoy and Suronjon, Language, culture and history provide the foundation of national identity.

The Duttas including Sukumar, Sudhanmoy and Suranjan (in line of hierarchy) regarded Bangladesh as their homeland and therefore refused to leave even at a time when majority of Hindus left for security purpose. “If there’s no security in the land of my birth, where in the world can I expect to be safe...If I die I’ll die in my own land, and if I live, it ‘ll be in my own country. This idealism of the Duttas was shattered when during the War of Liberation religion was used as a political weapon to gain independence and Islam was made the state religion. The people belonging to the minority Hindu community suffered. There was much bloodshed, loot and destruction in the name of religion that so much blood is shed and so many people have suffered. “Unspeakable cruelty was Unleashed on the minority Hindu community” (Lajja 62). It was a sort of oppression of the powerless by the powerful.

Suronjon had never learnt to differentiate people on the basis of religious identity. As a child he did not know that he was a Hindu. He was taught to belong to a human community which was Bengali which was not created by any religion but on the basis of the nation he belonged to, his motherland, his home land. Nasrin narrates an incident to show how Suranjan gets to understand his forced identity as a Hindu. As a child, he had known that he was a Hindu, but hadn't quite known what it meant. While Suranjan was at his lower primary class, he had a massive argument with a Muslim boy named Khaled. When this argument reached its peak, the boys had abused each other with the worst obscenities they could sum up. It was then the Muslim boy angrily referred to him as a Hindu. Suranjan was sure that the word Hindu was derogatory as swine or dog. It was only after he had grown up somewhat that he learnt that Hindu was a noun describing the religious community to which he belonged. When he was old enough to make up his mind on the matter he declared that he was above all, first, a human being and then Bengali by race. No religion had

created this race and he wanted his people to know no communal barriers and live together in perfect harmony.

Sudhamoy Dutta's ideas were courageous and blatantly patriotic. His belief was that he was a Bengali first and a Hindu later. Unfortunately, the system in which he lived did not allow such ideals to flourish and repeatedly reminded him of his minority status in society, whether in the matters of career or personal life.

Suranjan and his father Sudhanmoy finds their identity in a flux. What hurts them most is not the religious persecution but the forced identity thrust upon them by an unrelenting system and his total inability to offer resistance. They prefers to migrate to a liberal and tolerant India which does not force him to practise the religion he is born into. The binary logic of his home country has no such offers to make.

### **1.7 Key Terms :**

SAARC

Postcolonial

Post Colonial Literature

SAARC Literature

### **1.8 Check Your Progress**

#### **A) Answer in one sentence each.**

- 1) What is the full form of SAARC? Name the countries that are members of SAARC.
- 2) Define Postcolonialism
- 3) What were common themes that emerged in South Asian Literature?
- 4) *Lajja* is the fictional story of a Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.
- 5) Which incident, around which the novel revolves, sparked communal violence in Bangladesh?
- 6) How does Maya decide to survive the riots and live safely?
- 7) What did Maya do to support her family at times of financial difficulty?

- 8) Who was Shamima?
- 9) Why did Suranjon rape Shamima?
- 10) What was the reaction of Muslim Fundamentalists after the publication of *Lajja*?

### 1.9 Self-Assessment Questions

Answer the following question in about 250-300 words.

- 1) Write a critical note on the various aspects of Post colonial Literature
- 2) Write a critical note on the contribution made by women writers to South Asian Literature.
- 3) Write a note Oppression of women in patriarchal society referred in *Lajja*.
- 4) Critically examine objectification of women as reflected in the novel *Lajja*.
- 5) Discuss the identity crisis faced by Sudhanmoy and Suranjon in *Lajja*.

Write short note in about 100-150 words each.

- 1) Significance of the character of Shamima.
- 2) Character of Kironmayee.
- 3) Maya's struggle to pursue her dream for a better life.
- 4) Injustice on Hindus in Bangladesh after the demolition of Babri Masjid.

### 1.10 Key to check your progress

- 1) The full form of SAARC is South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. The member nations of SAARC are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- 2) Post colonialism is an umbrella term which encompasses issues ranging from creation of new nations, arousing the feeling of nationalism, cultural hybridity racial identity and gender issues. It is a field of study that incorporates many fields including history, anthropology, culture and literature. It is a body of literary and cultural theory which studies the impact of imperialism on countries ruled by British and French colonisers.
- 3) The themes that emerge in the novels of South Asian countries include:

Revival of native history, Colonial subjugation, After effects of partition, Religious anaticism, Identity crisis and Gender bias.

- 4) The novel 'Lajja' revolves around the aftermaths of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India on December 6, 1992, which sparked communal violence in Bangladesh.
- 5) Against the wishes of her father and brother, Maya preferred to follow the path of safety by leaving her home which was unsafe take shelter in the house of Parul, one of her Muslim friends.
- 6) Maya gave tutions to students to earn her living and support her family in times of financial trouble.
- 7) Shamima Begum, is the young prostitute who falls victim to Suranjon's rage and fury.
- 8) Suroanjon rapes Shamima, a Muslim prostitute.
- 9) The novel 'Lajja' by Taslima Nasreen is a protests against the atrocities faced by Bangladeshi Hindus in times of communal riots in Bangladesh dring December1992. The book was banned by the Bangladesh government two months after the book was published. The Muslim fundamentalists issued a *fatwa* against her as a result of which she had to flee from her own country and take refuge in other countries.

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## Unit-2

### Trends in Short Stories of SAARC Countries Sushama Joshi - *The Prediction*

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## 2.6 Answers to check your progress

## 2.7 Broad Answer type Questions

## 2.0 Objectives

**After studying this unit you will be able to**

### 1. Understand:

- Salient features of SAARC/South-Asian Literature
- Salient features of Nepali Literature
- Sushma Joshi as a representative author of Modern Nepali Literature

### Explain:

- Social, political, and cultural life of Nepal reflected in the stories
- Sushma Joshi's style of writing

### Find Relation Between:

- South-Asian in general and Nepali Literature in particular
- Writing of Sushama Joshi as a Nepali woman novelist and Indian women novelists

## 2.1 Introduction:

The present unit takes a brief survey of SAARC / South Asian literature/Post Colonial literature since the writer under discussion belongs to Nepal, one of the SAARC / South Asian countries. In the survey, the term South Asian literature is used in place of SAARC literature, since both refer to the writing that has emerged out of the colonial past, carry similar kind of literary trends, and is a product of mid-20th century. The literature is also recognized as Post Colonial Literature for the same reasons. Moreover the author, Sushama Joshi, being a Nepalese writer writing in English the unit also discusses the emergence and characteristic trends and patterns of Nepalese literature in English that showcases distinct Nepali identity. Joshi is the twenty-first century writer of Nepali literature in English. Hence her biographical details are noted giving essential details of her contribution to Nepalese literature in English.

The unit further discusses Sushma Joshi's *The Prediction and Other Short Stories* (2013) - a collection of 7 short stories which deals with varied themes – a Nepali guitarist turns High Lama in the USA; a Tabla player turns drummer making a life in Europe and his love life with the Spanish Ballerina; tragedy of a dynasty due to a broken promise; plight of a newly-wed bride; an astrologer's predictions in Mohan Shumsher's court; predicament of a wet nurses; and a satellite that crashes among the Himalayas and the building of statue of Buddha. Sushma Joshi seems to know a lot about each of these subject matters as she herself claims that she has listened to similar kind of stories and has used the tidbits to weave their plots. All the stories deal with unusual subject matters. Remarkably, except *A Boleria for Love* all stories take place in Nepal and rightly portray the beliefs, rituals, customs, traditions and socio-political life in the past and present Nepal. Being unusual and imbued in the essence of Nepali soil, the plot of her stories hold reader's interest till the very end.

### 2.1.1 SAARC/South-Asian Literature

The South Asian Association for regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the regional intergovernmental and geopolitical union of nations in South Asia. Its member states are – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It works for the promotion of economic and regional integration. The FOUNDATION OF SAARC WRITERS AND LITERATURE (FOSWAL) is

the only SAARC Apex Body in the SAARC Region. It works under the SAARC banner projecting, nurturing and strengthening cultural connectivity through literary and cultural interactions among the SAARC countries, for peace and tranquility in the region, through people-to-people contacts and dialogue.

FOSWAL launched its vision of cultural bonding among the neighboring SAARC countries in 1987, and emerged as the first and the only non government organization working in the specific area of culture, for creating cultural connectivity through a think tank of intellectuals and writers, creative fraternity and peace activities, who have common sensitivities and common concerns for the socio-cultural-political-economic-tribal-gender issues of the region. FOSWAL organises variety of art, literature and culture related festivals ensuring participations of eminent writers and scholars from across South Asian region.

The term ‘South Asian literature’ refers to the literary works of writers from the Indian subcontinent and its surrounding areas. Countries to which South Asian literature writers are linked include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, The Maldives, Burma, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Iran. English language enjoys significant space in this region due to its widespread usage in social life, educational and cross-cultural communication.

Each region constituting South Asia shares certain commonalities: multilingualism, multiethnicism and multiculturalism. More importantly, they share a collective experience of colonization by the same colonizer, who along with many impositions not only imposed its language on people of these regions but also influenced their psychology and perspectives.

There are multiple varieties of Englishes within the South Asian countries. Majority of the users of English in the region use localized varieties of English since there is no accepted standardized variety of English across South Asia. Moreover, there are many ‘Englishes’ - a variety of a particular region - Indian English, Pakistani English, Bhutanese English, Nepali English etc. These Englishes are used as a second or third language along with regional languages. Additionally, there is an impact of social, cultural, historical and political situations in the nativization of English.

South Asian literature is written in English and in many national and regional languages of the region. The literature has been produced in about forty major

languages, including translations into Persian, Portuguese, French, and English. After the success of Booker Prize winning authors like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, many South Asian writers got encouraged to write. A number of South Asian writers have emerged on the global literary scene since the end of the colonial era, offering a substantial contribution to world literature. Writing either from the South Asian subcontinent itself or from abroad, many of the writers have had a significant impact in places like the United States and England, where they have won prizes and earned recognition.

In primarily bilingual South Asia, there are many authors who write in English. Though it is their second or third language, they use English to fulfill their creative passion. They represent their ‘nativized self’ into the language to make their writing more authentic. Moreover they establish their distinct identity by creating altogether a new world of literature that differs from that of their colonizers. Their writing in English rightly projects ‘postcolonised’ attitude which gives real and genuine feel to their literary work. Their nativized English then affects usage of words and their symbolic meaning. They coin new words and use them in nativised syntax. Thus the linguistic features of South Asian literature in English are not merely a localized creative constructs but they represent “South-Asian-ness” in every possible context. Today the South-Asian ‘Englishes’ have become means of expressing socio-cultural-political situations in South-Asian countries.

For example Salman Rushdie exploits English as a vehicle to reach out the world. He prefers to have India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Great Britain as the backdrop for his novels. He states that he uses colonizer’s English to reproduce postcolonial experiences. For him it is ‘a therapeutic act of resistance’. In the essay “Imaginary Homelands” (from the eponymous collection published by Granta in 1992), he explains:

... we can’t simply use the language the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. (17)

South Asian literature written in English strengthens a sense of national and cultural identity by embedding South Asian values, norms, ideas, as well as linguistic and thematic elements. It reflects distinct identity of the writers and facilitates them to gain a world readership as well as to create a strong cultural milieu and expression employing colonizer's 'English'. Maintaining its own tang, South Asian literature challenges the assumption that it is influenced by Western Discourse. Thus the literature marks a departure from the standardized usage of English and in doing so enables these writers to highlight multitudinous themes that range from the personal to the socio-cultural and the political in a creative, and even in some cases an avante garde, manner. Many South Asian writers believe that English being flexible and rich in nuances is the natural vehicle of communication and is an artistic expression though English is not their mother tongue and they have rejected colonialism.

The primary objective of the South Asian authors while engaging in the creative pursuit in the colonizer's language is to examine and analyze the native history of the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial times, its spatio-temporal coordinates, its cultural shifts, its repressions and oppressions, its struggle for the subjective space and most pressingly its own unique existence. Hence South Asian literature does not merely question but rather answers back to the colonizers who imposed every form of colonization during their course of power, including the imposition of language. The use of nativized English in the constructions of nations and narrations has thus become a primary channel and one of the most subtle and conscious attempt to ascertain their distinctiveness.

### **2.1.2 Nepali Literature in English**

Nepali literature in English, the emerging body of literature has achieved a distinctive status in the world literature today despite its short history. The beginning of English writing in Nepal can be traced six or seven decades back. Having come through the history of over a century, Nepali literature stands by itself as a literature that offers distinct colors and tastes of this Shangri-La kingdom. It is a continuation from the past to the present. Hence Nepali literature, like other areas of studies, cannot be viewed in isolation. The past has always influenced the present and the present has always sought to break away from the bondage of the past.

The first written literary work in Nepali was Bhanubhakta's *Ramayana* (1883). The publication of the book created a stir in the Nepali society and marked the end of

the ancient period and the beginning of the medieval. Because of the use of simple language and the rhythm easy to be picked by the common people, the Ramayana attained lasting popularity in Nepali society. The Medieval period to some extent was free from religious dominance of Bhaktikaal (Devotional Period). The period was so much bent on Shringaar (Romance). But the mythological tradition persisted through these times too. It saw an extreme of shringaar with the publication of Lekhnath Poudel's *Suktisindhu* (1917) which was banned by the ruling Ranas. This was an important event that forced Nepali literature to turn to society and social life.

The modernists' tone was most apparently set after the advent of democracy in 1951 although its sparks were already in view right from the beginning of 1920s. Writers began to study new trends of literature in the West and write under their influence. Various literary movements including Boot Polish Aandolan (Boot Polish Movement), Sadak Kabita Kranti (Street Poetry Revolution), Aswikrit Jamaat Ko Kabita (Poetry of the Discarded Community), Ralpa Aandolan (Ralpa Movement), Bhok Kabita (Poetry out of Hunger) and Teshro Aayam (The Third Dimension) that appeared in the Nepali literary scene substantially contributed to the modern Nepali literature. All these literary movements together laid a concrete base for the literature of the postmodern times.

In the 1950s, Laxmi Prasad Devkota started writing literature in English followed by long silence during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. English education was restricted to a certain group of elites and they were not very interested in English writing. It was in 1959 that English was added to the higher education curriculum. During these decades, original writing in English was rarely produced, except for a few English translations. Only few Nepalese tried their hand at creative writing in English.

But with the 1990 Janaandolan for the restoration of multiparty democracy in Nepal, which put an end to the Panchayat and absolute monarchy, Nepal opened up to new possibilities in every aspect of life. One of these was the development of Nepali writing in English. Literature written in the English language does reflect the socio-political changes in Nepal. The post-1990 period is the starting point for a new generation of Nepali writers in English. Nepal's English literary movement only gained momentum with the publication of Samrat Upadhyay's *Arresting God in Kathmandu* (2000) and Manjushree Thapa's *The Tutor of History* (2001). Since then,

Nepali writers in English, whether from within Nepal or abroad, have earned critical acclaim, won literary prizes, and have been included on school and university courses. With the success of these books at the international level, both Upadhyay and Thapa paved the way for Nepali writers to follow in their footsteps. They are followed by other young Nepali writers, such as Sushma Joshi, Rabi Thapa, Sheeba Shah, Rajan Pokharel, Ammaraj Joshi, Sachendra Manandhar. Abhi Subedi, Padma Prasad Devkota, Mani Dixit, DB Gurung, Tek Bahadur Karki, Laxmi Devi Rajbhandari, Lil Bahadur Chettri, and Sanjeev Uprety. They are among the ones who have significantly contributed to the newly emerging writings in English and produced literary works for a global readership. English literary writing is thriving in Nepal. It has marked its own identity that diverges from other English literatures in the world. Devkota, Upadhyay and Thapa have been internationally acclaimed for their writerly qualities and thematic presentation and their works have found global readership.

Samrat Upadhyay, born and raised in Kathmandu, is the first Nepali author to write in English and be published in the West. His writing offers an unprecedented insight into the domesticity of Nepali life. *Arresting God in Kathmandu* (2001), collection of nine short stories is a triumph for its presentation of love and family in a city where there are more gods than people and more temples than homes. His writing presents the multi-faceted face of family lives where desire and spirituality, earthly and religious forces conflict and define identity.

Manjushree Thapa collection of political essays *The Lives We Have Lost* documents the dramatic and turbulent history of Nepal from 1990 until 2009. From discussions of corruption in the Maoist insurgency to the brutal counterinsurgency, to the controversial and still unresolved episode of King Gyanendra Shah's military coup and subsequent overthrow, this collection is essential for anybody wishing to understand the history of the nation.

Lil Bahadur Chettri's novel *Mountains Painted with Turmeric* (1950) is widely admired throughout the country. Set in the remote hills of far eastern Nepal, it tells the story of a peasant farmer, Dhane who struggles to provide for his family, tries to arrange a marriage for his beautiful younger sister, and finally subjected to a series of calamities which eventually force the family into exile. The novel depicts the power plays and social conservatism of village life.

They also provide a serious case for the discussion of whether Nepali literature in English has attained distinctive status. Many writers, including poets, dramatists, essayists, and biographers, have since published works with new possibilities for readers and prospective writers. With many writers publishing new books, the corpus of Nepali English literature has rapidly expanded its horizon. Nepali literature in English has managed to arouse considerable interest both within Nepal and abroad. Today, Nepali literature in English has been accepted by international publishers. The growth of indigenous publishing houses, access to international market and increase in the international exposure in recent years has encouraged a new breed of writers to publish their works in Nepal and abroad. By writing in English and in other foreign languages they introduce the life of Nepal in the international arena.

Since its political liberation in the 1990s, Nepali literature has flourished with all of the diversity and vibrancy of the nation. Although many native tales remain oral legends, some of the most canonical texts have recently been translated into English. Contemporary Nepali literature has an increasing range of works in the English language, covering extensive topics.

Nepali literature in English provides a taste of the splendour, depth and passion that permeates Nepali literary genius. It also inspires the scholars in the English-speaking world to appreciate its work. The bulk of Nepali literature in English consists of translations and original compositions in English.

Mahakavi Laxmi Prasad Devkota is the first significant writer of Nepali literature in English. Among his published works written originally in English are the *The Ballad of Luni, Bapu* (1991), and *Shakuntala* epic (1991). Among other unpublished works in English are poems, essays and a play, *Samyogita*. In reflect the nuances of traditional Nepali culture. Devkota also translated Nepali literature into English and vice versa.

Parijat's novel, *Blue Mimosa*, has found a place in an American university syllabus. Diamond Shamsher's *The Wake of the White Tiger*, a very well received historical novel, tells the story of the Rana court. Another interesting novel translated into English by Taranath Sharma has translated Bharat Jangam's novel *The Black Sun* an interesting work originally written in Nepali. Paras Mani Pradhan's *Mahakavi Laxmi Prasad Devkota* (1978), the only one of several volumes of *Makers of Nepali Literature Series* is devoted to the life and work of various Nepali writers and poets.

One major trends of Nepali writing in English is translation. Devkota's *Muna Madan*, BP Koirala's *Sumnima*, Parijat's *Shirish ko Phool*, Diamond Shumsher Rana's *Seto Bagh* and serial publications of Kavita have all been translated into English. Three anthologies of short stories in translation are worth mentioning: *Stories from Nepal*, *Selected Stories from Nepal*, and *Himalayan Voices: An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature*. The first two publications are pioneering works published by two leading academic institutions: the Royal Nepal Academy (now Nepal Academy) and Sajha Prakashan respectively. Such works have helped introduce Nepali literature to the wider world.

The legacy of both writing originally in English and English translation left behind by Devkota is well developed and practiced by Tirtha Raj Tuladhar, ML Karmacharya, Daniel Khaling, Kesar Lall, Taranath Sharma, Tanka Vilas Varya, Chaitanya Krishna Upadhyay, Dhruva K Deep, and Madhusudhan Devkota. This practice has been continuously followed by Shanti Mishra, Shailendra Kumar Singh, Nagendra Shrama, Peter J Karthak, HM Ansari, Govinda Raj Bhattarai, and Pallav Ranjan. There are some other translators, such as Sondra Zeidenstein, Greta Rana, Michael Hutt, Larry Hartsell, Maya Watson, Yuyutsu RD Sharma, Wayne Amtzis, and Philip Pierce whose mother tongue is not Nepali but have contributed a lot to the field of English translation in Nepal.

Nepali literature in English is a treasure trove of poems as well which flourished since 1950s. Bhanubhakta Acharya, Motiram Bhatta, Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Guru Prasad Mainali, Lekhnath Pouyal, Bala Krishna Sama, Sidhicharan Shrestha, and Bhimnidhi Tiwari to name a few have contributed immensely to enrich Nepali literature in English with their poems.

In the 1950s, Chittadhar Hridaya brought out a collection of Newari poetry (New Poetry) in English. The Royal Nepal Academy published *Modern Nepali Poetry* several years ago. *Selected Poetry of Nepal Bhasa* (1997) edited by Krishna Chandra Singh Pradhan is also a remarkable collection of Nepali poems in English. Bandana Shrestha and Arati Dahal have brilliantly contributed to the literature with *Dawn* Volumes I and II (1980s) and *A Rose for Mama* (1997) respectively. Laxmi D. Rajbhandari has published two volumes of poems in 1997: *Until the Ocean Bled* and *You My All*. Among other collections of poetry are Raju Maharjan's *Harassment and Other Poems* and D. B. Gurung's *Whisper*. Dr.

Navin Chhetri's *Zero Passion*. Tek B. Karki has brought out two volumes of poems: *Sweet Steeple* (1966) and *Anonymous Fathers and Other Poems* (1998).

The first major anthology of poems originally written in English by Nepali poets is *Voices from Nepal* (1999). Similarly, two other important anthologies of original works *An Other Voice: English Literature from Nepal* edited by Deepak Thapa and Kesang Tseten, and published by Martin Chautari in 2002 and *New Nepal, New Voices: An Anthology of Short Stories* edited by Sushma Joshi and Ajit Baral in 2008 are notable collections of English literature from Nepal.

Yuyutsu Sharma's poems address issues of commercialization, commodification, and consumerism in modern society. His collection, *Annapurna Poems* contains some of his greatest work. By transporting the reader into the hubbub of Nepali life Sharma wonderfully merges the glittering glory of Nepal with the coarse reality of its flecked political history.

**Nepali short story** has achieved its present state of development in shorter time than other genres. This area of literature has already been enriched by a number of classic world-class short stories. The contribution of the figures such as Guru Prasad Mainali, Pushkar Samser Rana, Posan Pande, Indra Bahadur Rai, Biseswor Prasad Koirala, Bhimnidhi Tiwari, Bhawani Bhikshu, Paarizaat can hardly be exaggerated. The short story writers like Ramesh Bikal, Parashu Pradhan, Sanat Regmi, Dhruva Sapkota, Shailendra Sakar, Nayan Raj Pandey, Benju Sharma, Sita Pandey, Sushama Joshi and their peers are those well esteemed writers who join the past with the present. These writers have written stories of artistic intent with themes related to Nepal and Nepali's cultural life and have made short stories even popular among Nepali people.

In the '60s Nepali stories saw a change in their characterization and tone. It was the most influential movement **Teshro Aayam** (The Third Dimension) that has its impact on short stories too. Indra Bahadur Rai, one of the trios to launch the movement is a very innovative short story writer. Although the Third Dimension triggered an intellectual debate in literary circles and provided a stimulus to Nepali literature, it could not produce a generation to follow it. So its impact gradually wore off. Indra Bahadur Rai has come up with **Leela Lekhan** (Leela Writing). It's a literary theory to approach literary works and a philosophy in itself.

His **Kathputaliko Man** (The Heart of a Puppet) is the first collection of short stories based on **Leela Lekhan**. Some writers are putting it into their works successfully.

Realism has been the sustained base of Nepali short stories from the past to the present. Other trends include progressive ideology, psychological realism and experimentalism. Leela Lekhan and other post modernist experiments operative in the latest decade seem to shake realism. Writers are breaking away from the established norms and values and are seeking to explore new heights and new horizons. This group of writers has been providing Nepali readers with thoroughly new texts. Village life, life in Kathmandu and Darjeeling, the lives of women in a male-dominated society, caste, class, and ethnic relations, the Gurkha soldier, poverty, corruption and most recently the impact of technological development on life have been the recurring themes of Nepali short stories.

There are varied individual works by Nepali writers in and outside Nepal. These include novels, short story collections, plays, poetry collections, and non-fiction works like essay collections, ancient tales, biographies, critical writing, and other prose works. Khem Aryal's *Kathmandu Saga and Other Poems*, Padma Prasad Devkota's *Dawn Cycle and Other Poems*, Sachendra Manandhar's *It's All Written in the Stars*, Abhi Subedi's *Chasing Dreams*, Sangita Rayamajhi's *All Mothers Are Working Mothers*, Mani Dixit's *Over the Mountains*, Rajan Prasad Pokharel's *Rebels of the Mountains*, Sheeba Shivangini Shah's *Facing My Phantoms*, Samrat Upadhyay's *Buddha's Orphans*, Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight*, Kesar Lall's *Folk Tales from Nepal: Myths & Legends*, Archana Thapa's *Telling a Tale*, and Sanjeev Uprety and Robin Piya's *IMAP Reader: A Collection of Essays on Art and Theatre in Kathmandu* are some examples.

Around 1967, *Vasuda*, an English monthly, started publishing interesting creative writing in English among other miscellaneous articles. Laxmi Prasad Devkota, one of the most popular poets in Nepali literature has written *Muna Madan* based on eighteenth century oral ballad. This is the most commercially successful Nepali book ever published. Several of Devkota's sonnets on Bapu appear in this magazine. In 1981, another important bi-annual literary magazine, *Literature*, published several of Devkota's English essays and poems, and also translations of Bhupi Sherchan and Madhav Prasad Ghimire. *Nava-Kabita*, though mainly a Nepali poetry magazine, has also regularly published English poetry. At present, the most specialized literary magazine is *Literary Studies*,

the annual publication of the Literary Association of Nepal. This scholarly journal occasionally includes creative pieces.

The Literary Association of Nepal itself was established in 1981 with the objectives of disseminating Nepalese literature abroad, of providing a forum for the study of foreign literature in Nepal, and of promoting creative functions through the medium of English. In keeping with its goals, the association has made arrangements with *The Kathmandu Post* to publish an article to Nepali literature in this very space at regular intervals. There are also some literary and social organisations that promote English writing. Among them, the Society of Nepali Writers in English (NWEN), Martin Chautari, and the Asian English Language Teachers' Creative Writing Project have contributed significantly to English writing in Nepal. In Pokhara, the Pokhara English Literary Forum-Nepal (PELF-Nepal) and the English Writers Association of Nepal have been active in this area for a couple of years.

Today, Nepali publishers with an eye on a potential readership in the millions have started publishing online magazines. Apart from print and online activities, live literary events are organised in Nepal. As such, the Kathmandu 'Literary Jatra' was organised in Kathmandu twice in 2011 and 2012. Similarly, the 'Ncell Nepal Literature Festival' has been held regularly since 2012.

To sum up as Gargesh (2006) states, South Asian writers are contributing to the development of new canons in world English literatures. There is tremendous nativization of literary texts written in English by Nepalese authors. The impulses behind such appropriation are: to manifest the authors' individual as well as socio-cultural values, to seek identities and dignity in immensity of World Englishes literature; to communicate the Nepalese social values to rest of the world and to show some empathy towards the English language, the second most used language in Nepal after Nepali. Although there have been resistance towards English, the literary creations in English creates a sense of belongingness in Nepalese towards English. Evidences are enough to justify that a distinct English literature is in route to become 'Nepalese English literature' owing to uniqueness in it. Nepalese English literature is not merely a fraction of English literature but also forms an important component of Nepalese literature.

### 2.1.3 Short Story: Genre

According to Edgar Allan Poe, a classic definition of a short story is that one should be able to read it in one sitting. He has mentioned this definition in his essay “Thomas Le Moineau (Le Moile)” (1846). However, today this definition is problematic because the length of “One sitting” may now be briefer than it was in Poe’s age.

According to other definition the maximum word count of the short story is anywhere from 1,000 to 9,000 words. For example, Harris King’s “A Solitary Man” is around 4,000 words. In contemporary usage, the term short story, most often, refers to a work of fiction no longer than 20,000 words and no shorter than 1,000 words or the short story comprises 5 to 20 pages. Stories of fewer than 1,000 words are sometimes referred to as “short short stories” or “flash fiction”.

The novels which are shorter in length are called “novellas”. Short stories are usually collected and sold into the form of “Collections”. For example, after Shirley Jackson died, a crate of unpublished short stories was discovered in her barn and collected into a short story collection in her memory. Sometimes, authors who do not have time or money to write a novella or novel decide to write short stories instead.

Due to the diverse nature of a genre, there is no specific definition of a short story. Each definition emphasizes some aspects and cannot cover all.

#### **Definitions:**

1. “A fictional prose tale of no specified length, but too short to be published as a volume on its own, as novellas sometimes and novels unusually are. A short story will normally concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters, more economically than a novel’s sustained exploration of social background”.

Chris Baldick: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

2. “A short story is a brief work of prose fiction, and most of the terms for analyzing the component elements, the types, and the narrative techniques of the novel are applicable to the short story as well.”

M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Galt Harpham: *A Handbook of Literary Terms*.

3. A prose narrative “requiring from half an hour to one or two hours in its perusal.”

Edgar Allan Poe: *Review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Twice Told Tales.*

### **Characteristics:**

The short story is not merely a shortened novel. It shares the usual constituent elements of all fiction: plot, character, and setting. However, these elements cannot be treated in detail as they are treated in a novel. Each element is to be reduced to give overall effect and impression. Hence, plot is confined to the essentials; the characters are portrayed as per the necessity, and the setting gives a few suggestive hints.

#### **I. Plot:**

Plot is a literary term defined as the events that make up a story. The events are related to one another in a pattern, in a sequence, through cause and effect. A reader is generally interested in how well this pattern of events achieves some artistic or emotional effect.

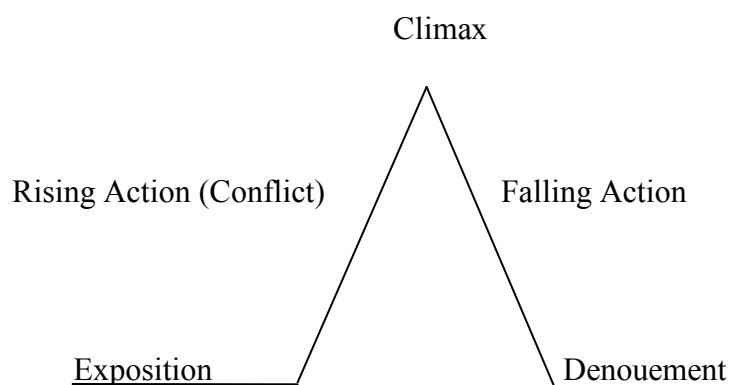
#### **Aristotle on Plot:**

Aristotle considered plot (mythos) as the most important element of a drama, more important than character in his *Poetics*. According to Aristotle a plot must have a beginning, middle, and an end. Further more, the events of the plot must casually relate to one another as being either necessary or probable.

For Aristotle, the utmost important point of the plot is the plot’s ability to arouse emotion in the psyche of the audience. For e.g.in tragedy, the appropriate emotions are fear and pity.

#### **Freytag on Plot**

A German novelist and playwright, Gustav Freytag considered plot as a narrative structure that divides a story into five parts. These parts are: exposition (of the situation); rising action (through conflict); climax (or turning point); falling action; and denouement or resolution.



**i) Exposition:**

Exposition serves as an introductory part or an introduction of the play. It introduces all of the main characters in the story. Here we learn who the main characters are; what they are there for; how they relate to one another; what their goals and motivations are; and the kind of person they are. Here we also hinted at the problem/s. As the Story is short, a writer cannot devote much time to the introduction and explanation. Hence, the exposition is brief. With the end of this phase, comes Rising Action / Conflict.

**ii) Crisis:**

It is through crisis or conflict that the action of the story develops. The crisis means a struggle between two opposing forces – a struggle between two persons, ideas, interests, groups or the hero/heroine and his/her fate. There may also be inner conflict between two opposite ideas or urges in the hero who is unable to decide what to do and hence suffers. Crisis or conflict is the back-bone of the story. It keeps the readers in constant suspense about the outcome of the crisis.

**iii) Rising action:**

Rising action starts with a conflict. Generally, in this phase the protagonist understands his or her goal and begins to work toward it. The problems become worse which make the protagonist's life miserable. This phase shows us how the protagonist overcomes these problems / obstacles.

#### **iv) Climax:**

Climax is the turning point of the play. At this moment crisis reaches its highest intensity and is resolved. One of the two contending forces now gains supremacy over the other. It is now clear which of two would win in the end. The action takes turn for better or worse depends on whether the play is comedy or tragedy. The main character makes the single big decision that defines the outcome of their story and who they are as a person. It occupies the middle of the story and is a moment of supreme interest in the play.

The beginning of this is marked by the protagonist finally having cleared away the preliminary barriers and being ready to engage with the adversary. Usually, entering this phase, both the protagonist and the antagonist have a plan to win against the other. Now for the first time we see them going against one another in direct, or nearly direct, conflict.

This struggle results with neither character completely winning, nor losing, against the other. Usually, each character's plan is partially successful, and partially failed by his or her rival. What is unique about this central struggle between the two characters is that the protagonist makes a decision which shows us one's moral quality, and ultimately determines one's fate. In a tragedy, the protagonist's "bad" decision leads him to his tragic flaw.

#### **v) Falling Action:**

Freytag called this phase, "falling action" in the sense that the conflicts are resolved in this phase. The reader comes to the point where it is understood that the protagonist will either lose or win in his struggle.

#### **v) Denouement:**

Denouement is the final stage of the story. The story now reaches its end. One of the two contending forces, that is, either the protagonist or the villain now definitely gets victory over the other. The action of the play concludes in this phase. As the space at the disposal is limited, denouement is very brief and often overlaps with climax.

## **II. Character**

A character is a person or animal in a narrative work of art (such as a novel, play, or film). The term 'character' is derived from an ancient Greek word *kharaktêr*.

The English word ‘character’ came widely in use when it appeared in the novel Tom Jones in 1749. Then onwards, it was understood that character means “a part played by an actor”. In *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses that character as one of the important features of a story.

In literature, characters guide readers through their stories, helping them to understand plots and ponder over themes. Characters are persons who have certain qualities or attitudes. Their qualities are expressed through the dialogue (what they say) and the action (what they do).

As the story is short in form, the characters are limited in number. Generally, there are not more than two to three principal characters. Not only the characters limited in number, they are fully developed. The writer has no time to present characters through different stages of their development. The attention is focused on only one or two prominent aspects of character. Besides this, the characters are ordinary men and women. They have their own faults and weaknesses as well as virtues.

**Characters are classified as follows:**

E. M. Forster, in his book, *Aspects of the Novel*, defined two basic types of characters:

**Flat characters:**

Flat characters are one-dimensional. They embody one quality. They lack complexity. The advantage of Flat Character is they are immediately recognizable. They do not change throughout the course of a work.

**Round characters:**

Round characters are multi-dimensional. Hence they are complex and difficult to describe. They change in the course of a story. They have a capacity to surprise the reader.

**Other Types:**

The **protagonist** is usually a dynamic and important character in the story. It can be a hero or heroine of the story.

The **antagonist** is usually the opposite of the protagonist. The antagonist is someone who puts obstacles in the way of the main character, creates difficulties and challenges the protagonist.

### **III. Setting**

Setting means the time and place that form the background for the story. Setting could be simply descriptive like a lonely cottage on a mountain. Along with the plot, character, theme, and style, setting plays a vital role in the short story. Setting of the story sets the reader's mood. A good description of the setting makes the reader more eager to keep up and follow the events of the story.

#### **Setting of a Short Story can be:**

**Place:** Geographical location. The action of the story takes place at a certain place.

**Time:** The story takes place at a certain time. It can be a historical period, time of day, year, etc.

**Weather Condition:** Sometimes the weather conditions become setting of some of the stories. It can be rainy, sunny, stormy, etc.

**Mood:** It is concerned with a feeling/mood which is created at the beginning of the story. It can be bright and cheerful or dark or frightening, etc.

#### **Benefits of the Setting:**

The setting of the story can give us a picture of where the story is taking place and when it's taking place. The setting gives the reader a better sense of the story. It allows them to visualize what is going on in the story. The setting complements the theme. It also determines the clothing, mannerism, life-style of the characters, etc. better.

### **IV. Point of View**

Point of view is from whose approach or opinion the reader hears, sees, and feels the story. The person who tells a story is called a narrator, and the angle from which the story is told is called its "point of view". A story can be told by someone who is a character in the story or by an outside observer. Through this, the reader is presented with characters, actions, setting and events which make up a narrative. Authors have developed many different ways to present a story to a reader.

### **First-person point of view**

A writer tells a story in the first person which gives a story an autobiographical touch. It is concerned with an individual self. A narrator speaks as “I” and presents the story as if he himself is witnessing the events. He reveals his own thoughts and opinions on the happenings of the story. He/she may be the central character of the story.

### **Third-person point of view**

A narrator is outside the story. He refers to all the characters by name or as ‘he’, ‘she, or ‘they’. A story is told from the third-person point of view by an observer who does not play a role in the events.

The third-person narrator may be an omniscient, or all-knowing observer, who knows what all the characters can see, hear, think, and feel. He comments on the action and interprets the events.

## **V. Title**

The title is an important aspect of a short story. It encourages readers to read the story. A short story deals with the personality or an incident. The title is expected to lead us to this central issue in the story. Title can be attractive by its contrast, suggestion, meaning etc. It is an inseparable part of a short story.

### **2.1.4 Sushma Joshi : Biographical Details**

Sushma Joshi (born May 26, 1973) is a Nepali writer and filmmaker based in Kathmandu, Nepal. Joshi was born and grew up in Kathmandu. From age 8 to 12, she studied in Dowhill School, Kurseong, in the district of Darjeeling. Her formative years were filled with passion for literature and writing. She finished her education at Mahendra Bhawan and Siddhartha Vanasthali High School in Kathmandu. Later Joshi graduated from Brown University in 1996 with a BA in international relations. At Brown, she studied liberal arts and took workshops in fiction, autobiography, and poetry. She also took classes in documentary production with artist Tony Cokes. From 1999-2002, she was in graduate school at the New School of Social Research in New York, where she received an MA in anthropology. From 1998 to 2000, Joshi worked with the Harvard School of Public Health to implement the Global Reproductive Health Forum, a health and rights program, in South Asia. During the summers, she attended The Breadloaf School of English at Middlebury

College, Vermont, and received a waiter fellowship to attend the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in 2000. There received another MA in English Literature in 2005. At Bread Loaf, she studied playwriting with Obie prize winning playwright Dare Clubb, as well as theatre directing and acting with Alan and Carol MacVey.

In 2004, Joshi joined as staff writer at the newly formed *Nation Weekly* magazine, political news weekly, in Kathmandu. She also consulted for the UNDP'S Access to Justice research programme from October 2004, during the height of the civil conflict. As part of a 6-member team, Joshi went to different areas of Nepal to document stories about human rights violations and the erosion of formal and informal justice systems. In 2005, she received a research and writing fellowship from the MacArthur Foundation. She also consulted for the UNDP'S Access to Justice research programme from October 2004, during the height of the civil conflict. As part of a 6-member team, Joshi went to different areas of Nepal to document stories about human rights violations and the erosion of formal and informal justice systems. She was awarded a residency at the Bellagio Center, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, in Bellagio, Italy, in 2006. Joshi was a featured writer at the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival in 2009. Joshi was a jury member of the Indigenous Film Festival in Nepal in 2009. She was also a member of a three-judge panel for the film competition on global warming sponsored by the British Council and Department for International Development in Kathmandu in 2010. In 2011, she was an Asia fellow and traveled to Thailand and Burma to do research on a book about Nepali migrants, with support from the Asian Scholarship Foundation. She has also received fellowships from the Toyota Foundation, the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation, as well as a seed fund from the Hubert Bals Fund in the Netherlands.

Her fiction and non-fiction deal with Nepal's civil conflict, as well as stories of globalization, migration and diaspora. Her book of short stories *End of the World* was long-listed for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award in 2009. "The Prediction", another book of short stories that bring together stories of tradition and modernity, was published in 2013. Her book of essays about contemporary art, *Art Matters*, was supported by the Alliance Française de Katmandou, a French language school and cultural centre in Nepal.

Joshi contributed a widely read Sunday column *The Global and the Local* to Nepal's leading English daily newspaper *The Kathmandu Post* from 2008-2011.

Inspired by Nepali history and contemporary politics, her non-fiction and reportage deal with issues of social change, environment and gender. Her non-fiction reportage has appeared in The Kathmandu Post, Nation Weekly Magazine, Setopati, Republica, Himal Southasian Magazine, The Indian Express USA edition, Utne Reader, Ms. Magazine, Z Net, The Irrawaddy, Bertelsmann Future Challenges and other publications.

*Sound of Silence* (1997) her first documentary, was screened at the New Asian Currents at the Yamagata Documentary Film Festival. *Water* (2000) was screened on the Q and A with Riz Khan on CNN International, and the UN World Water Forum in Kyoto. In 2006, she made several short films including *The Escape* which deals with the human rights violations which occurred during the People's War in Nepal. This film was accepted to the Berlinale Talents. Her films have also screened at Flickerfest Film Festival, Sydney; Vancouver Nepali Film Festival; Himalayan Film Festival in London and others. She also wrote her play *I Killed My Best Friend's Father*, about two teenagers who survive the civil conflict in Nepal. It was stage-read at the Arcola Theatre in London as part of the Kali TalkBack Festival in 2012. In 2014, Joshi made *Supportive Men* a story of Dalit community in Southern Nepal. The film was made for CARE Nepal, Norway, Austria and USA. In 2014, she also consulted and researched for the script of "Singha Durbar," a fictional TV series featuring a female prime minister, produced by Search for Common Ground.

Apart from being a writer and film maker, Joshi is also a wonderful painter. In 2004, Joshi had a solo exhibit of her paintings at Gallery Nine. The exhibit featured 26 paintings depicting figurative paintings about the state of Nepal during the civil conflict.

Joshi's multimedia installation titled "Jumla: A cyberphoto installation" was accepted to the Eighth International Symposium of Electronic Art (ISEA) at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1997. Since 2012, she works as a freelance journalist, and has also started her own media and publishing house Sansar Media.

### **Check Your Progress**

#### **A. Answer the following questions in one word/sentence/phrase**

1. What is FOSWAL?
2. Literature of which countries is known as South Asian Literature?

3. Which common elements are found in South Asian Literature?
4. When did Nepali literature adopt modernist tone?
5. Which assumption is challenged by South Asian literature?
6. Name a South Asian Booker Prize winner author.
7. Who is responsible for the rebirth of Nepali literature in English in 1950s?
8. Who is the first Nepali writer to publish in the West?
9. Which literary and social organisations promote English writing in Nepal?
10. Name the five parts of plot stated by Gustav Freytag.

## **2.2 Presentation of Subject Matter**

### **2.3 Section I**

#### **2.3.1 The Discovery of the High Lama**

As Sushama Joshi claims, the story is based on an anecdote told to her by her friend in 2002. He had a dumb classmate from Budanilkantha School who later gained enlightenment and became High Lama in Mangolia. The story is printed in *East of the Web*, an online portal for short stories based in the UK.

The story begins with a meet between an America-based narrator, Prakash who has just returned from Boston and a curly haired Bigyan alias Lwangay from Kathmandu, his schoolmate, who plays guitar in Tigerbalm band at the Insight Bar; wears dreadful pair of sunglasses and a Pakistani leather jacket with a big white yin-yang patch on the back and a hardcore hard-metal band fan. Seeing Bigyan's appearance Prakash ironically thinks of the marketing strategies of the West that exorcises and appropriates Eastern spirituality to its advantages. Prakash recalls their school days and Bigyan's journey from a 'buddhu' school boy to an enlightened Buddhist monk.

Bigyan is Prakash's friend from class IV since they were in Budanilkantha Boys' Boarding School together. His parents named him Bigyan – not after *bigyan*, the science of the West, but the *bigyan* or inner knowledge of the East. Unfortunately when in school, Bigyan was not endowed with intellect that his name hinted at. He had a reputation of the stupidest boy in the school. He would take three days to learn a poem that the rest of the class learnt in an hour. The thought of failing in exam

would scare him before every exam. But due to the encouragement from his friends that he is better than Ganesh Sir's retarded son he confidently continued his schooling. With the help Prakash and other friends as well as a scribbling in his pencil box and a folded piece of paper with algebra formulas and geometrical theorems he had tucked inside his socks he cleared his SLC exams.

Though Bigyan was not good at maths and Science, he had a hidden card up his sleeve. He excelled in kyo-kushin karate. He would win admiration from his schoolmates when he would chop boards to bits with the palms of his hands as if he is peeling an orange. foreign universities, Bigyan was touring across Mongolia participating in tournaments.

However, his life took a surprising turn when his coach, Jagat Lama asked him to join a team heading to magnolia for a world tournament. The unknown vista of the country – red sand and stone, men and women with ruddy cheeks and good health tempted him to leave his band and Kathmandu which he had never done before. Bigyan won silver medal and cash prize in the competition. It was proud moment for Bigyan when he won silver medal for their country while his friends were getting scholarship of American universities. This was the only time in his life when he had excelled and done something for himself and his country. With the money he had never seen before he decided to travel in Mangolia before returning home. He spent a long pleasant week travelling around the country; entertained people by playing guitar; stayed with the karate practitioners of different regions and slept with women as strong as himself.

A week later Bigyan accidentally landed up in a monastery located in a totally unknown land. To his surprise, the monks ceremoniously welcomed him blowing big gongs and banging on drums. Bigyan was completely taken aback by the Head Lama's generous respect to him. Bowing before him and addressing him as 'generous teacher', the Head Lama asked him to accept their prostrations. Though he pleaded that he was a karate master and not a Lama, the monks bowed even lower towards him. He was their newly discovered lama, the one who was predicted to walk off the desert after having traveled thousands of miles from a distant land. Bigyan, though was nervous, something pushed him forward and stay put.

Bigyan was led to a huge colourful hallways having high ceiling, thick columns with red paint and golden curliques like a tail of a dragon, walls painted with

mythical characters, dragons and beasts in all shapes and sizes, Buddhas and guardian figures flying through beautiful clouds in blue and white. The enormous statues of Buddha painted in bright yellow and having orange robe with folds of realistic looking wrinkles around his arm fascinated him all the more. He saw Buddha smiling a classic and mysterious smile.

Though Bigyan desperately wanted to relieve his bladder, the monks forcibly escorted him to the dais below the Buddha statue and made him sit on it. They asked to choose number of objects placed before him – books, jeweled boxes, turquoise lockets, prayer wheels with ancient scrolls inside them and many dot-pens. When Bigyan chose the things randomly, they declared him to be an ‘incarnate lama’ and their newly anointed leader. The sudden lavish adulation came as a welcome surprise to a ‘buddhu’ who was used to being dismissed for his intellectual inferiority. Thrilled by an incredible change in his life, Bigyan accepted to be their leader being the only winner of the medal for his country. Soon he learned their language, their texts and their vocabulary. A school idiot and a winner of silver medal in karate thus became Lama of the monastery.

A completely changed Bigyan returned to his town after three long years. Dead Metal Rose Tigerbalm band lost the hope of getting back their best guitarist when at Kathmandu they met Bigyan who by now voluntarily forsaken ordinary life after three years of his stay at the monastery. Widely recognized as a venerable Abbot, Bigyan travelled across the United States and France. He was honoured by French monks who lined up to receive his blessings and listen to his talks. People across the United States travelled thousands of miles to receive his teachings. He was requested to name the babies and give blessings to newly wedded couples. Some fought to become his disciple while some wrote books based on his lectures.

Bigyan’s aura was a mystery to Prakash and his other friends. A class clown was changed into a wise man of the planet. It was unbelievable that the boy who was incapable to remember a four line poem was giving lectures on profound topics, on finer points of Buddhist philosophy, on the knower and the known, the perceiver and the perceived, the profound truths of the universe, etc.

Prakash, the narrator finally decides to visit monastery at Boulder where Bigyan is scheduled to deliver lectures on ancient wisdom. He is curious to know whether Bigyan has an inner awakening that fired up his neurons and turned him into a

scholar or whether he is still his old 'buddhu' friend who needs help of a prompter. He feels strange compulsion to ask many questions to Bigyan. At the monastery at Boulder Bigyan's gentle and soothing voice on peace of mind and Buddhist spiritual practices captivates Prakash. Bigyan's simple discourse on the need to rest the mind in a state of peace and his comparison of earlier period with today's materialistic world emphasizes the idea of meaningful East and meaningless West. Bigyan's big smile after the end of every statement calms Prakash's doubtful mind. Bigyan's talks on the need to practice mind in positive way in order to heal one's mind and thereby have a sense of clarity and brightness deeply affects him. Bigyan's talk in fact is not unheard of; yet his skill of putting intuitive understanding in words is so clear that Prakash feels the vastness of the void in his life that has overpowered his successful and luxurious life. He realizes the insignificance of his spectacular salary and the best employee award before the comprehension and yearning for something otherworldly. He could comprehend the reason why all through his life he was feeling restless within. The moment Bigyan talks on compassion as an intrinsic element to all sentient beings, Prakash feels a sudden awakening – a flood of kindness that cleanses his existential tiredness, his feeling of inadequacy, and his search for love. He experiences gentleness for himself, for his beliefs and assumptions and for his life. The manner in which Bigyan, as his name goes, dissects life with a simple science of inner knowledge awakens Prakash to the truth of life that lies within every soul. Towards the end of the story Prakash who had entered the monastery skeptically sits calmly waiting for Bigyan to finish his talk and ask him some questions.

The story reveals unpredictability of life. Life, a roller-coaster ride, with its up and down as well as upside down swings, leads us to unpredictable destinations which we hardly think of. The boy, Bigyan who is passionate about hard metal band, flaunts yin-yan patch on his jacket as a fashion, wins silver medal in a world championship, somehow clears his exams with the help of his friends, accidentally enters the monastery in Mangolia, plans to sneak away from it ultimately transforms into an enlightened monk. He gains fame and reverence across the globe by appropriating Eastern philosophy to the Western people. Bigyan's simple words enlighten skeptical and amazed Prakash and make him aware of the true meaning of life.

### 2.3.1.1 Glossary

**Yin-yang:** A Chinese philosophy that describes how seemingly opposite forces are complementary.

**Penchant:** affection

Lop-sided grin: friendly

**Spirituality:** in a way that relates to or affects the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things

**Exoticize:** portray as exotic or unusual

**Crass:** stupid

**Materialism:** a tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values.

**Moron:** a stupid person

Rave: talk or write with great enthusiasm

**Heavy Metal Band:** It has its roots in blues rock and acid rock, the bands that created heavy metal developed a thick, massive sound, characterized by highly amplified distortion, extended guitar solos, emphatic beats, and overall loudness. During the 1980s, glam metal became popular with groups such as Mötley Crüe and Poison.

**Riff:** short repeated tune

**Nirvana:** American rock band formed by singer and guitarist Kurt Cobain and bassist Krist Novoselic in Aberdeen, Washington, in 1987.

**Theorem:** a truth established by means of accepted

**Accentuate:** to emphasize something

**Reprimands:** spoken angrily for doing something wrong

**Cryptic:** having a mysterious meaning

**Unadulterated:** pure

**Crinkled:** having small surface wrinkles

**Rife:** widespread (especially something undesirable)

**Vista:** a pleasing view

**Itinerary:** a planned route/journey

**Cantankerous:** argumentative

**Glower:** having an angry look on one's face

**Monastery:** A building or buildings occupied by a community of monks living under religious vows

**Gong:** East and Southeast Asian musical percussion instrument

**Prostration:** Lying stretched out on the ground with reverence

**Proclamation:** declaration

**Gusto:** enjoyment and enthusiasm in doing something

**Irrevocably:** that cannot be changed

**Adulation:** praise

**Déjà vu:** feeling of familiarity

**Glitterati:** The fashionable set of people engaged in show business or some other glamorous activity

### 2.3.1.2 Check Your Progress

#### B. Answer the following in one word or phrase or sentence.

1. What is exoticized and marketed by the West?
2. What was contradictory with Bigyan the name and Bigyan himself?
3. In which sport Bigyan was good at?
4. How is Bigyan's achievement different from his friends?
5. Why do the monks welcome Bigyan at the monastery?
6. What is Bigyan known as when he becomes the lama?
7. What is the spiritual practice of Buddhism according to Bigyan?
8. What is compassion according to Bigyan?
9. Why does Prakash visit Bigyan in the US?
10. What does Prakash feel after listening to Bigyan?

### 2.3.2 A Boleria for Love

*A Boleria for Love* was written in 2002. It was inspired by Joshi's visit to a flamenco performance in New York wherein a Spanish dancer in seventies danced energetically and seemed to be fused on a psychic level with her young and handsome drummer. The love story of young drummer, Xavier Shrestha and Rosa Pilar Cuellar, a famous flamenco Spanish dancer an old but graceful woman is a bold attempt by Sushama Joshi. The narration takes us to the past and present of the main character, Xavier Shrestha and his passion for living life on his terms.

Xavier, a drummer lives off nightly musical performances in Manhattan, city that bustles with musical clubs. His familiarity with the American people's values, lives and yearnings as well as his easy manners and lack of history make people claim him as their own. His beard and silence are so reassuring that the people welcome him as part of their family. People get a sense of recognition when they meet him even though he is unlike them. One day an advertisement placed by Rosa Pilar Cuellar, a famous flamenco Spanish dancer, urgently in need of a drummer catches his attention.

Xavier had learnt to drum Tabla as a toddler from his father who was a music teacher at Patan, Nepal. He wanted to turn Xavier into one of the most famous musicians of the world rather, better than Zakir Hussain. Xavier practiced rigorously till he could satisfy his father. At twenty he gave such a vigorous and zealous performance on Shivratri at Kirteshwar Temple that his body became the very instrument. He drummed as if Shiva himself is dancing *tandav* on the hilltop. His performance and his looks fascinated a girl from California, Keri who had come to Kathmandu in students exchange programme. His life took altogether a different turn when Keri offered him to come to Goa with her. Thenceforth he permanently cut off his ties with his father and his hometown. He felt no regret. In Goa he passionately loved Keri and lost his virginity. Soon Kathmandu melted like rancid butter from his memories. Xavier would play Tabla in a local hotel during dinner time. However he often recalled his school days when he was humiliated as 'King Xavier' by his schoolmates. He used to be doubtful about his genes for having curly hair and light eyes unlike his parents who had straight hair and eyes like enlightened Buddha. He would wonder whether he, the son of a peasant woman and a one-eyed musician from Patan was indeed a reincarnation of a Portuguese sailor or a pirate from five

hundred years ago. He would walk through the Goan streets as if he was walking through his past life trying to remember the story he could not remember. He felt he was a tourist in Kathmandu who had come to search something which they could neither name nor remember. He always felt some yearning within and a strange nostalgia. He would often try to find the meaning of his restlessness while lying with Keri. Soon he parted with her. After his stay in Goa, Xavier landed in the US.

Now Xavier shares his apartment with John who too is fascinated by his quiet charm. Xavier loves the spontaneity, humour and the queenly ingénue in John. John being gay, their platonic relationship is a surprise for others. John has many women in his life and teases Xavier for losing interest in them. In fact Xavier's loss of interest in women has a reason. He has given divorce to his wife Dana with whom he has a daughter Srishthi. Later Xavier too has variety of women in his life but often feels a void inside him. He never can have the experience he had in Goa with Keri which gave him moments to recover some irrevocable loss.

Xavier dials the number given in the advertisement and gets an appointment to meet Rosa Pilar personally at the Spanish repertoire theatre. Her secretary is surprised to know that Xavier plays flamenco. Xavier plays *palos de flamenco* – song of happiness. Soon he is lost in the music and doesn't notice Rosa's entry and her dance to his music. She dances as if the world is crystallized in the moment of music and rhythm; as if she would never stop. Xavier barely keeps his eyes away from the spectacular dancer. When the music stops Xavier is bemused to see a proud and beautiful face of sixty year old woman. Undoubtedly she chooses Xavier as her drummer.

Xavier finds in Rosa a woman of his dreams. For him she is his soulmate, a being who knows his every fear, passion, desire; who can sense his every mood through the slightest gesture, one who knows his intimate thoughts without any eye contact. And Xavier falls in love with the woman who makes him alive. The man who is often surrounded by beautiful young women falls for a twenty year older woman and gets physically involved with her. However his involvement in Rosa seems absolutely a foolish and perverse idea for John.

Xavier does not express his love for her. For Xavier, it is impossible to disrupt social rules and propose Rosa openly since she is happily married, has loving husband, children and grandchildren. In spite of her age, the way she has retained her

body, her energy on the dance floor, her smile, and her eternal beauty mesmerizes Xavier. Xavier wonders whether his love for Rosa is transcendental. For three months that he works for Rosa he drums like he has never drummed before in his life. Her every divine performance takes his breath, his thoughts and his socially conditioned responses from him. Even though she never looks at him during her performances, he knows she is aware of his existence. He knows she dances like she has never danced before when he drums. In fact both of them are aware of each other's presence. Their love is on such a profound level that he can't articulate it. It is the bond between two people who share the same rhythm. In the three months Xavier talks to Rosa only twice. Their first meeting is quite intimate and in the second one he realizes that Rosa too loves him. With the end of season, Rosa leaves for Madrid but with an untold promise of continuing their divine love. John is relieved when Rosa leaves New York for ever but Xavier obliquely suggests him that he will not let this story end.

### 2.3.2.1 Glossary

**Boleria:** a fast flamenco rhythm

*que pasa:* what's going on?

*hola:* hello

**kiosk:** newspaper stall

*Un café:* a coffee

*Por favor:* please

**Gigs:** a slang for live musical performances

**Flamenco:** a professionalized art-form based on the various folkloric music traditions of Southern Spain

**Repertoire:** stock of plays or dances

**Jesuits missionaries:** A group of Catholic missionaries who came to New France in order to convert the Native Americans so that they became Christians and followed the European way of life.

**Arty-farty:** showing interest in the arts

**Platonic:** intimate not sexual love or friendship

**Void:** completely empty

**Canto jondo:** a vocal style in flamenco

**Alegría:** joy

**la danza de la muerte:** dance of death

**Esta lugar tiene duende:** this place has a quality of passion or inspiration

**Metamorphosis:** A change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one

**Amalgamation:** result of combining

### 2.3.2.2 Check Your Progress

#### B. Answer the following in one word or phrase or sentence.

1. Which instrument does Xavier play in his childhood?
2. What is the aspiration of Xavier's father?
3. How does Xavier perform at Kirteshwar Temple?
4. What does attract attention of Xavier in the newspaper?
5. What is Rosa Pilar?
6. Why does Xavier get attracted towards Rosa?
7. How is the relationship between Rosa and Xavier?
8. Why is John angry towards Xavier?
9. Why can't Xavier express his love to Rosa?
10. How does Xavier react to John's relief over Rosa's leaving for Madrid?

## 2.4 Section II

The section II comprises two stories – *The Promise* and *The Prediction*. They are heard by Joshi in her childhood and span from the end of last century to the mid fifties. *The Promise* (2002) is a blend of two stories. One that deals with her own ancestor who went mad after evoking a Goddess during tantric puja and the other one is about the general sense of betrayal felt by many of the concubines of the Ranas and Shahs. Here Joshi shows how a man has to deal with the consequences of his follies – lust for power, pride, arrogance and jealousy when he refuses to keep his

promise. She also shows the troubling demarcation of caste, belief in superstitions, fate of the concubines and the power politics. The second story *The Prediction* is about an accurate prediction made by an astrologer about the end of the Rana regime. He was Joshi's one of ancestors and came from outside Kathmandu. The story was first published in 2013 in *LA. Lit* a literary journal based in Kathmandu and was also published in *Himalaya*, a journal of Himalayan studies published out of Yale University in the same year. The story is based on a small snippet of an anecdote told to Joshi by her father who did not believe in astrology though her ancestors were astrologers in the Royal Court of Nepal. The young astrologer in the story however is not from Joshi's family but is thought to have come from outside Kathmandu.

#### **2.4.1 The Promise**

The story begins in spring when heavy rain lashes dry and dusty Kathmandu after three years of drought. Colonel Ketan Jung Bahadur Rana is standing at the window watching his servants running below and among them is a girl whom he has nicknamed Devi, the goddess. Seeing her hair tangled by the fierce wind and her face turned towards rain, he recalls a prediction made by *dhami*, a family astrologer a month ago – *A goddess will come into your life, and change it irrevocably. Her power will take away your obstacles. But do not be greedy, otherwise the power will be your destruction.* The colonel is obsessed with his planetary fortunes since he desperately wants to be the commander of the King's Army. However he has failed to convince the King and at fifty one, his lifelong ambition is still unfulfilled. When colonel Ketan had seen the girl, Maili for the first time, her oval face and slanted eyes reminded him of the sculptured face of the granite goddess who guard the intersection of three roads outside his main gate. Her youthful energy also reminds Ketan of his own lost youth.

The library of the palace wherein the portraits of his ancestors are proudly hung and now getting wet reminds Ketan of the history of murders in his family. Ketan is the grandson of one of the sons who murdered his own brother in the fight over the possession of the portrait of the Sri Tin Maharaja Jung Bahadur Rana of Nepal. And thereby he won the throne, the women, the army; in totality the power. Ketan does know that sentimentality has no place in the game of power. Later Ketan too plays the same power game but with a difference.

Ketan comes out of the reminiscences when his granddaughter enters his room with her *dhai*, Maili in her twenties who has a fresh-face and mind of her own. Her looks, expressions, and her playful gait remind him of his first wife, Lalitha who had died thirty-five ago. Soon Ketan establishes sexual intimacy with her and names her his 'Devi' and Maili becomes Devi for everyone in the palace.

Devi is exempted from her other responsibilities. She no longer remains the *dhai* of the children of the palace. She is shifted from her small, dark room in the attic to cavernous chamber in the deserted Westside where the colonel becomes a regular visitor. Devi even has her own maid-servant, Elaichi who adores her. The colonel himself teaches her alphabets and even allows her to sit in the adjoining room and listen to the tutor who comes for his grandsons. The old cook who once was a concubine to the colonel watches Devi with a jealous eye.

Once Maili is summoned by the mistress who is colonel's third wife. The otherwise aloof mistress becomes friendly with Maili when she hears about Maili's nightly visits to the colonel. She sends Maili small gifts and cooked food from her kitchen. Since she knows that Maili's village is known for witchcraft, she expresses her wish to take Maili's help in doing Puja for the Colonel as he wants to be the Commander of the Army. The Colonel who has fought many battles during the war cannot be so as his brother occupies that position. Maili's family is the *dhami-jhankri* of the palace and the colonel also has requested Maili's brother to do puja to get colonelship. But her brother has declined to do so since waking up the ancestral gods is dangerous. She also tells Maili that she is getting old and wishes to spend rest of her life in Banaras and the colonel needs a wife when he becomes the Commander of the army. Thus she gives Maili a suggestive hint that she is the prospective mistress of the palace.

The colonel too is obsessed with the grit of becoming the Commander of the army. When he fails to convince Devi's brother to do puja for him he decides to read books on his own and do the puja in half year's time. Meantime Devi becomes his confidante. He treats her like his muse and goddess to whom he shares his darkest thoughts. Though the colonel's career has not seen any defeat, Devi can foresee his devastation the puja will inflict on him. However when Devi cannot see him brooding and silent she suggests him to take help of a woman of the neighboring village who is well known for her tantric powers. It is believed that she can make a beggar into a village head man and the headman into a castrated goat. Pleased to hear

this, the colonel sits before the shrine of the goddess along with Devi; marks her forehead with red vermilion and says if she helps him to be the Commander of the Army, he will make her his Queen.

A month later the news of Devi's pregnancy is spread in the palace. Devi's obstinacy demands the Colonel to attend to her every whim. She dreams of seeing her son succeed the Colonel as the Commander of the Army. The colonel too talks of sending his eldest son into exile and make Devi's son his heir. However whenever Devi questions him about their marriage, he postpones it for the auspicious time. The astrologer's words echo in his head each time he looks at Devi's swelling belly. For the colonel Devi is the very woman to empower him to do his puja and thereby fulfill his dreams; she is the proof that his manhood is still alive.

By the end of six months with a peculiar excitement the colonel finishes reading charts, formulae, philosophies, mantras, the tantric methods of divination and puja to wake the gods. Devi fetches the old tantric woman to the palace. On their first meeting the old woman offends the colonel by disclosing his intention to steal his brother's position. She also annoys him by asking him to be cautious about the puja which must be performed only on prescribed time under the guidance of his *dhami*. She obliquely reminds him of his promise to Devi about marriage and making her son his heir. To his utter surprise the old woman leads him to the puja-kotha through the maze of confusing hallways and rooms of the old palace as if she were walking through her own house. Except his family nobody, not even Devi, knows of this secret puja-kotha that they use for the family deities. Following the old woman's gestures the colonel enters the dark room wherein he can sense presences of the deities, dead spirits and so many ancestral voices. His entire body thuds with dread and exhilaration. He wonders whether the intrusion of the old woman's voice who is sitting outside will anger the deities as she does not belong to the ancestral lineage. However, her presence gives him confidence. She prepares the colonel by taking assurances from him to perform the puja fearlessly. She asks the colonel whether he is capable of silencing the goddess once she is aroused. The old woman also challenges him to put the goddess back to sleep as she does not like to be aroused for personal power. When the colonel assures her, the old woman asks him to keep his word to keep the goddess calm. The old woman sincerely helps him begin his puja as she knows that the colonel does not recognize the extent of his power and his invulnerability.

On the eighth day of the Dashain, a ten day harvest festival, the palace jubilantly prepares for Bada Dashain sacrifice (Durga Puja). The colonel meets Devi who has put vermilion mixed with goats' blood on her forehead. He bows his head before her. As she knows that her touch is going to influence his puja, she stretches her arm to mark his forehead with a red line. It is colonel's day of trial. If he fails in his puja, he will go mad but if he succeeds he is to be the next Commander of the Army. Devi keeps a fast with a vow to eat the *prasad* of the Goddess only when the colonel finishes his puja. At midnight he finishes his puja and staggers into the room as if he has just returned from a violent struggle not just with outside forces but with his own internal demons as well. The next day he receives the news of his brother's accidental death.

On the Day of Bada-Dashain (Vijaya Dasmi) the King declares the colonel as the Commander of the Army. Devi is not called to accompany the Colonel. The mistress breaks the promise of making Devi the Commander's wife and her son his successor. Devi is shifted to smaller quarters on the outskirts of the palace till she delivers a baby. After almost a month the Colonel meets eight month pregnant Devi. He laughs at the promises he had given to Devi; instead assures her and her son a land and house in the outskirts of the city. He also tells her that their marriage won't be sanctioned by the King and his own family, due to her low caste. He declares his grandson as his heir. Devi leaves the room without a word. The next day when the Colonel dreams of the disappearance of the goddess from the alcove, he calls Devi but Devi too is nowhere seen in the palace. His frantic efforts to find her go in vain. The palace gets seeped into the dark feeling of foreboding. The palace sees misfortunes one after other. Many servants leave the palace when they hear strange noises – howling, weeping and cursing from the wing where Devi used to have her room; the mistress and the younger daughter become bedridden; the eldest daughter becomes widow; Colonel's grandson, a heir to be, goes insane. The Colonel, the Commander of the nation's army remains as the lonely head of the lunatic household. The people whisper about the hovering of the goddess around his house and causing misfortune as the colonel failed to send the goddess back to her realm and not completing the puja.

For years the colonel haunted by the ghost that never leaves him, sends his men at every Dashian to find Devi in her village. However nobody has ever seen and heard of Devi and her son. It is almost as if Devi were a supernatural being evoked

out of the firmament to help him. She grants him all the wishes in his life but with a warning to keep his word. When he fails to keep his promise, she disappears with the same sureness as the goddess who has evoked.

#### 2.4.1.1 Glossary

***Cheena*** : Horoscope

**Parchment** : skin of a sheep or goat that was used for writing on.

**Throes**: agony

**Belligerent** : aggressive

**Decapitate**: execute

**Subservience**: respect

**Surveillance**: vigilance

**Tacit**: indirect

***Patuka***: Piece of clothing tied around the waist that supports women while they work by preventing back pain.

**Intransigent**: obstinate

**Cavernous**: huge

**Catty**: spiteful

***dhami-jhankri***: an group in Nepal whose business is to determine the nature of the spirit, and then either to calm it or drive it from the ill person's body. As healers, they examine animal entrails for signs, collect medicinal plants, perform sacrifices, exorcize demons, and chant magical incantations.

**Premonition**: forewarning

**Saligrams**: Shaligrams are fossilized shell usually collected from river-beds or banks such as the Gandaki river in Nepal and considered as divine

**Confidante**: a trusted friend

**Vermillion**: red powder

***Rakshi***: an alcoholic drink distilled from rice or grain made in Tibet (south-western China) and Nepal

**Infinitesimal:** insignificant

**Dashain:** Nepali version of Durga Puja

**Condone:** remit

**Concubine:** kept woman

**Litany:** recital

#### **2.4.1.2 Check your Progress**

**C. Answer the following in one word or phrase or sentence.**

1. What is Devi's real name?
2. What work does Devi do in the palace?
3. What does Devi remind to Colonel Ketan?
4. What is the prediction of the dhami?
5. What is colonel's ambition?
6. What promise does the colonel give to Devi?
7. On which day the colonel does his puja?
8. What warning does the old woman give to the colonel?
9. Why does Devi leave the palace?
10. How does the colonel live after Devi leaves the palace?

#### **2.4.2 The Prediction**

The astrologer from Pokhara is summoned by Mohan Shamsheer to the palace to know when he will become Prime Minister. Shamsheer is expecting to see an older, more commanding and authoritative man but he is surprised to meet a pleasant looking young man of thirty wearing worn down cloth shoes and dust-coloured set of clothes. He appears surprisingly nondescript. The fame of this young astrologer is spread across Nepal for his predictions have never gone wrong. He is a student of Banaras Hindu University and his knowledge of Vedic astrology is indisputable. His clients range from the Prime Minister to the lowly people.

Since the question he wishes to ask presumes the downfall of another man, Mohan Shamsheer meets the astrologer who is sitting behind the curtain through his

Khardar. The astrologer though is unaware of the exact location of his observer whose fortune he is about to predict in the room, he knows the man is sitting a few feet away. Though he is ignorant about the identity of the man, he can make out from the way he was driven in the horse-carriage in the dusk that he must a man of importance. But he does not know in which area he is in Kathmandu. The astrologer feels as if some invisible people are watching him from the darkness of the hall whose every nook and corner is filled with shadows.

The astrologer had visited some such palace like building a year ago to read the charts the King Tribhuwan and his three sons. That time too he was kept in the dark about the identity of the people whose predictions he had to make and the place he had to visit. Later on returning with a fat bag of silver coins, he was told that he had been to the Hanuman Dhoka palace of the king. He was invited there because the women of the palace had heard about his fame and insisted on listening to him. This time, from the opulence of the hall the astrologer realizes that like earlier, he is in the house of someone whose importance is rivaled that of the king.

When the Khardar asks him when Shamsheer will become Prime Minister on behalf of Shamsheer, the astrologer asks for the time of birth, date, year and place of birth. He hesitatingly also asks for the name and he receives a tightly rolled scroll rather reluctantly by the Khardar. The astrologer on seeing the daphne bark paper marked with the elegant hand he had seen on the charts of other Rana generals, immediately presumes whose chart is unrolling before him. Though he is ignorant about the hierarchies of the Rana family, the astrologer is certain that the chart belongs to some Rana – Mohan Shamsheer Rana.

The astrologer's meticulous calculations and gestures make Rana restless. After completing his work, the astrologer finds some good and some bad aspects in the chart. He suggests to start with bad aspects first. He reads Rana's chart in detail – the twelve houses, the exalted and debilitated planets, and the dashā Rana is going through. The astrologer's accurate revelation of his character startles Rana. The Astrologer also talks about his parentage, wealth, marriage, children, health, enemies and his public standing. And then waits for the specific question. The Rana is desperate to talk to him in person but his Khardar on behalf of him repeats the same question of his Prime Ministership. Seeing Raj Yoga in Rana's chart, the astrologer predicts the day – *Shukhrabar, Baisakh 18, Bikram Sambat 2005*, when he will be the Prime Minister.

On Friday, 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1948, Mohan Shamsheer is crowned Prime Minister of Nepal as per the predicted date. While ascending the steps for the coronation ceremony, Shamsheer remembers the humble young man who had stated the exact date and time of this ceremony with confidence and finality. As the crown is placed on his head, again a thought of the young man crosses his mind. He wonders, if he knows this date then he might know the date when he will be no longer a Prime Minister. During the ceremony the astrologer who is a special guest looks at Rana with calm and serene face.

Rana remembers the political situation which had caused him to become the Prime Minister. Padma Shamsheer was planning to form a Constitutional Reform Committee to draft a constitution of Nepal and a Government of Nepal Constitution Act with the help of Indian advisers. He had decided to change the Rana system and bring in a Panchayat system of local self-government in villages. The Constitution guaranteed freedoms of speech, press, assembly, worship, and equality before the law. It promised free elementary education for all and universal suffrage. The Ranas were skeptical about the way Padma Shamsheer tried to implement newfangled western ideas that worked well in foreign countries and even in India. Many raised their eyebrows for his inclusion of outlaws like BP Koirala into the Parliament. For Mohan Shamsheer, Padma's brother Kaiser who was known for his genius and other people Padma Shamsheer's political moves were weird, too modern and intolerable. The Ranas pressurized Padma Shamsheer to quit but he refused to resign and left for India; however finally he had to sign the papers. And Mohan Shamsheer became the Prime Minister of Nepal. In fact, he knows that his own wise political strategies have landed him in the Prime Minister's position; still he is amazed by the predicted timing which is hard to dictate. The precision of the prediction stirs up his curiosity to know the end of his Prime Ministership.

After the coronation of Mohan Shamsheer, he offers the astrologer a humble position in the administration under Barar alias Babu Saheb's purview. It is clear that it is the reward for his accurate prediction. However, he is also there if his consultations are needed by Mohan Shamsheer. Soon his office becomes crowded for many people are curious in his predictions.

The same question – whether everything is predestined and therefore knowable now crosses Babar Shamsheer, Mohan Shamsheer's younger brother. He wonders whether he will get an opportunity to become Prime Minister since he is next in line

in the hereditary system of prime ministers. He has heard about the startling prediction of the astrologer through palace grapevine and Mohan Shamsheer himself.

After a month of speculation, Babar asks the Khardar to consult the astrologer for the same inquiry. The Khardar, who knows the ways of the world and how the young minds work, agrees to follow his request. Accordingly Babar Shamsheer's birth-chart is read exactly as he had read that of Mohan Shamsheer's. Babar also listens to all the details with the same impatience till his impertinent question is answered. However, since there is neither Raj yoga nor Adhiraj yoga in Babar's birth-chart, the astrologer declares that he can never become the Prime Minister and thereby angers Babar. The humiliated and furious Babar accuses the astrologer of being paid to his patron, Mohan Shamsheer. The next day he orders the Khardar to relieve the astrologer of his post as he is of no use.

The news of the astrologer's dismissal reaches Shamsheer but at the same time the news of Pandit Jawaharlal's promise to support his regime seems more imminent to him. Yet he is worried about the agitations of Nepali Congress and BP Koirala's determination to topple Ranas. He also gets the news of an armed uprising in Biratnagar. Mohan Shamsheer's anxiety is overlooked by the still angry Babar. His anger is aggravated when he sees the astrologer in the palace.

After some days King Tribhuwan flees to India along with his family leaving behind his grandson Prince Gyanendra. Mohan Shamsheer decides to crown the three year old prince and rule the country as they have done in the past. The news that King Tribhuwan and his sons will stay in India in exile and the Ranas will rule with a child king on the throne brings relief to Babar Shamsheer since he sees his way for being Prime Minister getting cleared.

Young Gyanendra is scared in the company of big men of giant moustache who look at him with sinister eyes. Feeling lonely and afraid, he cries disconsolately. He feels betrayed for his grandfather, father and brothers had left him behind with a promise that they would come back soon. They had told him that he would become a king and since he is a big boy he would enjoy sitting on the throne wearing a crown and carrying a sceptre. Mohan Shamsheer too repeats the same thing. Gyanendra stiffens his face to control himself from busting into tears as his nanny warns him not cry since the kings don't cry. He is taken to Hanuman Dhoka palace for the crowning ceremony. As he is being crowned, he cannot stop thinking about his family who had

promised to return soon. However now he doesn't trust them. Holding back his tears, he carries a stubborn look on his face and tries to hold the crown from slipping.

When Gyanendra hears his nanny whispering about people's protest against the coronation ceremony, he doubts whether he has done something terribly wrong. In a few days his family's return from India receives a huge welcome from people of Nepal. However the betrayed Little King Gyanendra vows not to forgive them for leaving him alone with strangers. The talks of his family about India saddens as well as threatens him. The thought that they would desert him again scares him. When his grandfather talks about democracy and the end of Rana's regime, he blames democracy for vanishing his family. And he vows to revenge this democracy in future. When the king appreciates him for bravely staying behind and for saving the country by becoming the king, little Gyanendra shouts at him and says he hates democracy.

In another part of Kathmandu, Rana Mohan Shamsheer feels betrayed by Jawaharlal Nehru for declaring the end of Rana rule and bringing democracy in the country. Babar Shamsheer remembers the astrologer's prediction. He wonders whether he has sinned against the Brahmin by dismissing him. However he is also sure that it is not in his destiny to become the Prime Minister and it is of no use to blame the astrologer. He only read what was shown in his birth-chart.

On 12<sup>th</sup> November 1951 with the resignation of Mohan Shamsheer Jung Bahadur Rana, The Rana regime comes to an end. Four days later Matrika Prasad Koirala becomes the first Prime Minister of democratic Nepal. Mohan Shamsheer dies sixteen years later. Each year on his birthday he invites the astrologer to tell him his fortune. Each year he wonders if the young man knows his day of death but doesn't tell it to him.

The story dwells in the politics of Nepal - the Rana regime and MP Koirala's efforts to bring in democracy in Nepal. On this backdrop Joshi shows Mohan Shamsheer Rana's obsession for not only taking up the office of Prime Minister of Nepal but also for knowing his future, the astrologer's accuracy in his prediction regarding Mohan Shamsheer's Prime Ministership, his political moves to keep Kiorala who wants to bring democracy in Nepal at the bay and his anxiety to retain it. The story shows that man's future is determined by his actions; still his anxiety to know his future forces him to believe in astrologer's reading of his birth chart.

### 2.4.2.1 Glossary:

**Commanding** - Dominant

**Khardar** - Attendant of Rana

**Nondescript** - Without distinguishing politics

**Nook and cranny** - Small parts of a place

**Daphne** - Kind of shrub

**Patronizing** - Assuming a tone of superiority

**Opulence** - Abundance

**Coronation** - Act of crowning

**Suffrage** - Right to vote

**Speculation** - Thinking

**Re-enactment** – Repetition of an earlier event

**Imminent** – Something about to happen

Disconsolately - Cheerlessly

**Demeanour** – Social behaviour of a person

### 2.4.2.2 Check Your Progress

#### D. Answer the following questions in one word/sentence/phrase

1. What type of astrology is the astrologer knowledgeable about?
2. What does Mohan Shamsheer want to know from the astrologer?
3. What is the prediction of the astrologer?
4. What does worry Mohan Shamsheer?
5. Why is Babar Shamsheer angry with the astrologer?
6. In which office is the astrologer appointed?
7. Why is Mohan Shamsheer disappointed with Jawaharlal Nehru?
8. Which word does the little king Gyanendra hate to hear from his grandfather?

9. Who becomes the first prime minister of democratic Nepal?
10. What does Mohan Shamsheer wish to know in his old age?

## 2.5 Section III

Section III comprises three stories – *Hunger*, *Shelling Peas and History Lessons* and *The Best Sand Painting of the Century*. *Hunger* is based on a story that Joshi heard in her childhood. Her aunt was married to a big and influential family in Kathmandu, but as the family was too large, food was always insufficient for them and the new child bride would be hungry. The story reveals the daily plight of child brides in Nepal and how her ingenious great-aunt used a tactic to quench her hunger. The story was published in the *Kyoto Journal* released in Japan. The second story *Shelling Peas and History Lessons* is written when Joshi was eighteen year old and is based on what Joshi heard about wet-nurses during her childhood. It is a heart-wrenching account of the *dhais* or wet-nurses who would leave their children starve to feed the children of rich families. The third story *The Best Sand Painting of the Century* (1996) captures some of the elements of the zeitgeist – the height of the Internet and computer bubble, the dispersal of the Buddhist philosophy and the struggle between the corporate worlds and those who want to live an alternative life.

### 2.5.1 Hunger

The story begins with a thirty-two members strong big joint brahmin family having a meal together in a mournful silence as speech is discouraged during mealtimes. However the silence is broken by a sudden and hurried entry of a hungry boy who has to sit in front of the old patriarch of the family who glares at him with his mean eyes. The patriarch controls his curses as he usually maintains silence during meals. For few minutes the boy watches with interest and amusement the old grandfather's sour as a squeezed lemon face, the way he popped a ball of rice in his mouth and his plain white dhoti wrapped up like a woman. Soon the boy looks down dumbly swallowing his laughter.

The boy again disturbs the silence when his broken wooden seat which is too small to accommodate his butt, skids across the floor creating a farting noise. The children giggle while their parents frown at them. Ratna, the new daughter-in-law, slaps a battered tin plate in front of the boy. Murari, cook of the family and the boy's father serves him with some rice and weak, watery lentils. When he whispers for

more *dal* to his father the second daughter-in-law obliquely and ironically criticizes the family's miserly way of eating. Murari is angry with the boy for coming late and causing a scene but serves him the *dal* until all his rice grains practically float. Murari's brass pot is like a magic pot; it is never empty for he generously pours water over the handful of lentils until everybody gets a taste of it. Murari loves his only son but expects him to be more disciplined to avoid the old man's angry outbursts. Last night he had been beaten up by the old man for scavenging in the vegetable garden and eating the fava and soybeans and even dipping into the raw chilies.

Though the boy has diarrhea that day, he again demands for more *dal* which he gets from Ratna though her mother-in-law disapproves of it. Ratna remains behind to have her meal with the cook and Bubu the old nanny since the custom of the house is that new bride has to serve the family first for few months and hence cannot eat with other family members. By the time the three sit for meal, there is almost no rice, the *dal* is as good as a soup of turmeric and salt and the eggplant is cold and sticky. Bubu who is quiet until now roars like a Bengal tigress and curses the family for not keeping enough food for them. Murari who receives a larger share, finishes his meal and leaves the two ladies to share the last dollop of eggplant. Since Bubu is fed at night by the scheming ladies of the house, she asks hungry Ratna to have the last dollop. The daughters-in-law invite Bubu in their rooms and compete with each other to feed her extravagant tidbits and delicacies with the hope that Bubu would take care of their children better and would give them a little bit more of food during their lunch hour. However, what they give her is many eggs and many handfuls of beaten rice.

Thus on the seventh night in a row of her marriage, Ratna's empty stomach keeps her awake. Lying on her bed she can hear the hysterical laugh of her eldest brother-in-law and his wife on the fourth floor. His wife laughs with a peculiarly piercing hee-haw. She finds the gossips and the unchanging menu of the house not just funny but side-splittingly hilarious. She also hears the low-voiced and bitchy sound of the nagging second sister-in-law even though she lives on the third floor. Everyone in the house knows what she must be up to as nobody hears her husband's voice. She perceives the sound of the third son-in-law who is putting his baby to sleep as his wife is massaging her aching legs. The fourth couple married just over a year is on the first floor and seems to be engaged in lovemaking. However the old

man's snores cut through all these whisperings and activities. She also hears Murari's cry of lonely solitude from his room and Bubu twitching in her sleep in her attic.

Ratna still lying on her bed and feels a steady pulse of pain at the back of her head due to hunger. It reminds of her father who always made sure his daughters are well fed and she never had a single day of hunger before entering this house. Now the creak of the front door tells her that husband is back home. He usually comes late and has dinner in the hall while she is sleeping in the inner room. She wonders whether she should tell him that she is hungry.

In fact except her mother she has not told anybody about her hunger. She remembers how her mother had cried on her first visit listening to her plight and had said that she did not deserve such kind of fate as all her daughters are in homes that treat them like dogs whereas she treats her daughter-in-law like goddess Laxmi. Thrusting a couple of coins in Ratna's hand she had told Ratna how she had warned her husband that it would be a sin to kill her daughter. The words during her marriage ceremony – "If you kill her, it'll be a sin. If you nurture her, it will bring you merit." bring a sarcastic smile on her face. Ratna thinks about the miserable predicament of the girls in Nepal. The gracious merits are believed to be gained from feeding other people's children while death is sure for those who either starve or give corporal punishment to other's children. While returning to her in-laws home, her mother had given her pickle, dried lentil paste and handful of fermented spinach; however in no time it was taken out without asking her permission and finished by the large household.

Ratna pretends to be asleep until her husband falls fast asleep. She decides not to worry him about the things that he is helpless about. He has never contradicted his mother. She does not want him to tell his mother to give her more food and be called as a spoilt and demanding bride. Her thoughts drift towards Murari's child and suddenly she feels as hungry as the boy who had breached the thorn fence to eat vegetables the other day. She almost tastes the delicious dishes in her mouth and drifts off into a light sleep. She dreams of food of all sizes and descriptions – fresh corn, fried intestines, hot tomato pickle, and fresh lapsi fruit. The mewing of the cat sitting outside her window wakes her up. When she gets up to shoo her away, her eyes fall on the garden lying under the silvery moon. Soon she sneaks out of the house and surreptitiously walks towards the garden. She easily enters through a small

opening but her blouse gets torn by a thorn. She feels indefinable pleasure in walking among the beds of spinach which she picks up and sticks in the cloth tied around her waist. As she goes little deeper she finds chilies, famed fava beans, huge pomelos. Finally as she bends down to gather all her booties, she sees a flash of movement by the trees. She tries to look again but she sees no one there.

Shivering with excitement and fear, she runs towards the open door of the house which she had left open carelessly. She is scared of the thief who she thinks might have entered the house and stolen all the jewelry, the heirloom lentil vessels, and even the chamber pot. The fear of the thief kidnapping her, carrying her away in the jute sack across the border and forcibly marrying her make her dart into the house and latch the door. Slowly she walks towards the kitchen, still the ground under her feet crackles. She ignores her wild imagination of dark shadows lurking in the corners or a ghost extending his creepy fingers from the fireplace. With trembling fingers she lights a small fire in the massive fireplace. Informing about her feast to her sleeping mother in a distant village, she swiftly prepares spinach with fava beans and chili. She also enjoys singing Kishor Kumar's song loudly and out of tune as the kitchen is far away from the rooms.

Yet a subtle sense of unease makes her look behind. She wonders whether she heard a creak behind her or saw a shadow on the floor. But again ignoring her imaginations, she continues her preparation and finally pours vegetables in the plate. The guilt of having food like a thief raises tears in her eyes. However stifling a sob and laugh at the same time she eats her delicious spinach like a hot *prasad*, a sacred offering. For the first time she eats her stomach full. As she is about to finish the remaining food, she hears a small shuffling sound behind her. Knowing who that might be, she scrapes the last helping of the vegetable into a bowl, puts two peeled pomelos next to it; cleans the fireplace as before and leaves the kitchen without a backward glance.

The next day the house screams of theft in the garden. The old man blames Murari's child but Murari's defense saves his son from the charge. Ratna thanks the goddess for covering her act. The floor does not show any traces of footsteps returning home. Bubu blames the third son because in the past he had charged her as 'ghee-stealing criminal' while he himself had stolen ghee. She suggests a visit to the magician who sees the true culprit in the mirror of oil-black smeared in the palm of a child's hand. Bubu's suggestion filled with vengeance trembles Ratna. However her

mother-in-law who is scared of enraged Bubu for unearthing many excruciating and painful secrets, hastily defuses the idea of an insider thief.

As the family continues arguing angrily about the raids in the garden during meal time, Ratna gives an extra helping to her accomplice. A smile appears on their face as their eyes meet. However, both remain silent as if what happened last night was just a dream; a mere imagination of hungry minds.

The story gives an account of family customs in Nepal, miserable treatment to new brides in a joint family, miserly way eating and how Ratna a young bride boldly finds a way to quench her hunger pangs by stealing vegetables from her own garden.

### 2.5.1.1 Glossary

**Parka** : flat wooden platform

**Engineer:** skillfully arrange for (something) to occur

**Scavenge:** search for

**Buhari:** younger brother's wife

**Morass:** complicated and confused situation

**Metamorphosized** : transformed

**Dollop:** large mass of something, especially food

**Side-splittingly:** extremely funny

**Squeak:** short but high sound

**Rummage:** to search something by moving things carelessly

**Insatiably:** to great to be satisfied

**Pomelo:** a kind of citrus fruit

**Fava:** a plant in bean family

### 2.5.1.2 Check Your Progress

**E. Answer the following questions in one word/sentence/phrase**

1. Why is the old man angry on the little boy?
2. Why does the boy stifle his laugh?

3. Why doesn't Ratna have her meal with the family members?
4. What is Ratna's husband?
5. Why doesn't Ratna tell her husband about her hunger?
6. How does Ratna feel while walking in the garden?
7. What does Ratna collect from the garden?
8. What are Ratna's feelings while eating food alone at night in the kitchen?
9. Why does Ratna leave a bowl of food in the kitchen?
10. Why is Bubu angry on the third son?

### **2.5.2 Shelling Peas and History Lessons**

On the dusty May afternoon, the old woman is in nostalgic mood while shelling the peas together with Sapana, the six year old little girl of the house who is always interested in listening to her stories. The old woman moves effortlessly from her past and present world. She can hear the traffic of the present world roaring faraway at the same time the echoes of people of the past world calling from one valley to the other. Bubu remembers the misty mornings, frozen wells and how as a young girl she would clamber barefoot on the winding, stony paths of the hills; drink icy water of the springs to wash away the pains in her legs, nibble berries from the branches like goats and later take out thorns stuck on soles of her feet.

Bubu while shelling peas swiftly drifts off into another reverie. Sapana's inquisitiveness brings up memories she has buried to the back of her mind for sixty-five years. She recalls her childhood wherein she along with other children would go to the thick jungle in search of firewood and to graze goats taking popcorn in her *patuka* cloth. Sometimes they would also eat berries and amla lying on the forest floor and carry soybeans and peanuts in their *patuka*. However, now she feels sorry for not having teeth to eat them. On this Sapana reminds her that now she grinds and eats them by putting their powder in her tea.

Sapana wants Bubu to continue her story while she herself tries her best to open the pod skillfully like Bubu but all the peas she has managed to extract get either rolled into the grass or end up in her guiltily appreciative mouth. She knows that Bubu's patience is short-lived and so doesn't wish to irritate her for being a hindrance than a help to her and by asking too many questions. Sapana needs a daily

dose of both – stories and peas while Bubu too tolerates Sapana’s presence and her inquisitiveness. The child is her little *baba*, her darling. She has special liking for Sapana among nine children under her charge for Sapana is the smallest and follows her around, sometimes asking her for a lump of sugar and stories with equal insistence. Bubu loves her innocence as she is yet to realize the rules of the world. However the thought that Sapana too would grow into a cold-hearted woman and forget her like all the other children have done worries her.

Lately except Sapana, nobody pays much attention to Bubu. Everyone take her for granted like that of jackaranda trees in the garden. However Sapana is the only one who nags her with barrage of questions like how a spider’s web brings wealth to a home and why her Ama can’t touch a loukat tree when she is bleeding. However Bubu’s answers to these questions elicit more questions from Sapana and they are never-ending. Sapana’s questions never irritate Bubu though. On the contrary she looks forward to for Sapana to join her for shelling peas, to ask her questions, demand more stories and to know more about herself as well. So far no one has bothered to ask her about her life; and even if they had, Bubu wouldn’t have told them anything. In fact Bubu has not talked about her life for sixty-five years. But as the child wants to know about her, memories come back in fragments. When Sapana asks her about tigers in jungle, Bubu tells her the story of a man who was killed by a tigress when she saw the man nearing her cubs. Defending the tigress’ act, Bubu says that one has the right to protect one’s children especially when their father is not around. Suddenly Sapana asks her a forbidden question about her children. And Bubu tells her that she had a son who is dead now. Bubu has never shared this with anyone in the house. On this Sapana asks her many questions on death and measles and wonders whether Bubu’s only son died of measles. Though Bubu scolds her for asking too many questions as girls should not ask questions, Sapana asks her where her parents are. Smiling, Bubu replies that she has a brother now as her parents are dead. Sapana knows her brother and hates him for being rude to Bubu.

Remembering the circumstance under which she was married off, Bubu further tells her about her marriage when she was nine year old and her husband was thirty-three. However She lost her husband when she was twelve and pregnant. Fortunately her kind mother-in-law didn’t send her to her parents home; instead she let her live in the house till her son was born. When her in-laws thought that she would have a better life in a big house in the valley, the beautiful and young Bubu was sent to

Bishalnagar's Rana's house but as Rana's wife didn't want a young and pretty dhai in the house, Bubu came to Sapana's house as a wet nurse and from then Bubu became its permanent member.

Bubu entered as a dhai to the eldest Dulahi-saab's child. As she was the granddaughter of one of the Rana Maharajas and hence a princess, the custom did not allow her to breast-feed. Thus Bubu fed the child along with her own child. However, when the house complained that the milk is insufficient for Dulahi-saab's child, Bubu's son was given away to Hira to look after in return of a bit of money. Bubu still remembers the day when she held the child in her arms and felt him breathing before Hira took him on her back. Bubu never heard of her again. However later she was told that Hira often visited the house along with the child looking for Bubu. But nobody called her with a fear that it would upset Bubu and consequently affect the milk. Her child died six months later. However, Bubu heard about his death after two years. The house lied to her about his health as well. Bubu had told the mistress to give all her salary to Hira. But neither her salary nor the promised stipend to Hira reached Hira. Hira who didn't have money to buy milk for the child could give him only rice which the child couldn't eat. Bubu who fed other woman's son to make him healthy lost her own son to hunger.

The story that begins with Bubu recalling her happy childhood days in jungle ends with the memory of the death of her own son. It gives an ironical account of the pathetic life of wet nurses who had to give away their own children to feed children of rich families. Bubu is one of them. However, her sixty-five years suppressed past becomes alive when a six year old girl, Sapana's insists on listening to her story. Bubu's story unwinds her own childhood, marital life, her fraught motherhood, miserable death of her child and selfishness of the rich. Bubu who had fed nine children so far, now is a worthless member of the house except for Sapana who loves listening to her stories and follows her for answers to her unending questions.

### 2.5.2.1 Glossary

**Nibble:** take small bite of something

**Calloused:** area of hardened skin

**Reverie:** a state of being pleasantly lost in one's thoughts

**Judicious:** wise

**Uncanny:** unnatural

**Demonstrative:** expressive

**Haze:** confusion

**Breach:** break

**Condescending:** snobbish

**Benign:** gentle

**Malignancy:** cancerous growth

**Swat away:** sharp blow

**Amble:** wander

#### 2.5.2.2 Check Your Progress

#### F. Answer the following questions in one word/sentence/phrase

1. What are Bubu and Sapana doing in May afternoon?
2. What does Sapana want from Bubu?
3. What kind of work Bubu did in the past?
4. At what age Bubu got married?
5. Why did Bubu work in Rana's house?
6. Why did Bubu feed the eldest Dulahi-saab's child?
7. Why was Bubu's son sent away?
8. Why didn't Bubu meet Hira and her son?
9. For how many years Bubu has suppressed her past?
10. Why did Bubu's son die?

#### 2.5.3 The Best Sand Painting of the Century

The story is divided into three scenes that happen in Kathmandu, France and the Himalayan ranges of Nepal. All have a strange connect with the statue of Buddha of Peace and the spy satellite of China. The characters too are amazingly linked with one another. The first scene: *The Bar* opens in Maya bar, one of the popular bars in Nepal wherein a shirtless, tall, bearded American monk having long hair pushed

back with a red bandana and carrying a bag across his hairy chest enters and asks for Maya special. He hits a conversation with a woman wearing ethnic cotton and leather hipsters and who has spent six years studying in America. Speaking English slowly and clearly in an Indian accent he tells the woman about his eight years as a monk in the mountains of Nepal, the reason for being weak in Nepali language and his stay in the caves in Himalaya with an oath of silence for eight years. Now the monk has left his meditation and monkhood as he has decided to move on with a new life. Showing a characteristic Hippy psyche, he wonders whether now he would be able to adapt himself to the American way of life that values speed, money, success and fulfillment but have no time for spirituality. He prefers Nepal for its peaceful life and its environment imbued in Hindu and Buddhist spirituality which always advocates peace and enlightenment.

The man further gives her details about his ambitious project of building a thousand feet statue of Buddha for those who visit Nepal with a curiosity to know the world of peace and enlightenment as well as with a dream of uniting the world; the funds to be raised from the kind and generous people of Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea as well as from the people who believe in the world peace; its design and specifications, the alloy of gold and quartz to be used, the unavailability of the local craftsman to work with such material, insistence on involving the local craftsmen and finally the estimated time of twenty years to get it finished. The woman ridicules his project and doubts whether the world would exist at all in the next twenty years and if it happens so there will be no one to appreciate the statue of Buddha but amoebas. Being once a student of International Relations and a believer in Security and Stability the former monk disapproves of her opinion. He hopes for better world even though France and China are adamant about their stand regarding the possession of nuclear weapons.

Further conversation between the two interestingly resolves the issue of funding the statue which is the chief concern for the monk. The brilliant woman puts forth a wonderful, intelligent and incredibly innovative plan before him of requesting Pentagon to fund building the left leg of Buddha of Peace which can benefit both—the Spiritualists for they will get funds and the Pentagon for they will float a satellite at the top of the statue that would catch the signals of potential nuclear warheads coming from China. The monk who is by now getting fund-raising fatigue is pleased to hear the plan. Still he doubts about the involvement of a military heaven in the

project. The woman immediately offers solution to this by suggesting that the monk can promise Pentagon of keeping inside of the statue hollow so that it can keep its military implements in case of hostilities.

The monk then speculates about the plan of approaching Pentagon. The woman seems to have solution to each of his doubts. She suggests him to hunt for a diamond encrusted button released to commemorate Mao-Tse Tung's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and a 24 carat gold mold prepared for printing U.S. banknotes installed in a Chinese satellite to celebrate the market reforms. Unfortunately the satellite flew off the edge and crashed somewhere in the Himalayas according to the BBC. She asks him to send a letter to Pentagon expressing their plan to hunt the button and mold. She also suggests him to convince Pentagon that the large radars installed in the left leg of Buddha of Peace will catch all the radio-magnetic waves coming from the Himalayas and help find the two precious things. Also, the radar can be used by Pentagon to pick up, intercept and destroy all the nuclear weapons from China. The statue thus can be used for dual purpose – it will not only find the button and the mold but it will fulfill its purpose as the Buddha of Peace. The monk finds the idea rather weird. Being an American he believes in direct action and concrete solutions rather than the Taoist notion of letting go and non-action creating its own action. However, he also knows that being in solitude for eight years he has lost his ability to jump to future conclusions. The woman comes up with another brilliant idea of finding the mold first which they need not hand over to Pentagon as they can use the gold mold to print their own banknotes for funding the Buddha of Peace. Moreover they can plate the statue with gold and put Mao's button as the third eye. The woman's creative ideas again amaze the monk.

When the monk doubts Pentagon's interest in their project, the woman puts forth another awesome idea of approaching potential sources - Bill Gates, the UN and the Tibetan students. They can approach Bill Gates, if they fail to siphon funds from Pentagon. According to her Pentagon can fail to notice their proposal for one reason - if it is occupied in matters like the sex life of the President. In that case they can contact the UN. However if the UN is thinking of cutting fund for conflict resolution, they won't get funds from them as well. Then she plans to approach Tibetan students fighting for Free Tibet but this too seems unworkable because of their exams. Being the richest man in the world, Bill Gates can be convinced of fulfilling the ultimate collector's dream of possessing Mao's button. Moreover, since the button

commemorates the success of capitalism, Bill Gates seems the only person to take up the challenge of installing a giant satellite searching software onto the left leg of the statue. The highly impressed monk appreciating the woman's intelligence and innovative ideas calls her his Karma.

In the second Scene *The Hotel*, an American business tycoon, David is on a holiday in the mountain ranges of Alps. He is with his second wife, Marie and his sons – Alexander from his former wife and Phil. Alex has sour relations with his father for his money-mindedness and arrogance, Marie for her tasteful outfits and vapid smile and Phil for being a snob. Though on a holiday, David makes a business deal with Frank Anderson, an art collector. In the midst of their talk, the TV flashes news of the car-shaped Chinese spy satellite carrying a diamond encrusted button and a 24-carat mold. The news confirms that the satellite has gone out-of-control but if it survives reentry, it will smash into the ground. Soon the hotel meets with an accident and gets crushed under a terrible avalanche. While everybody is waiting for help, a car-shaped fiery light passes over their heads and disappears over the age of the mountainside; no one knows where it is headed.

The third and last Scene: *The Teahouse* is an account of how the Monk succeeds in approaching Bill Gates who shows his readiness to fund the statue of Buddha of Peace. After receiving a proposal from the monk, Bill Gates seeks help from one of his most wired computer software programmer, Jim who floats around in the universe of C++. Jim has resigned his job to follow his passion for art. Bill wants Jim to create a program that would plot out all the probable landing spots of a satellite that has fallen off from the space and fly down to Kathmandu to help the New Age freaks – the Monk and his friend Shanti on building the software into the left leg into the Buddha of Peace. The monk, Tim happens to be Jim and David's brother Tim who had declared monkhood in his childhood. Jim lands at Kathmandu for the second time though he had taken a vow in the past not to visit the place again in his lifetime. However, he does remember a sand painter Tsering whom he had met during his first visit for his love for video games and America.

For the next two weeks Jim along with the monk and Shanti climb the mountain, works hard with his calculations and finally when the monk and Shanti refuse to accompany him in his crazy search, walks alone to the distant land and finds the remains of the satellite buried in the snow. After around twenty-three days of his search, Jim finally hunts the satellite. However, on finding the ashes of the burnt

satellite, he informs the monk, Shanti and Bill Gates about the totally destroyed satellite. Though completely disillusioned, Bill makes an announcement through the press about his funding for building and maintaining the statue to save his public image. A week later, Jim calls Tsering who is on a visit to America and gives him a glittery dust of gold and diamond for his sand painting. The next day Tsering uses the sand on the mandala of his Avalokiteswera painting and later throws it on the waters of river Seekonk. People watch the colourful, glittering sand soared and fell on the water. Tsering's dream of painting the best sand painting thus gets fulfilled with this precious and priceless painting of the century people have ever seen. Jim watches the glittering sand painting amazingly along with his nephew Alex who too is amused by its beauty.

### 2.5.3.1 Glossary

**Alloy:** combination of metals

**Approximation:** rough idea

**Pentagon:** headquarters of the United States Department of Defense

**Expiate:** to make amends for

**Manna:** something beneficial that appears or is provided unexpectedly or opportunely

**Trojan Horse:** hollow wooden statue of a horse in which the Greeks are said to have concealed themselves in order to enter Troy. (Greek Mythology)

**UN:** International Organisation that works to promote international order

**Commemorate:** pay tribute to

**Plat de jour:** dish specially prepared by a restaurant on a particular day,

**Mao-Tse Tung:** A Chinese communist revolutionary

**Avalanche:** snow slide

**Crater:** hollow

**Wired:** energetic

**Slather:** spread

**Avalokiteśvara:** (Sanskrit: अवलोकितेश्वर) is a bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas. This bodhisattva is variably depicted, described and is portrayed in different cultures as either female or male.

### 2.5.3.2 Check Your Progress

#### G. Answer the following questions in one word/sentence/phrase.

1. For how many years the monk was under the oath of silence?
2. Why does the monk prefer Nepal?
3. What is the ambitious project of the monk?
4. How is Pentagon going to be benefited from funding for the statue?
5. What is installed in the Chinese spy satellite?
6. What happens after the avalanche that strikes the hotel in France?
7. Why does Bill Gates seek the help from Jim?
8. Why does Bill Gates fund for the statue?
9. What does Phil give to Tsering?
10. How does Tsering's sand painting become the best painting ever?

## 2.6 Answers to check your progress

- A) 1. The FOUNDATION OF SAARC WRITERS AND LITERATURE (FOSWAL) is the SAARC Apex Body in the SAARC Region that works under the SAARC banner projecting, nurturing and strengthening cultural connectivity through literary and cultural interactions among the SAARC countries, for peace and tranquility in the region, through people-to-people contacts and dialogue.
2. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, The Maldives, Burma, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Iran.
  3. Multilingualism, multiethnicism and multiculturalis and more importantly, they share a collective experience of colonization by the same colonizer.
  4. After the advent of democracy in 1951.

5. South Asian literature is influenced by Western Discourse.
  6. Arundhati Roy / Salman Rushdie
  7. Laxmi Prasad Devkota
  8. Samrat Upadhyay
  9. The Society of Nepali Writers in English (NWEN), Martin Chautari, and the Asian English Language Teachers' Creative Writing Project.
  10. Exposition, Rising action, Climax, Falling action and Denouement or Resolution.
- B)
1. Eastern spirituality
  2. The name *Bigyan* means inner knowledge while Bigyan was the stupidest boy in the school.
  3. Kyo-kushin karate
  4. In his country nobody but Bigyan has wins a silver medal in the international sports event.
  5. Bigyan was their newly discovered lama, the one who was predicted to walk off the desert after having traveled thousands of miles from a distant land.
  6. Abbot
  7. Need to rest the mind in a state of peace
  8. An intrinsic element to all sentient beings
  9. Praksh is curious to know whether Bigyan has an inner awakening that fired up his neurons and turned him into a scholar or whether he is still his old 'buddhu' friend who needs help of a prompter.
  10. Prakash feels the vastness of the void in his life that has overpowered his successful and luxurious life.
- C)
1. Tabala.
  2. To turn Xavier into one of the most famous musicians of the world, better than Zakir Hussain.

3. As if Shiva himself is dancing *tandav* on the hilltop.
4. Advertisement placed by Rosa Pilar Cuellar urgently in need of a drummer catches Xavier's attention.
5. A famous flamenco Spanish dancer.
6. In spite of her age, the way Rosa has retained her body, her energy on the dance floor, her smile, and her eternal beauty attracts Xavier towards Rosa.
7. Transcendental
8. Xaveir's involvement in the older lady Rosa seems absolutely a foolish and perverse idea for John.
9. For Xavier, it is impossible to disrupt social rules and propose Rosa openly since she is happily married, has loving children and grandchildren.
10. Xavier obliquely suggests he will continue his relations with Rosa.

**D) 1. Maili**

2. She is a *dhai* to the children of the palace.
3. His wife, Lalitha
4. A goddess will come into the Colonel's life, and change it irrevocably. Her power will take away his obstacles. But if he remains greedy, the power will destroy him.
5. To become Commander of the Army.
6. The colonel promises to marry Devi and make her his Queen and her son his heir.
7. On the eighth day of the Dashain.
8. The old woman warns him to keep his word to keep the goddess calm.
9. The colonel breaks his promise of marrying Devi and makes his grandson his heir.
10. The Colonel remains as the lonely head of the lunatic household.

**E) 1. Vedic astrology**

2. Mohan Shamsher wants to know when he will become Prime Minister.

3. Mohan Shamsher will become Prime Minister on *Shukhrabar, Baisakh 18, Bikram Sambat 2005*.
  4. If the astrologer knows the date of his coronation then he might be knowing the date when he will be no longer a Prime Minister.
  5. The astrologer predicts that he can never become the Prime Minister since there is neither Raj yoga nor Adhiraj yoga in his birth-chart.
  6. Administration
  7. For declaring the end of Rana rule and bringing democracy in the country.
  8. Democracy
  9. Matrika Prasad Koirala
  10. The day of his death.
- F.**
1. The little boy breaks the silence the family follows during meals with his sudden and hurried entry.
  2. The boy sees the old grandfather's sour face as a squeezed lemon, the way he popped a ball of rice in his mouth and his plain white dhoti wrapped up like a woman.
  3. The custom of the house is that new bride has to serve the family first for few months and hence cannot eat with other family members.
  4. Ratna has headache because of hunger.
  5. He never contradicts his mother and she doesn't wish to be called a spoilt and demanding bride.
  6. Ratna feels indefinable pleasure.
  7. Spinach, chilies, fava beans, and huge pomelos.
  8. Ratna has a mixed feeling of guilt, sadness and pleasure.
  9. She knows that Murari's hungry son is hiding in the kitchen.
  10. Once he had accused her of stealing ghee whereas he himself had stolen it.
- G.**
1. Bubu and Sapana are shelling peas.
  2. Stories

3. Bubu was a wet-nurse for the children of the house.
4. Nine
5. After Bubu's husband's death, her in-laws thought that she would have a better life in Rana' house.
6. The eldest Dulahi-saab was the grand-daughter of one of the Rana Maharajas and hence as she was the princess, the custom did not allow her to breast-feed her child.
7. The house complained that the milk is insufficient for Dulahi-saab's child.
8. Nobody told her about Hira's visits.
9. Sixty-five years
10. Bubu's son died of hunger.

- H.**
1. Eight years
  2. For its peaceful life and its environment imbibed in Hindu and Buddhist spirituality which always advocates peace and enlightenment.
  3. To build a thousand feet statue of Buddha of Peace.
  4. By floating a satellite at the top of the statue Pentagon can catch the signals of potential nuclear warheads coming from China.
  5. A diamond encrusted button released to commemorate Mao-Tse Tung's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and a 24 carat gold mold prepared for printing U.S. banknotes.
  6. A car-shaped fiery light passes over their heads and disappears over the age of the mountainside.
  7. Bill wants Jim to create a program that would plot out all the probable landing spots of a satellite that has fallen off from the space and fly down to Kathmandu to help the New Age freaks – the Monk and his friend Shanti on building the software into the left leg into the Buddha of Peace.
  8. To save his public image.
  9. A glittery dust of gold and diamond.

10. He puts the precious dust of gold and diamond used in the making of diamond encrusted button and 24 carat gold mold prepared for printing U.S. banknotes installed in the sensational fallen satellite on his sand painting.

## 2.7 Broad Answer type Questions.

1. Describe the journey of Bigyan from a stupid boy in the school to a renowned Buddhist monk.
2. How does the story depict the unpredictability of human life?
3. Discuss the transcendental love between the flamenco dancer and her drummer.
4. How does Sushama Joshi convey the idea – ‘One needs to follow his/her passion to live life to the fullest’ through ‘A Boleria for Love’?
5. Elucidate Sushama Joshi’s attempt to show the social belief systems in ‘The Promise’.
6. Sushama Joshi reveals the exploitation of the poor by the Ranas in ‘Promise’, Discuss.
7. Why does Colonel Ketan Jung Bahadur Rana live alone in the lunatic palace?
8. Describe the plight of brides depicted in ‘Hunger’.
9. Discuss family traditions followed in Nepali joint families.
10. Discuss Sushama Joshi’s depiction of politics of Nepal with reference to ‘The Prediction’.
11. Discuss the aptness of the title - ‘The Prediction’.
12. Discuss the satirical element in ‘Shelling Peas and History Lessons’.
13. Elucidate Sushama Joshi as a representative of modern writers in Nepal with reference to ‘The Best Sand Painting of the Century’.
14. How does the monk solve the problem of funds in building the statue of Buddha of Peace?



## Unit-3

### Trends in Drama of SAARC Countries Mohan Rakesh : *Adhe Adhure (Halfway House)*

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- 3.7 Answers to check your Progress
- 3.8 Exercises
- 3.9 Books for Further Reading

### 3.0 Objectives:

After studying this unit, you will be able to

- study development and trends in SAARC drama
- understand the contribution of Mohan Rakesh to SAARC Drama
- know life and works of Mohan Rakesh
- analyze the play Halfway House
- assess the characters in the play
- examine various themes reflected in the play
- understand and appreciate the play

### 3.1 Introduction:

The first section of the present unit takes a brief survey of development and trends in SAARC drama and the second section discusses the text *Halfway House* by Mohan Rakesh, a significant playwright from India. Mohan Rakesh is one of the noteworthy writers in Hindi Literature, who pioneered a movement called *Nai Kahani* (New Story) in the realm of Hindi Literature. His contribution to novel, drama, essay is important in building up the early post-independence Indian literature. He is a playwright par excellence and revolutionized dialogue writing in regional Drama in particular and Indian drama in general. Of all the plays that Mohan Rakesh wrote *Aadhe Adhure* (*Halfway House*), perhaps has received the most attention. It was so different from the established tradition of plays that received swift reaction. Some critics put it in the same category of the plays of Brecht, Ibsen, Strindberg, O'Neill and Arthur Miller. On the other hand the play was seen as being sentimental, commercial, superficial and hollow. *Aadhe Adhure* has been translated into all the major languages of the country. It is not only translated but also performed.

### 3.2 Trends in Drama of SAARC Countries:

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, recognized as SAARC, is a geopolitical union of Nations in South Asia formed for creating socio-cultural, political, economic and linguistic connectivity. This Association includes countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan and

Maldives, who have common experiences of colonization and common concerns for socio-cultural, political, economic, and linguistic development. Since their colonial past, they carry similar kind of goals till mid-20th century. The Literatures of these countries are also referred as post-colonial literatures.

The present unit discusses the contribution of Mohan Rakesh to Modern Indian drama in particular and to SAARC literatures in general. As SAARC is a political term, the present unit uses the term 'South Asian Literatures' as a substitute for SAARC. Over the last few decades, South Asian Literature in English has achieved a global prominence that is unique among postcolonial literature. It is essential to discuss the history of South Asian writing from the colonial period to the present day. South Asian Literature explores the impact of British colonial policy on the then colonies. It also deals with some of the social and political issues whether it be the case, communal violence or the concept of nation and nationality .It studies the English language experiences in this area and literatures produced by indigenous inhabitants in the English language.

South Asia being a mixture of many regions shares certain common issues like: multiculturalism, multiethnicism, and multilingualism. Colonization became a collective experience of these people by the colonizer, who along with many burdens not only forced its language on people of these regions but also affected their psychology and perspectives. Currently, South Asian literature written in many national and regional languages of the region is flourished in English. Many writers from the South Asian subcontinent have won prizes and earned worldwide recognition and have been included in the syllabi of the abroad universities. The writings of these writers reflect issues related to native tradition and cultures and affected by their nativatized English.

The main purpose of the South Asian literature is to explore the native history since the colonial period and strengthen the native tradition. It gives voice to the oppressed and marginalized voices through the various literary genres like drama.

### **3.2.1 SAARC Drama : A Brief Survey**

The brief survey of South Asian drama in English has been taken for further understanding. In Pakistan, English drama has had a limited tradition as an art form. It is significant that the few well-known Pakistani English dramatists have all established themselves in Britain. Notable among them are Hanif Kureshi whose

screenplay *My Beautiful Loundrette* deals with unemployment and racism in Britain and was followed soon after by *The Buddha of Suburbia* which was a novel about an Asian boy growing up in Britain. The work of other playwrights like Rukhsana Ahmad and Tariq Ali also thematize the East-West encounter.

Sri Lankan theatre in English took several years before it was able to develop an English language drama which could successfully exploit the resources of the local idiom. Attempts were made to adopt European plays by the University Dramatic Society under Professor E.F.C. Ludowyk in the 1940s, but these attempts could not establish a successful dramatic tradition subsequently. It was only with Ernest McIntyre's production of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and later Shakespeare's *Othello* that a connection was established between the worlds of Sinhalese and European drama (Gooneratne, 1980. p156) At the same time, there is a tradition of domestic comedy in English which comprises plays like Ludowyk's *He Comes from Jaffba* (1950), Lanerolle's *Well*, Mudaliyar and McIntyre's *The Education of Miss Asia* (1971) and *The President of the O.B.A.*

The story of the growth of Indo-English drama highlights several significant aspects about culture, language and the nature of dramatic and theatrical activity. Nineteenth century attempts to stage and adapt English plays were gradually shifted to drama in regional languages. While Shakespearean and western drama have often been successfully welded with local folk traditions (e.g., 'Jatra') and performed in the regional languages. Drama in English in India has been restricted to a limited urban audience. Mohan Rakesh, Mahesh Dattani, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Habib Tanvir and Badal Sircar are the few well-known names in the field, in contrast to regional language drama which boasts of a native tradition. Indian-English drama has to derive its impetus and strength from traditional Indian forms. The Indo-English dramatists' continuing attempts must be to locate and successfully use such indigenous traditions.

### **3.2.2 Modern Indian English Drama**

As a sign of our national sensibility Indian drama came into existence as a tool of exploring and communicating the great heritage of Indian culture. The year 1920s brought some drastic developments in Indian English drama as it started to be written in almost all the Indian languages. But due to certain reasons and limitations the speed and growth of Indian drama has not been in tune with poetry and fiction. The

early practitioners of drama in India like Ravindernath Tagore, Shri Aurbindo, and Bharathi Sarabhai strive for triumph over these difficulties and opened up new scenes in the genre. In the pre-independence period these playwrights regardless of the poetic excellence, thematic variety, technical competence and symbolic and moral importance of their works, remained unsuccessful in terms of acceptability and 'stage-worthiness' of their plays.

The word "Modern" can be used to examine the concept of modernity in post-independence Indian theatre and drama. Sixty years of Independence provide a crucial marker to renegotiate and reinterpret the past decades. The terms "drama" and "theatre" are often defined as written and performance texts respectively.

Robert Leach in his book *Makers of Modern Theatre* provides a crucial and useful definition of the term "modern" in the context of Western drama;

The modern theatre is the theatre of today. 'Modernist' theatre refers to the theatre of the first fifty years or so, years of the last century when Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Brecht and Artaud flourished. Their Modernism however infiltrates and influences all aspects of modern theatre. They bestride the gap between Modernism and Modern. ( 78 )

Kendriya Natak Sangeet Akadami remained a new support for Indian English drama which was started in January 1953. Along with this support there was another development of National School of drama which set up Sangeet Natak Akadami in 1959. The actual experiments in drama started in the 1960s by suitable mixing of various styles and techniques from Sanskrit western theatre. Therefore, the creativity of modern Indian theatre was given a new, versatile, and broader approach at every level of creativity; the year 1972, was a land-mark year for Indian theatre. Indian Dramatists used legends, folklores, myths, history and achieve splendid results. They represented Indian drama at national level by dramatizing universal aspects of human life in India. Drama has always been a carrier of social and political changes in Indian literary context. Genre of drama has forever tried to resolve human mysteries through live presentation on a stage before an audience.

Modern Indian English Drama has tried to utilize traditional techniques. Traditional theatrical perceptions have been given new dimensions and meanings in modern Indian English drama. It has explored new vistas through reinvestigations into history, legend, myth, folklore and contemporary socio-political issues and has

increased the interest of the foreign countries in Indian English literature in general and Indian English drama in particular. These playwrights have made daring innovations and abundant experiments in terms of both thematic and technical concerns.

The significant trend in post-independence drama is regionalism in theatre specifically in Marathi, Bengali, Kannada and Hindi and dramatists like Dharamvir Bharti, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Mahashweta Devi, and Bibhas Chakrabarty, Girish Karnad, Chandrasekhar Kambar experimented with bold innovations both in terms of themes and techniques. They used folk forms and rejuvenated the language theatre. They have used myth, history, folk legend and religio-centric tradition to comprehend and reflect upon contemporary situations. Indian dramatists writing in English and in regional languages have both amalgamated the orient with the occidental traditions of theatre. Naturalism, realism and existentialism dominated the drama of this period. Modern Indian drama was also deeply influenced by European drama in its questioning of traditional values in religion and culture, a self-consciousness reflection on the fragmented nature of the urban experience, avant-garde movements and an emphasis on experimentation in form and theme. Immediately after independence, Indian dramatists were negotiating with a Eurocentric view of modernism and on the other hand, they were actively engaged in a dialogue with the diverse folk and traditional forms of theatre, still alive and active in many parts of the country. In this regard Aparna Dharwadkar rightly points out that the modern and traditional theatres in India are not necessarily in direct competition with each other because they appear in different locations and fulfill different needs in their audience.

It is essential to take the brief review of the contribution by Major Indian English Dramatists for the development of Indian drama in particular and SAARC drama in general.

Girish Karnad born on 19 May 1938 in Matheran is well known Indian actor, Kannada writer, film director, playwright and a Rhodes Scholar. He had an idea of the challenges which Indian playwrights had to face after independence. It was a healthy time and good circumstances for Indian drama to accomplish huge opportunities and contribute itself in the building of a new nation. Girish Karnad's success lies in the fact that he draws a similarity between ancient times and contemporariness. His plays such as *Yayati*, *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Nagamandal*,

*Tale Danda and Fire and the Rain* are structured on history, myths and legends. He looks at new visions ahead to Indian English Drama. Because of him one can experience Modern Indian English Drama equipped with novel directions to deal with social and individual issues. He discovers the Sanskrit plays worthier to be staged than the plays of Tagore and Aurbindo.

In Karnad's plays, poetry is created combining reality and fantasy together. His plays represent the connecting point at which "dream is simultaneously reality, where the invisible coincides with the visible. Karnad set up a new trend of drawing historical and mythological sources to cope up with the contemporary themes and existentialist crisis of modern man by presenting characters locked in psychological and philosophical clashes. His play *Tughlaq* (1964), is about an unkind, an idealist, Muhammad bin Tughluq 14th-century Sultan of Delhi. This established Karnad, as a young promising playwright of the country.

His another play *Hayavadana* (1971) was based on a theme drawn from *The Transposed Heads*, a 1940 novella by Thomas Mann, which is originally found in the 11th-century Sanskrit text *Kathasaritsagara*. Herein he engaged the folk theatre form of Yakshagana. His play *Naga-Mandala (Play with Cobra)*, 1988 brought him the 'Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award' for the Most Creative Work of 1989. It was directed by J. Garland Wright, as part of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis. The theatre then made to order him to write the play, *Agni Mattu Male (The Fire and the Rain)*. Though before it came *Taledanda (Death by Beheading)*, 1990 which used the backdrop, the rise of Veerashaivism, a radical protest and reform movement in 12th century Karnataka to bring out current issues.

Vijay Tendulkar, born in Mumbai on 6th January 1928, was one of the outstanding Indian playwrights. He started writing at an early age, and has excelled in many areas like essays, short stories, criticism, screenplay writing and drama. He has carved his place as a leading Indian playwright, movie and television script-writer, literary essayist, political journalist, and social commentator primarily in Marathi. Although, initially labelled as a controversial writer, he gradually emerged as an honest artist. His honesty and skill won him reputation and recognition. For the past five decades, Tendulkar has been a highly influential dramatist and theatre personality in Maharashtra.

Tendulkar's play *Kamla* was inspired by a real life incident published in the Indian Express. A person called Ashwin Sarin, actually bought a girl from a rural flesh market and presented at a press conference. Using this incident as a backdrop, Tendulkar has staged value system of modern, success oriented generation who are ready to sacrifice human values in the name of humanity itself. Tendulkar exposes the Chauvinism intrinsic in the modern male who believes himself to be liberal minded.

Like *Kamala*, Tendulkar's *Laxmi* also create an example of gender stereotyping. She is thrown out of her house by her husband, yet she considers him as her God. In portraying the women characters, Tendulkar stands on par with the writers like Mahashweta Devi. He is one of those dramatists who use their medium in the service of their favourite socio-political ideology. He is not out to propagate any particular philosophy of life. Tendulkar's plays are open to diverse interpretation and cannot be tied down to a single line of thinking.

Based on a 1956 short story, *Die Panne (Traps)* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Tendulkar wrote the play, *Shântatâ! Court Châlu Aahe (Silence! The Court Is In Session)*. It was presented on the stage for the first time in 1967, and proved as one of his finest works. The play is a social satire on middle-class society, particularly its treatment of women.

*Ghashiram Kotwal*, deals with political violence. The play is a political satire created as a musical drama set in 18th century Pune. It combined traditional Marathi folk music and drama with contemporary theatre techniques, creating a new paradigm for Marathi theatre. *Ghashiram Kotwal* with over six thousand performances and translated versions remains one of the longest-running plays in the history of Indian theatre.

In his 1972 play, *Sakharam Binder (Sakharam, the Binder)*, Tendulkar dealt with the topic of domination of the male gender over the female gender. Kanyadaan studies a case of spousal abuse and interrogates many of the issues mentioned above concerning this domestic problem and reasons why victims and their relatives allow it to continue.

*Gidhade (The Vultures)*, produced in 1970 and published 1971, was actually written fourteen years before. It was with the production and publication of 152 *Gidhade* that Tendulkar name became associated with sensationalism, sex and

violence conservative section of Maharashtrian society were stunned by the open display of illicit sexual relations and scenes of violence. The play is a ruthless dissection of human nature revealing its inherent tendencies to violence, avarice, selfishness, sensuality and sheer wickedness.

As an experimental playwright, Tendulkar's every play, in its form and structure, is different from the previous one. He picks this complex theme and tackles with a simple form and language.

Badal Sircar Bengali playwright and theatre director, most known for his anti-establishment plays during the Naxalite movement in the 1970s and taking theatre out of the proscenium and into public arena, when he founded his own theatre company, Shatabdi in 1976. He has not only influenced Indian theatre, but also has had a global reach. He wrote more than fifty plays of which *Ebong Indrajit*, *Basi Khabar*, and *Saari Raat* are well known literary pieces. He was a pioneering figure in street theatre as well as in experimental and contemporary Bengali theatre with his egalitarian "Third Theatre". He prolifically wrote scripts for his Aanganmanch (courtyard stage) performances, and remains one of the most translated Indian playwrights. Though his early comedies were popular, it was his angst-ridden *Ebong Indrajit* (Evam Indrajit) that became a landmark play in Indian theatre. Today, his rise as a prominent playwright in 1960s is seen as the coming of age of Modern Indian playwriting in Bengali, just as Vijay Tendulkar did it in Marathi, Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, and Girish Karnad in Kannada.

Though he continued to hold his job till 1975, as a playwright he rose to prominence in the 1970s and was one of the leading figures in the revival of street theatre in Bengal. He revolutionised Bengali theatre with his wrath-ridden, anti-establishment plays during the Naxalite movement. His plays reflected the atrocities that prevailed in the society, the decayed hierarchical system and were socially enlightening.

Mahesh Dattani is the most powerful and potent dramatic voice in the present Indian English dramatic world. He has enriched and embellished tradition of Indian Drama with his experiments and innovations. His plays are, originally, written in English. He has authored a good number of dramas diverse in themes, techniques and devices.

Moreover, his plays have been produced on the stage very successfully. The plays of Mahesh Dattani are characterized by some theatrical and thematic innovations. He has not only intellectual power and ability to produce a play in text but also has an ability to get it staged successfully. His *Where There's a Will* (1988) marks the beginning of his literary career as serious dramatist. It is, first, full length play dealing with mechanics of middle class Gujarati family. The play is a drawing room comedy in which patriarchal male head of the family tries to control his family even after his death through his will. His *Final Solutions*, which bags him Sahitya Academy Award, is a gripping and sensitive play, dealing with communal tension.

In *Bravely Fought the Queen*, *Do the Needful* and *On a Muggy Night* in Mumbai, Dattani presents issues of the same sex love. *Tara* is the most touching three-act stage play by Dattani. The playwright presents arguments against the parents' preference for the male child at the cost of girl child. The play holds much significance in the present time especially when the government and other NGO's are holding programmes and rallies for creating awareness among people against female foeticide. *Dance Like a Man* is also another celebrated play by Dattani. The play depicts conflict between tradition and modernity. *Thirty Days in September* is based on child's sexual abuse and its impact. *The Seven Steps Around the Fire* probes into the lives of eunuch community. It deals with murder mystery.

Habib Tanvir was born in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. In 1955, when he was in his 30s, Habib moved to England, there he trained in Acting at Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) (1955) and in Direction at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (1956). For the next two years, he travelled through Europe, watching various theatre activities. He has produced *Mitti ki Gaadi* a post-London play, based on Shudraka's Sanskrit work, *Mrichakatika*. It became his first important production in Chhattisgarhi. This was the result of the work he had been doing since his return – working with six folk actors from Chhattisgarh. He went on to found “Naya Theatre”, a theatre company in 1959.

His another breakthrough in 1972, with a staging of the play titled *Gaon Ka Naam Sasural*, *Mor Naam Damaad*. This was based on a comic folk tale, where an old man falls in love with a young woman, who eventually elopes with another young man.

By the time he produced his seminal play, *Charandas Chor* in 1975, the technique became popular. This play immediately established a whole new idiom in modern India theatre; whose highlight was Nach – a chorus that provided commentary through song.

His first brush with controversy came about in the 1990s, with his production of a traditional Chhattisgarhi play about religious hypocrisy, *Ponga Pandit*. The play was based on a folk tale and had been created by Chhattisgarhi theatre artists in the 1930s. Though he had been producing it since the sixties, in the changed social climate after the Babri Masjid demolition, the play caused quiet an uproar amongst Hindu fundamentalists, especially the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), whose supporters disrupted many of its shows, and even emptied the auditoriums, yet he continued to show it all over.

### 3.2.3 Check your progress

- Answer the following questions in one word/sentence
  1. What are the common issues of the South Asian Literature?
  2. What is the main purpose of South Asian Literature?
  3. Who set up Sangeet Natak Acadami in 1952?
  4. What is the full form of SAARC?
  5. Who established the theatre company called 'Shatabdi' in 1976?
  6. What is the theme of Hanif Kureshi's screenplay 'My Beautiful Laundrette'?

### 3.3 Mohan Rakesh: Life and Works

Mohan Rakesh was born in 1925 at Amritsar, Lahore in a well-to-do family. His father Karam Chand Guglani, though was a lawyer by profession, had a deep interest in literature, which had influenced Rakesh and contributed in the development of his love for music and literature. His initial name was Madan Mohan Guglani; later he was called as Madan Mohan; and finally he became Mohan Rakesh. When he was sixteen years old, his father died leaving behind a big list of debts. Rakesh and his elder sister then shouldered the responsibility of family. He completed his early education at Amritsar and post graduation in Sanskrit from Lahore. After the

participation of India in 1947, his family moved to Jalandhar, where he had completed his post graduation in Hindi.

Rakesh had seen and experienced the oppressive caste system in India since his childhood. His rebellious attitude towards superstitious beliefs and oppression of the caste system had been shaped with the observations of his grandmother who was very much superstitious and believed in caste. In fact, she had also confined him in the house so that he can remain away from other boys who belonged to lower castes, which opened a door for him to the imaginary world free from all the constrains of the real world of his grandmother. After the post graduation from Hindi, he worked as a teacher in various institutes; but he could not hold his post anywhere because of his straight forward nature and very open views about politics. He began teaching in Elphinstone College, Bombay between 1947 and 1949; then went to Delhi to work as a lecturer in a college; afterwards moved to Shimla to work as a teacher in school; and then returned again to Jalandhar to continue teaching there. He had also worked as an editor for 'Sarika', a Hindi journal between 1962 and 1963; but left it early for he did not like the discipline of the journal and the deadline in which he has to complete the work.

Besides his wanderings in the professional life, his personal life was also very much disturbed. In the early phase of life, he was forced to live on his own as he refused to follow discipline of the family introduced by his grandmother. In 1950, he married to a girl whom he met twice before the marriage. It was an arrange marriage, so later he realized that his wife is too much egoistic and feels proud because she used to earn more than her husband. After the couple of years, he convinced his wife for divorce and they separated. In 1960, he married to a sister of one of his close friends; however, he was not much acquainted with her before the marriage. Within a short period of time, he experienced the erratic behavior of his wife who was very short tempered. In search of the satisfaction, he shifted to the office of Sarika journal, but he could not stay there because his wife created a scene in the office. Once again he decided to break off from the wedlock, which established his reputation as a home breaker. Finally he married to a girl named Anita who accompanied him till his death in 1972.

Rakesh began writing from 1957 and since then, he had experimented with various styles and different genres, which include short stories, novels, plays, anthologies of essays, biographies, memoirs and travelogues, etc. Though he tried his

hands in several genres, it was drama that made him popular in Hindi Literary circle, leading him to be credited with several awards for the innovative contribution in the field. He won 'Sangeet Natak Akademi Award' for his play *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* (1958) in the category of best play. His other plays are *Lehron ke Rajhans* (1963), *Aadhe Adhure* (1969), *Pair Tale ki Zameen* and *Kuch aur Samagri* which led him to be second time winner of 'Sangeet Natak Akademi Award' in 1968. He had also won Nehru Fellowship to carry out his research on 'The Dramatic Word,' but while doing his research.

The theatrical scene in Hindi was not so vibrant as in Bengali, Marathi and Kannada but Mohan Rakesh whose first play *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* followed by *Lehron Ke Rajhans* in 1963 also made waves. Mohan Rakesh humanizes the legendary characters and approach which the early audiences found difficult to accept. But his plays were a step ahead in the process of realistic presentations and meaningful debates about human values. These two plays raised questions of the contemporary life. *Aadhe Adhure* moves away from the kind of work Badal Sircar, Tendulkar and Karnad were doing at that time. The play carries an inbuilt sense of incompleteness and fluidity to support its title and theme and reinforces them through the dramatic strategy. The play dramatises incompleteness of man at multiple level through the gap between the dream world and the actual world.

His play *Aashadh Ka Ek Din* deals with man woman relationship and dramatises separation of Kalidas from Mallika. A feature film based on the play was directed by Mani Kaul and released in 1971. It won Filmfare Critics Award for Best Movie for the year. The title of the play derived from Kalidas's play *Meghdut*. *Lahron Ke Rajhans* is another notable play of Mohan Rakesh which is about an ancient Buddhist tale on the renunciation of the Buddha. It was written in the form of Short Story and later turned into a radio play for All India Radio Jalandhar, and broadcast under the title *Sundri*.

He died in December, 1972 at the age of forty-seven.

### 3.3.1 Check your Progress

A. Answer the following question in one word/sentence

1. What is the source of for the play Aashadh ka Ek Din?
2. What is the central theme of the play Lahron Ke Rajhans ?

3. Why did Mohan Rakesh left 'Sarika' journal ?
4. For what did Mohan Rakash receive the Nehru Fellowship?
5. What is the name of Radio version of the play *Lahron Ke Rajhans*?

### **3.4 Summary of the play Halfway House**

#### **3.4.1 Act I:**

The play *Halfway House* is written in two acts with a separate prologue to it. The first act of the play opens with Savitri, an attractive young woman in a cotton sari and choli, who carries parcels with her. When she enters, she seems to be very tired and exasperated. She finds the living room in disorder, but there are no traces of any of the family member. A pair of the pyjamas is kept on the chair, a school bag is placed on the tea-pot, the pictures of Hollywood actresses are scattered on the sofa – all of which gives impression that other members are in the home, but no one is responsible and cares for the house. She takes the pyjamas and begins to fold them, while Mahendra Nath enters, who is surprised at the early return of his wife. The initial conversation between them reveals that Savitri is a dominating person in the house who asks her husband that where he was and what he was doing outside the house. He replies that he has gone to the market; he realizes that his wife is irritated because of the mess in house, hence he submits to help her in arranging the house. He folds the pyjamas and places them on its place. Meanwhile Savitri notices the empty tea-cups on the tea-pot and asks him further questions whether there was any guest in the afternoon; but he says that he himself had those cups of tea. However, once more she is irritated with the answer of her husband as he does not do anything except taking excessive tea.

Savitri asks her husband Mahendra Nath about their daughter Kinni who has returned from the school which is witnessed with the school bag on the tea-pot. She also asks whether he has given her a cup of milk; but he says that he has neither seen her since she has returned nor known where their son Ashok is because he himself was out of the house. Then she tells him that Singhanian is going to visit them this evening. Though Mahendra Nath never objected over the regular visits of Singhanian, he does not like it. He arranges to get out to the market so that Singhanian and his wife could get freedom. She offers him a cup of tea while he has begun reading a newspaper. She asks him to stay in the house, but he says that he needs to meet

Juneja and her husband who have returned from abroad. It is very important for him as he might get a chance to start a new business. Yet she expresses regret over her husband's intention as in the current business she finds no hopes of success for her husband, and, on the contrary, Juneja gets benefit even if the factory is in loss. He tries to explain that he has withdrawn his invested share, which he used to shoulder the responsibilities of the house. She is not satisfied with the explanations as she knows that he has spent all the money in the drinking parties which unnecessarily he hosted for his friends. They continue to blame each other which reveal so many things in the household – including the cause of Singhania's frequent visits. She invites him so that he can provide an opportunity to Ashok to join somewhere.

Binni enters in the house when Savitri and Mahendra Nath were quarreling with each other that make both the husband and wife to disperse from the scene. When Binni goes to take a bath, they both begin to discuss about the married life of their daughter who is now regular visitor to her parent's house. They sense something wrong about the married life of Binni as this time she even does not have money to travel in rickshaw. Binni has eloped with Manoj therefore Savitri wants to know whether there is any problem in the relationships of Binni and Manoj or they are suffering with the financial crisis. When Savitri forces Binni to tell the reason of her frequent visits to them, she replies that she does not behave naturally because she is unable to take off the impressions of her parent's house.

Binni's reply causes to break once again the quarrel between Savitri and Mahendra Nath as Mahendra Nath blames Savitri for the disturbances in Binni's life. To avoid further remarks he tells Savitri that Jagmohan has been transferred again to Delhi. Savitri poses Binni that Manoj was aware about the environment of the house before marriage, then why he accepted her even after his awareness about Binni's background. Binni becomes upset who then tells that she intends to do job but Manoj does not allow her to do it. Hence, she returned to her mother's house so that she may find the real cause which is preventing her to step in the world. Meanwhile, Kinni enters who is still in the school uniform. She is surprised to see her parents and sister in the house as when she has returned from the school, no one was in the house. She intends to know what is happening there and then demands for a cup of milk which Mahendra gives her. She then complains about the skeins of threads, sets of uniform and socks. She also declares that she would behave like her brother

Ashok whom she calls as a Shoki and will not go to school. Mahendra exits to the courtyard leaving behind his two daughters and wife to argue.

Savitri involves herself in arranging the house for the coming guest. Binni asks her mother that why she has to do this and comes forward to help her in arranging the house. After some time Mahendra returns with two slices of toast, places it in a plate near glass of milk, and begins to search a file of Juneja which he takes out from the book case. At this time, Kinni enters crying as Ashok pulled her hair while she tried to wake him up from his sleep. Following Kinni, Ashok enters in the room. His unshaved face and torn shirt gives the impression of his ridiculous mood. Binni scolds him for his reckless behavior with Kinni as she is now grown up and conscious of sex. He accepts his mistake and tells that he should have snatched the book *The Memoir's of Cosanova*; and actually he should have kept it under his pillow so that she could not have it.

Mahendra Nath expresses his grief as no one in the house treats him respectfully. In fact, his existence is not significant and he is treated as somebody else other than a family member. His irresponsible behavior leads Savitri to take the control of whole house, who then begins to invite different men to support the family's financial needs. He craves from within as he understands that he has lost everything which man needs to live in the society. After the shouting of Mahendra, Kinni eats a piece of charcoal which she immediately spits out and runs away from the house. Binni tries to catch her but she runs away quickly. Ashok wants to bring her back but Savitri prevents him to do so as Singhanian is going to come shortly. Savitri explains Ashok that she has invited Singhanian only for the sake of Ashok; but Ashok replies that he will not accept a job given by Singhanian. Binni asks him reasons and he tells that Singhanian is mannerless man. Ashok begins to argue with Savitri over the matter of Singhanian.

Singhanian, who is addressed as a second man in the play, enters in a Nehru jacket and trousers. Savitri welcomes him and introduces to Binni. He enquires about her college but Savitri tells that she has been no longer in the college. Binni asks for tea but he refuses and gives a long lecture over it referring to an article published in 'Readers Digest'. Ashok is annoyed with the irrelevant speeches of Singhanian and wants to go out but Savitri presses him to stay there. Singhanian tells that job is ready and asks Ashok about his education which shows his own confusion about education and other fields. Ashok prefers to remain silent to the questions of Singhanian, but

when he finds that he is taking interest in Binni and further insisting Savitri to his house, he refers to the insect and tries to squash it.

Singhania leaves the house and Savitri goes to see off him, but soon returns for the help of Ashok as Singhania's car does not start. Meanwhile Ashok has sketched a picture of Singhania in the form of monster. When he goes out to help Singhania, Binni shows it to Savitri. She asks Ashok about the sketch; and he tells that Singhania is a monster and she should have to think about Mahendra Nath before inviting men like Singhania. Sivitri tells that whatever she did was all for the sake of her family and Binni also supports her, but Ashok firmly refuses to accept it. Savitri realizes that the situation is against her and tells that hereafter she will not take any responsibility of the house. The act ends with the realization of Savitri that whatever she was doing in the name of welfare of the family was all incorrect.

### **3.4.2 Check your progress**

- 1) Why does Savitri invite Singhania at her home?
- 2) With whom Binni ran away?
- 3) Where did Jagmohan transfer again?
- 4) Why does Binni scold Ashok?
- 5) Who is addressed as a second man in the play?
- 6) Who gives a long lecture over tea with reference to an article in 'The Reader's Digest'?

### **3.4.3 Act II**

The opening of the second act once again puts forth the family tragedy where there is no harmony between the family members. The front room is in disorder – the room is scattered, the furniture including dining table, sofa, tea-pot and other furniture is dingy, clothes have been dispersed here and there, and other things are in disarray – which gives the impression that the place is not worth to live in. As the act commences, Binni is busy to butter the slices of bread while Ashok is playing the cards himself on the sofa. As Binni is unable to open the jar of cheese, she asks Ashok for help but denies. On the contrary he asks her why she had told him to buy it and tells her that he has purchased it on the credit. It reveals that probably Savitri has not given money to the basic family needs and other members have to help

themselves. Ashok also tells Binni that he called uncle Juneja who will visit them shortly, but she is disappointed as she does not like him. When she begins to prepare sandwiches for her parents, Ashok tells that Juneja likes sandwiches. So she asks him whether uncle Juneja is coming to meet them and Ashok replies that he is coming to meet Savitri. Both Binni and Ashok know that Savitri is disappointed and went to office in a festive sari which gives them a clue that there may be a special occasion in the office.

Ashok takes the cheese pot to open but he is unable hence asks for the sharp instrument. Binni tells him that she does not know such weapons as she now feels as if stranger in the house. So he asks about her feelings before the marriage, but she chooses to remain silent. She then says that perhaps their mother will go somewhere after the office that refers to the immoral relations their mother has with different men. Ashok points out the strange environment in the house which cannot be discussed openly and asks Binni when she does realize this strangeness in the house. Binni is shocked with the question and begins to tremble which is reflected through her shaking of hands while opening the jar. Ashok goes out to get sharp instrument to open the jar leaving alone Binni in the room who reveals her inner feeling in the soliloquy. When she notices Kinni, she shouts for her as she bunked the school and is roaming whole day. Meanwhile Ashok enters dragging Kinni, who tried to run away and places the opened cheese pot in Binni's hands. Binni questions Kinni about her conversation with Surekha. Ashok tells Binni that he has heard Kinni was telling something to Surekha. Kinni says that Ashok beats her whenever she intends to give gifts to her girlfriends and tells that he has given a pen to his girlfriend Varna. She then runs away quickly, Ashok tried to catch her but meantime Savitri enters and he stops.

Savitri enters with number of parcels which she put on the chair. She is disappointed and when Binni gives her tomato tea, she has not shown any interest in it. When Binni exits to the kitchen, she observes the disordered room, but this time she does not showed any inconvenience about it. Binni tells her that there is no tea powder in the house but she tells that she is going out with Jagmohan. When Binni tells her that uncle Juneja is coming to meet her, she says that Ashok has called her to inform about Juneja, but she will not remain in the house. She also informs Binni to do not disclose Juneja about Jagmohan. Binni expresses the fear that if her father comes to know about it, but she tells that she is not going to make any misdeed. She

is going to have a cup of tea with Jagmohan and she has to discuss something important with him. Meanwhile Ashok enters and tells them that he is going out.

Savitri tells Binni that when she next time visits the house, she will not find her mother there which shocks her. She asks Binni to go inside as Jagmohan is coming to take her and begins to mutter about the situation in the house. She finds the signs of age on her face, but she is still very attractive. Now the third man Jagmohan enters in a sports shirt and trousers making rings of smoke in the air and holding a packet of cigarette in his hands. As Savitri does not pay any attention to him and as he finds her alone, he greets her “Hello cuckoo.” She extends her hand to show him love but soon withdraws saying that Binni is in. Jagmohan wishes to get in another room but she forces him to go out as early as possible so that they can avoid another guest coming to the house. Meanwhile Binni enters and Jagmohan is surprised to see the grown up Binni as he has not seen her for many years. He talks about how lovely she was when she was a child, but Savitri expresses the sorrow that now she is trapped in an unpleasant marriage. Savitri then leaves a message that she will be late and exits with Jagmohan.

Kinni enters crying and tells Binni that Surekha’s mother has beaten Surekha for being friend with Kinni. She also tells that Surekha’s mother has blamed her and said that she is ruining the life of her daughter. She further reveals that she was commenting about Binni, Savitri, Ashok and Mahendra Nath. Binni tells her that their mother is out so she requests to accompany her to the house of Surekha, but Binni denies. Hence, Kinni taunts her and starts crying; meanwhile someone knocks at the door and Kinni starts crying continuously supposing it is her mother, but Juneja, the fourth man, enters wearing an old fashioned coat and trousers. He asks Kinni the reason of her crying but she runs away saying that she will not return until her mother returns.

Binni is alone in the company of Juneja who tells her that he has come earlier but returned as he discovered a new Indica car in front of the house. She asks her if Jagmohan had come, but Binni tells that she does not know who it was. He then tells her that he met Ashok on the bus stand who was in the miserable condition and supposes himself responsible for it. He knows that Savitri and Jagmohan have gone out in the car. Binni gives him tea with no sugar and no milk and offers sandwiches which he denies as he does not like it. She sits with him and asks about various things but he has come to meet Savitri therefore gives short answers to her enquiries.

She requests him to talk to her father about her mother, but he knows that Mahendra loves blindly to Savitri and therefore he will not listen to his advice. However, Binni is unable to believe in Juneja as she has always seen her parents quarreling – frequently turning it in chaos and Mahendra’s beating to his wife. But Juneja says that Mahendra confessed his love for Savitri to him several times. He also blames Mahendra for the chaotic situation of the house they are facing at this time. When he decides to go, Binni requests him to tell her father at least about Jagmohan; but he says that nothing can be done as a forever solution to this problem.

Meanwhile Savitri’s voice is heard who was talking to Kinni outside. In fact, Kinni intends to take her to Savitri’s house so that she can explain all her blames, but she denies and enters. At her arrival, Juneja wants to leave, but Savitri tells him that he has been there to speak with her. Initially he says that he prefers to do not speak as she is not in the mood, but when she tells him that she is normal, he tells her to set Mahendra free from her trap because he has lost himself and she is responsible for his destructions. However, she begins to blame Juneja as it is the friends of Mahendra who have destroyed him. After marriage, they called him as a puppet in the hands of his wife and make fun of him. She wanted a man in the house, but he behaves miserably. She also talks the way he has been ruined in the partnership and lost all his shares. Juneja in turn sweeps all arguments of Savitri and blames her for being disloyal to him. He says that Mahendra is similar to other men except one defect. When she realizes that Juneja is speaking something different, she asks Binni to go to another room, but he stops Binni as she has heard only half part explaining her mother and now he is going to expose another half part of her life. Unwillingly Savitri permits Binni to stay there. Juneja says that Savitri does not find satisfaction with any man she meets. She initially loved Juneja for his wealth, then shifted her attention to Shivajeet for his university degree and abroad trips, afterwards attracted towards Jagmohan for his excellent contacts. Any man in the place of Mahendra would not have satisfied her hunger of sex and money. Further, he also reveals that she has extramarital relations with Manoj, who has run away with Binni. Even after the marriage of Binni, Manoj continued his affair with Savitri.

Manoj’s elopement with Binni makes Savitri desperate and she acts as frenzy for some time. When she finds all doors shut, she turned again to Jagmohan. Perhaps Juneja has heard the conversation between Savitri and Jagmohan. Now Savitri is speechless and only listens to Juneja who speaks with confidence. It seems that

whatever Juneja spoke is all true. He remarks that she has not left any other option to Mahendra except to live with her. At the outside Kinni is calling so that they can open the door but no one seems to dare to open the door. The desperate Savitri finally shouts to take Mahendra away from her. Juneja says that he will set him free from her trap; he is attached to her but not so much attached and can be taken away from her.

Meanwhile Ashok enters and without giving the attention to the happenings in the room asks for the walking stick which is taken by Kinni to lock the door from inside. He informs the present members that Mahendra is not well and he needs that walking stick but Kinni unaware of the situation refuses to give it. Listening to the condition of Mahendra, Juneja feels very sad and Savitri is frozen in her place. Ashok senses someone's arrival at the outside and is sure that it is his father. He rushes out to support him and after him runs Juneja. In the end of the act, Mahendra Nath enters with the support of Ashok.

#### **3.4.4 Check your progress:**

1. Which gift does Ashok give to his girlfriend Varna?
2. What does Binni offer Savitri when she returned from the office?
3. Where does Kinni intend to take Savitri?
4. Whom did Savitri love for his university degree and abroad trips?
5. With whom Binni runs away from the house?

### **3.5 Major/Minor Characters:**

#### **1. Savitri:**

Savitri is the central character in the play. She is very beautiful and attractive, and her beauty and provocative figure does not reveal her real age. She works in an office but it is not clear whether she got the job before marriage or after it. She is forty years old but still looks young. She is married to Mahendra Nath and has three children – one son and two daughters. She carries all responsibilities of the household on her shoulders and therefore she has all the control of her family. However, she is very much irritated in the opening of the play as she notices the entire house in mess. Her initial conversation with her husband reveals that she cares for her family. She asks him about his daughter who has returned from the school.

But she does not give respect to her husband. According to her, he is idler who only sips cups of tea one after another without doing any work.

She has extramarital affairs with number of men including the friends of her husband. She says that she has to bear this only for the wellbeing of the family. When she returns from the office, she informs her husband that her boss Singhanian is going to visit them. In fact, she has invited him to the house so that she can arrange for a job to their son Ashok. Her husband Mahendra Nath, though objects to Singhanian, prepares himself so that his wife can get enough freedom with the guest. However, this is not very true because under the covers of well being of the family, she satisfies her hunger. She is highly ambitious woman with great expectations. She says that she wants a man and not a hanger on it. Her views of man include various qualities such as strength, manhood, status, social influence and bank balance. Such approach of her makes her a tragic person in the play. She knows that Mahendra Nath has a defect and even though married him so that she can get enough freedom to satisfy her desires. She was initially in love with Juneja because she loved his wealth. Then she turned towards Shivajeet, a university degree holder who is occasionally in trip on abroad. Then she shifted her attention to Jagmohan, Singhanian, Manoj, and again to Jagmohan.

Savitri has led the family to such a path that all becomes dependant on her. They have not money even to buy tea powder. She always tells her children that she has to do everything for the family. But when Juneja enters and reveals her mistakes, it is seen that she is the destructive figure in the family. Her control over the lives of family members and especially on her husband is so much. Her husband is desperate, her daughter Binni is not satisfied in her married life, Ashok is devastated, and Kinni is disturbed only because Savitri has chosen a different path of the life. Thus, the play seems to revolve around all these tragic events in the life of Savitri.

## **2. Mahendra Nath:**

Mahendra Nath is husband of Savitri and head of the family who does not earn the bread for them. He is totally controlled by his wife, Savitri after he lost everything in the factory. When the play opens, he is near about fifty year old person with no job except to wander in the market. His submission to his wife's statements and the attitude to avoid arguments show his realization of no dignity in the house. In fact, he feels as if other in his own family. When Binni returns to the house, he

suspects about something wrong in her married life and asks Savitri about it but she forces him to remain away from her married life. Though he is not satisfied with the answers of his wife, he knows that he cannot do anything except obeying his wife, the only earning member in the family. When his wife tells him that her boss is coming to visit her, he prepares to get out and tells that he does not like the visits of men like Singania. Savitri tells him that he should have to object such men but instead he goes out, which shows that he does not have manhood qualities.

Mahendra Nath's friend Juneja presents his plight in front of the spectators when he is involved in the arguments with Savitri. He says that Mahendra is in the traps of Savitri and asks her to free him so that he can live his own life. He points out how he has been destroyed by her. Here Savitri points out that he is not even a half man which points out a defect in his manhood qualities. Savitri expected strength, valour, wealth which he could not give her hence she turned to other men. In the end of the play he is shown too weak to walk on his own revealing the entire destructions of life.

### **3. Binni:**

Binni is a twenty year old daughter of Mahendra Nath and Savitri. She has eloped with Manoj who used to be regular visitor to her house; but after marriage she returns to the house of her parents that shows her dejections in the marriage. When she returns in the opening of the play, she has no money even to pay for the scooter rickshaw. When Mahendra Nath is surprised to see her again and again in the house and suspects that there is something wrong in her married life. As she comes out of the bathroom, Savitri asks her whether Manoj is unfaithful to her or they have no money, she replies shockingly that it is the air of her parent's house that disturbs her. It shows clearly that she has been affected by the extramarital affairs of her mother. She also likes to behave in the same way as her mother; hence, she wants to do a job which up course Manoj rejects.

Binni shivers when Ashok asks her when she has sensed the strange atmosphere in the house. It reveals the intensity of her high desires – she also wants to indulge with different men and therefore she wants to do a job somewhere so that she can easily find the partners. When Ashok criticizes Savitri for her immoral behavior, Binni takes the side of her mother. Even when Juneja blames Savitri for destroying

the life of Mahendra Nath, she takes the side of her mother. All these things reveal her passions for different men in the life.

#### **4. Ashok:**

Ashok is the twenty one year old son of Mahendra Nath and Savitri, who has failed in his final examinations of B. Sc. He has no intention to complete his education, instead he wanders the whole day and goes after the girls to fulfill his sexual desires. All the day he either sleeps or cuts the pictures of actress, doing nothing. He never gives respects to the elders and has no emotional feelings either towards his parents or towards his sisters. His mother takes efforts to arrange a job for him in the Air Freeze company but he failed to continue his job.

Ashok is aware about the misconduct of his mother and when he gets an opportunity, he speaks against her. He blames her for destroying the life of his father. He does not like Singhanian in his house and when Singhanian enquires about his education he prefers to remain silent. In fact, to get Singhanian out from his house, he keeps talking about squeezing an insect so that indirectly he can insult him. In the second act, when Juneja informs Binni that he has seen Ashok on the bus stand going after his father, he seems to leave the house like his father in order to avoid the responsibility of the house. Even Binni scolds him for his reckless behavior in the house which is affecting Kinni.

#### **5. Kinni:**

Kinni is the thirteen year old daughter of Mahendra Nath and Savitri. As soon as she comes to the house from the school, she rushes off to roam locally as there was no one in the house. When she returns, she is surprised to see her parents and sister together and senses that something is going on there. She wants to know about it but then diverts her attention towards her school things and begins to complain about it. She is conscious of the environment in the house and is interested in the sexual talks with her friend Surekha. When Surekha's mother discovered that Surekha and Kinni are talking about sex and the related activities between men and women, she whips Surekha and scolds Kinni for such a talk with her. She even blames her family for being careless and immoral. So Kinni wants to take her mother to the house of Surekha so that she can explain the situation to Surekha's mother. When Savitri refuses to go along with her, she locks herself in the room with the walking stick and refuses to give it to Ashok who wants it to help his father.

## **6. Juneja:**

Juneja is the former partner and friend of Mahendra Nath. He is first time referred in the first act when Mahendra reveal to his wife that he is going to meet Juneja and will not be at home when Singhania arrives. Savitri is very much angry over the reference of Juneja as she supposes Juneja as the responsible for her husband's entire loss in the factory. But Mahendra tells her that it is important to meet him as there are chances of starting a new business. In the end of the play Juneja appears wearing a coat and formal trouser. He has come earlier to the house but when he finds someone's car in front of the house, he returned. After Savitri has gone with Jagmohan, he entered in the house where Binni was alone. When Binni asks him about the general happenings, he prefers to answer shortly as he has been there with a special purpose and intended to talk with Savitri. As he gets up to walk out, he listens Savitri's voice and when she enters, he prepares to go but Savitri stops him. He says that she is not in the mood and therefore he will not talk but when she reveals that she is normal, he speaks with her and asks to set free Mahendra from her trap. The quarrel between them begins and Savitri continues to blame him for destroying the life of her husband and making fun of him in their friend circle. She blames him for calling Mahendra as puppet and ruining him in the business. But he sweeps all the attacks of Savitri and blames her for devastating condition of his friend. He says that she is unsatisfied woman who has changed her objects constantly to fulfill her sexual desires. He shows the mistakes of Savitri which were not necessary at all and it is those unnecessary demands and expectations which led the entire family to suffer tragically.

## **7. Singhania:**

He is boss of Savitri and a frequent guest in her house. He is charming persons and tries to win Savitri for sexual pleasure, so he provides all the facilities in the office as well as in her personal life. Neither Mahendra nor Ashok likes his presence in the house. But Mahendra keeps silence and whenever Singhania comes, he goes out so that his wife and Singhania can get freedom. Savitri tells Ashok that she has purposefully invited Singhania so that he can arrange a job for Ashok. Ashok tells her that he does not like a job arranged by Singhania, which begins a quarrel between them.

Singhania enters wearing a Nehru Jacket and trouser and receives a welcome from Savitri. She introduces him to her daughter Binni. Then he keeps talking with Binni and attempts to impress her. He begins to talk about his several visits to the foreign countries and other irrelevant things which may impress her. He even asks Ashok irrelevant questions so that he can impress Binni. He promises her that he will help her whenever she needs. Irritated Ashok insults him indirectly and he leaves the house. But while going, he invites Savitri in his bungalow so that they can have their time. Thus, he is a man with low character and confused mind.

#### **8. Jagmohan:**

Jagmohan is described as the third man in the life of Savitri and it seems that he loves her whole heartedly. He entered in the life of Savitri as a replacement to Juneja and whenever he visits her in her house, Mahendra goes out in order to provide enough privacy to them. He is referred in the first act when Mahendra tells Savitri that Jagmohan is transferred to Delhi once again and he appears in the final act for short period. He is a smart person and appears in sports shirt and trousers. He makes rings of smoke in the air and holds a packet of cigarette in his hands. As Savitri does not pay any attention to him and as he finds her alone, he greets her as “Hello cuckoo.” She extends her hand to show him love but soon withdraws saying that Binni is in. Jagmohan wishes to get in another room but she forces him to go out as early as possible so that they can avoid Juneja who is coming to the house. Perhaps she has decided to move with Jagmohan forever so she tells Binni that when next time she visits the house she will not find her mother there. When Mahendra told her about the transfer of Jagmohan, she immediately calls him and determines to shift with him. Hence, when Jagmohan appears, she convinces him to take her out so that she can discuss her plan. So he takes her out and after some time drops her to the house.

### **3.6 Critical Aspects in the Play**

#### **1. The play *Halfway House* as a Family Tragedy:**

The play *Halfway House* portrays the tragedy of a middle-class family which has experienced degradation from the upper middle class life to a lower-class life as well as a life from dignity to ignominy. The house shows the signs of their aristocratic life including a sofa-set, dining-table, writing-table and refrigerator. At numbers of the occasions both husband and wife blame one another for being

spendthrift and being ruined either by their friends or by themselves. Since the loss in the factory, the family inclined to ruin themselves. Mahendra Nath takes out all his shares and spends the money on the family needs and in the unnecessary drinking parties which he himself hosted. Since the loss, he has been jobless and merely spends time wandering aimlessly in the nearby market. He feels that there is no respect for him in the family and he is merely other to his wife and children. He tolerates the extramarital relations of his wife as he has a defect. As he is unable to take care of the family and complete their desires, Savitri is forced to shoulder the responsibilities of the household but her salary fails to all the requirements either of the family or her own. She is attracted towards the fashionable life and hence she is involved in the extramarital relations with wealthy men like Singhanian, Juneja, Jagmohan. She does not want only the wealth but also wants man's strength so she sets the trap for Manoj so that he can complete her sexual desires. When Manoj elopes with her daughter, she seems to be in frenzy mood but then is adjusted with the transfer of Jagmohan.

Ashok the elder son in the family is failed to pass the final year examination of B. Sc. and is dropped out as he does not wish to continue his further studies. He is cynical, rude and never respects the elders. He steals his younger sister's trinkets in order to give present to his girlfriend so his mother accuses of it. His mother arranges a job for him in Air Freeze but he is unable to do it that shows his recklessness. Binni, the elder daughter, has eloped with a man who has sexual relations with her mother. Though she is not aware of it, she keeps coming to the house so that she can find a cause of her unhappiness. She is unable to come out of the impressions of her mother and when Ashok and later Juneja accuses Savitri, she takes her mother's side that shows her desires for strange men like her mother. Kinni, the thirteen years old girl is conscious of the sex and all the activities between adults. She is rude and unable to resist her desires. So the whole family is trapped in the mess like their room which is every time in disorder.

## **2. The place of women in the Indian society:**

The women in the Indian society are limited only to the household work and they cannot have the freedom to act as per their wishes. In the play *Halfway House*, the prologue reveals that if the family would be different, the entire situation would have been different but the family presented in the play is surrounded by the circumstances in such a way that there is no possible alternative except the way they

behaved in response to the questions of their lives. It is in fact a declaration of the Man in Black Suit that no one can be supposed responsible for the family tragedy. However, most of the times the critical comments reveal that it is Savitri and subsequently the women who are responsible for the destructions of the family. It is expected that a woman should not live a free life and should have to follow the codes of the society every time. Though she earns money, she cannot be supposed as the head of the family. Mohan Rakesh gives freedom to Savitri only to demonstrate immoralities of the situation and imbalances in the character of Savitri. She is object of sex for every high profile man and she understands it perfectly. Therefore, she exchanges her body to fulfill the desires of her family. When she stops giving money, the family even does not have money to buy tea powder. But in the end of the play, she is blamed for the destruction of not only her husband but also the lives of Binni, Kinni and Ashok. Thus the play presents the picture of anti-women attitude.

### **3. Search for Meaning and Identity:**

The play *Halfway House* demonstrates crisis of identity and communication gap leading to ruin the human relations finally resulting in the collapse of total family. It pasteurizes the broken persons in a fragmented society who are devastated as they failed to cope up with situations in their lives. The play begins with the existential anguishes raising the question of identity as the Man in Black asks 'Who am I?' Further the existential crisis is evident as the narrator says that he has stopped searching the answer of the question. In fact, he intends to remain unidentified because he is aware about the absurdity of the life. This awareness of the absurdity in the life is witnessed in the characters of the play who are continuously engaged in the search of meaning to their lives.

Savitri searches the meaning to her life in the marriage but after the marriage she realized that her husband is unable to satisfy her desires; hence, she starts extramarital relations where she can get the satisfaction she has been searching. Though her existential anguish is ignited with the sexual satisfaction, it cannot be accepted in the Indian society where the codes of conduct are very much important. She is impressed with the power, affluence and sense of reason exhibited by Juneja, but then shifts her attention to Shivjeet as she finds him intelligent and frequently going abroad. Her attraction towards Jagmohan is due to his understanding nature and elite life-style. Thus, her shifting from one man to another indicates her inner search for the perfect partner which she is unable to find in anyone else she has met.

Her words to Binni when she tells her that Binni will not find her in the house when she will visit them next time indicate that she has determined to move away in search of meaning to her life.

Her husband Mahendra Nath is also trapped in the existential anguishes, who feels that there is no meaning to his life at all. He realizes that there is no one in the house who gives respects to him – neither as a husband not as a father. He has lost his identity with the financial crisis he experiences after the loss in factory. His realization of meaningless life leads him to search identity in new relations where, as he hopes, can find some satisfaction to his restlessness. Hence, he determined to meet his old friend Juneja even when his wife blames him for ruining her husband. In the similar way Ashok and Kinni are craving for the meaning to their lives in their own way. Ashok seeks meaning to his life in the physical pleasures wandering here and there doing nothing. He fails to make contact with the real world which is witnessed in his failures in exam as well as in job at Air Freeze. Kinni tries to find identity in her awareness about sexual pleasures and when Surekha's mother scolds her, she seems to be very disturbed and wants to take her mother to her house. Even Binni is not satisfied in her married life and returns to her parent's house so that she can find out that missing element which is preventing her from the satisfactions of the life.

### **3.7 Answers to check your progress**

#### **3.2.3**

1. Multiculturalism, multiethnicism, and multilingualism
2. Explore the native history since the colonial period and strengthen the native tradition
3. National School of Drama
4. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
5. Badal Sircar
6. Hanif Kureshi screenplay *My Beautiful Loundrette* deals with theme of unemployment and racism in Britain

#### **3.3.1**

1. Kalidasa's play *Meghdut*.

2. An ancient Buddhist tale on the renunciation of the Buddha.
3. He did not like the discipline of the journal and the deadline in which he has to complete the work.
4. To carry out his research on 'The Dramatic Word'.
5. Sundri

#### 3.4.2

1. So that he can arrange a job for Ashok.
2. Manoj
3. Delhi
4. As Kinni was reading The Memoir's of Cosanova
5. Sinhganja
6. Sinhganja

#### 3.4.4

1. Pen
2. Tomato tea
3. To the house of Surekha
4. Shivajeet
5. Manoj

### 3.8 Exercises:

- A. Answer the following questions in 200-250 words.
1. Elucidate *Halfway House* as a family tragedy.
  2. Critically comment on the place of women in Indian society with reference to *Halfway House*.
  3. Explore existential anguishes represented in the play *Halfway House*.
  4. Write the development of plot in the play *Halfway House*.
  5. Comment on the man-woman relationships represented in the play *Halfway House*.

6. Sketch the character of Savitri
- B. Write short notes in about 150-200 words.
1. Mahendra Nath
  2. Binni
  3. Ashok
  4. Juneja
  5. Jagmohan

### **3.9 Further reading**

Rakesh, Mohan. *Halfway House*. India: Worldview Publication, 1971. Print.

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## Unit-4

### Trends in Poetry of SAARC Countries Selected Poets from *Anthology of Commonwealth Poetry* - ed by - C. D. Narasimhaiah

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Terms to Remember

Check Your Progress

4.4 Self Assessment Questions

4.5 Key to Check Your Progress

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## **4.0 Objectives:**

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- understand the literary scenario in South Asia
- find similarities and differences in the literary tradition of the countries in the region prescribed
- salient features of South Asian poetry
- know the life and works of the poets prescribed
- analyze and appreciate poetry in general
- To understand the central ideas and themes in the prescribed poet

## **4.1 Introduction:**

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the regional intergovernmental Organizations and geopolitical union of nations in South Asia. The countries that belong to this association are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It was founded on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1985 in Dhaka. The organization promotes development of economic and Regional Integration. These SAARC nations have something in common. They are adjacent to each other and share cultural similarities. Languages of some nations are being spoken in some other nations. The food habits, lifestyle, geography, ancestral history, culture are some of the area where these nations can found some similarities. These things are reflected in the literature of the countries. We find the common subject related to society, cultural aspirations, problems of women and children reflected in novel, plays and poetry of these nations. The history also cannot be neglected. Some of the nations were ruled over by British, French or Portuguese colonies. The history of freedom movement, persecution of the common people by the upper caste people and the colonizers had also got special place in the literature of that time.

## **4.2 Development and trends in SAARC Poetry:**

South Asia is known as the home of world's best epic stories and poems which is an integral part of culture through the centuries. Poetry is one of the major sub genres of south Asian literature. South Asian poetry in English began in early nineteen century in the Indian subcontinent. South Asian poetry in English represents

the transnational and specific national paradigms. To study the transnational paradigm of south Asian poetry in English it is important to study the south Asian Diaspora spread in the world. It is worth noted that the use of English by South Asian writer has opened the doors to the western culture and from 19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards. Indian culture has become hybridized. The hybridization has made the poetry of South Asia stylistically and thematically multivalent. The writers of South Asia have strong connections with the west, and that is why their writings reflect traditions.

The themes of South Asian poetry mostly revolve around **Politics, Power-dynamics, Social factors, homesickness, sufferings of the natives, oppression, suppression, identity crisis, concept of third space, revolt against patriarchy**, objectification of women and marginalization of the weaker. Sarojini Naidu, Agha Shahid Ali, Kamaladas, A. K. Ramanujan R. Parthasarathy, Taufiq Rafat, Patrick Fernando, Razia Khan, Ahmed Ali, and Yasmine Goonerante are some of the South Asian poets writing in English. We shall try to understand the trends in poetry with the help of some of these poets and their poetry.

**Sarojini Naidu** was born on Feb 13, 1879 in Hyderabad. Her father Dr. Aghore Nath Chattopadhyay was a scientist, Philosopher and educator. Her mother, Varada sundari Devi was a poetess in the Bengali language. Sarojini naidu was an Indian independence activist, poet and politician. She was the first women governor of an Indian state after independence. Many of the Naidu's poems are about everyday life or the natural world. Many are infused with her patriotism and her desire for India's freedom from British rule. Naidu's writing style is traditional and simple, with use of such literary devices as imagery and alliteration. Imagery is description using any of the five senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, or smell. Naidu's poems are rich with imagery.

As a President of All India Congress Committee in 1920, she had said "I think it is inevitable that one should become interested in politics if one is a true Indian". If she was influenced by other leaders it was not surprising that her dynamic personality attracted others. Jawaharlal Nehru too could not escape the contagion when he heard her recite "Awake". Similarly she once wrote a poem entitled "The Lotus" to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi where Gandhiji symbolically stands for this pious, king of flowers.

*“O mystic Lotus, sacred and sublime,  
In Myriad-petalled grace inviolate.  
Supreme o’er transient storms of tragic Fate  
Thine ageless beauty born of Brahma’s breath.*

She not only awakened the rural people of India, but as a woman she felt that it was her duty to bring into light the woman of India lying dormant and in dark labyrinth. She thus became a strong, thunderous feminist leader who actively worked for the liberation and emancipation of women.

**Yasmine Goonerante** is a Sri Lankan poet, short story writer, university professor and essayist. She is the most popular poet in Sri Lanka. She has been awarded the order of Australia in 1990 by the Australian government for her distinguished services to literature and education. Gooneratne’s writing engages with various themes. One theme that continually appears in her works is a reflection upon how the past affects the future.

Gooneratne’s poetry also has many different themes. One major question raised by her poetry is: what is poetry? Her work engages directly with the question of aesthetic. She refers to different parts of poetry, like verses and lines, in many of her poems. “The Scribble” describes how a young girl sees that as she gets older “that words grow sedate, / long may she find / verse in the wind, / rhyme run in the rivers, / words hum and quiver.” “6,000 Ft. Death Dive” explains how a woman dies and at the same time compares the power and freedom of death to writing. As Gooneratne writes, “from poetry to plummet till we splash/ down in a terse, laconic paragraph.” In “The Cave,” she writes, “Build on, poets, / out of ourselves, our pain / and our delight, / we build our own support.” In this poem she is encouraging poets to express themselves and know that someday they will “tremble on / the blazing summit of our own creation”.

Her poetry engages with the different aspects of immigration. In “Newsletter,” she mentions Australia and “the island-shaped wastes common to immigrant hearts,” indicating the love the immigrants have for their new land. She explores both perspectives of foreigners in other lands. In “Business People,” she describes how tourists love the beauty of the land, but do not care to know the terrors of its past. She writes, “They scan the catalogue, write out a cheque and for the price fixed-thirty

dollars- /buy my poor country.” As “bits and pieces” of her land are carried away by the newcomers she says “our children / have become a nation of beggars”

**Patrick Fernando** is considered to be the major force and, of course, the most significant voice in Sri Lankan poetry. It may seem incompatible with his profession as a tax man and a revenue specialist all his life; it is also astonishing.

Fernando’s “meticulous, mannered poetry” was well-inspired and shaped by his western classical learning and literature. These roots have a natural inborn concern for discipline and precision of technique of the classical tradition which he practiced scrupulously. Even in the thick of hostilities of the chauvinist cultural insurgents, Fernando faced and worked victoriously for his roots in the “unhelpful isolation”. Perhaps none or nothing can destroy the well-nourished, deep and wide-spread roots though the assaults hurt and bruise.

The dark, gloomy and tragic tone and temper find their overwhelming expression in the poetry of Fernando. His poems are long enough to cover the subject and short enough to reveal it in all its tenderness and grace. We can’t venture out into the poetic landscape and horizons of Fernando without being fairly acquainted with the Bible, the Greek and the Roman mythology. What adds to his inimitable strength is his stupendous ability to use felicitous phrases, compounds (complex and simple) and condensations. The beauty that emerges out of the elegiac in his poetry is simply stunning. We study the poetry of Fernando and find that his poems are deftly and gracefully and artistically embrace all these meanings of theme, subject-matter and style. All these lyrics, elegiac and elegies, written in three different phases of his 51 years of richly fruitful life, reserve for Fernando the most coveted position in Sri-Lankan English poetry and also an honorable place among the notables in English poetry.

**R. Parthasarathy** gives a new dimension, a new thought and a new way of outlook to Indian English Poetry. But in doing so he has to suffer a lot as he dwells in cultural dilemma which results in alienation and rootlessness. On one hand he dreamt of England as his future home and English language with English culture as his medium of expression. And on the other hand he loves his own Tamil culture very much. As a result, a double alienation from English language and Tamil culture are found in his poetry. He is suffering from the conflicts between his past memories and present social reality. Alienation and search for identity come obviously with a sense

of homesickness in his poetry. So his “Rough Passage” deals with emotional and cultural dilemma, rootlessness, urge for belongingness, impotence to acquire foreign culture and language and love for Tamil culture. R. Parthsarathy’s contribution to Indian English Poetry is quite remarkable, uncountable and unforgettable. As a poet, he does not compose too much poems but which he composes are notable and praiseworthy. *Poetry from Leeds* (1968), edited volume of *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets* (1976) and *Rough Passage* (1977) are his masterpieces. And his poetic world in postcolonial era can be shown in a more vivid and clear way in “Rough Passage”. Here we find his cultural dilemma, striving for native roots and search for identity. “Rough Passage” has divided into three sections namely “Exile”, “Trial” and “Homecoming”. In “Exile”, he wants to show his solitary condition in England and his fractured bond with Tamil culture. In “Trial”, he wants to find consolation through physical love as this section deals with emotion, love and human relationship. And in the last section “Homecoming”, he tries to harmonize the fusion of the English language with his Tamil culture.

In the second section “Trial”, he wants to show his realization of his inability to rediscover his Tamil past and his own roots. And in order to remove this alienation, he even engages in love. This engagement in love adds variety, seriousness, sensuousness and aesthetic dimension in his poems. But his dissatisfaction in love again brings that sense of failure, alienation and detachment into his mind. As he says:

**“My past is an unperfected stone**

**The flaws show, I polish**

**The stone sharpen the luster to a point.” (Trial)**

**Professor Ahmed Ali** was born in Delhi in 1910, his family tracing its origin back to the great Muslim mystic teacher, Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani of Baghdad (1078-1166 A.D.) His ancestors came to India at the request of Hamida Bano, mother of the great Moghul Emperor, Akbar, to serve as Ulema, or religious teachers, at the court. Ahmed Ali's father, however, worked as an Extra Assistant Commissioner in the Punjab Civil Service, a job which required the family to move about the province a great deal. As a result, Ahmed Ali received his early education at a number of schools in the Punjab, and later, after the death of his father in 1919, in the United Provinces. He started his study of English in the early twenties as a

student at the Wesley Mission High School in Azamgarh. Ahmed Ali had experienced the 20th Century too fully to settle for simplistic solutions and continued to seek a precise definition of modernity."His poems reflect the influences imbibed from the Chinese lyric, English Romantic, Urdu, and Persian traditions. Often written in a deliberately antiquated style - as if an English translation of old Chinese, these poems achieve a certain distance and 'impersonality' while dealing with personal details of human, moral and metaphysical themes; they also lend themselves both to personal and political allegories, to which most of Ali's work since the 1930's responds rather readily." Ahmed Ali's stay in China definitely brought about a fruitful change and created a profound effect on his literary career; especially in terms of his poetry. In 1960, he published a volume of English poetry entitled Purple Gold Mountain: Poem from China (London: Keep Sake Press). It contained only eight poems and was a mere sixteen pages in length. Since that time he has gathered revised and edited his poems. There are some specific themes in Ahmed Ali's poems which are as follows;

***The theme of loss of men and matters and loneliness :***

'On the Departing Seasons', though short, very effectively portrays his feeling towards his lost friends.

***The autumn wind Bfows***

***The summer Beyond recafl;***

***The leaves hurry along the road***

***The flowers of the spring has trod.***

***Who knows the sorrows of the lonely heart ?***

***One By one all old time friends have gone.***

In the above passage, one could experience the loneliness of the poet, who laments having lost his friends. It is so ambiguous that it cannot be explained whether they have departed because of death or for any other reason (may be abandonment). He feels lonely, hence he laments:

**"One by one all old time friends have gone".**

***The theme of Politics and the Element of Exile:***

Ahmed Ali is a writer for whom politics is an important part of life. His affiliation with the Progressive Writers' Association in its early phase is a further testament to his commitment to political and social concerns in his writings. For Ahmed Ali, art is higher and nobler than politics. In *Purple Gold Mountain*, there are two types of political poems: early and later poems. These poems are a testimony to Ali's maturation process as far as the relationship of art and politics is concerned. The first type of poems is found in the collection, 'Preludes', where politics is much talked about. The quatrain entitled 'The Chess Player' is an excellent example of this type.

*As a players rapt*

*In a game of chess*

*Am I in the thought*

*Of a suffering world*

Ahmed Ali, is a socially committed progressive writer, firmly believes in exploring the inner human reality. He does not consider the word "progressive" to be synonymous with revolutionary. It does, however, mean trying for the betterment of our social life. It also means the acceptance of realism as primary factor in art and literature. The resoiling of culture, that is, the search for harmony, love and renewal, is found to be at the heart of Ali's poetry.

**Razia Khan Amin** (1936-2011) truly was a writer. In her lifetime she was awarded, first the Bangla Academy Puroshkar for her literary works (1975) and then the Ekushey Padak (1997) for her overall contribution to Bangladesh's culture and letters. Razia Khan was a truly colorful person. She was not only precocious but also ahead of her time in her ideas and ways. She was also always herself, which is to say lively, mercurial and fascinating—almost a diva. She concentrates on the themes like human relationship, Diaspora and past glory of the nation.

### **Major Poets from South Asia**

## **4.3 South Asian Poetry: Text, Summary and Analysis:**

### **4.3.1 Sarojini Naidu (B.1879- d.1949)**

Sarojini Naidu was born on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1879. Her father Sr. Aghore Nath Chattopadhyay was an educator, philosopher, scientist and founder of Nizam college of Hyderabad. Her mother, Varda Sundari Devi was a Bengali poetess. Her father

was involved in active politics and freedom movement. Beside this, her brother Harindranath Chattopadhyay was a renowned poet and playwright. Her sister Sonalini Devi was actress and dancer.

Sarojini was bright and intelligent since her childhood. She was proficient and versatile speaker of English, Bengali, Urdu, Telugu and Persian. She completed her matriculation from Madras University with top rank. It was her father's wish that Sarojini could become Mathematician or Scientist. But she inclined towards poetry and wrote a 1300 line long poem in English titled *The lady of the Lake*. Her father was impressed with her skill of writing and expressing emotions and encouraged her works. With the guidance from her father, Sarojini wrote a play in Persian language '*Maher Muneer*'. Her father distributed the copies of the play amongst friends and relatives and sent one copy to the Nizam of Hyderabad. Impressed by this work, the Nizam granted her a scholarship to study abroad. She got admission in King's College, England at the age of 16. In England, Sarojini had the opportunity to meet the authors like Arthur Simon & Edmond Gause. These poets impressed her to write on the theme appropriate to India. They advised her "To be genuine Indian poet of Deccan, not a clever machine-made imitator of the English classics." That was the reason Sarojini attracted towards natural beauty, religious pluralism and social milieu of India.

In England, Sarojini met Muthyala Govindarajulu Naidu, a non Brahmin South Indian Physician and fell in love. After her return in 1898, she married him at the age of 19.

As a sensible poet, she was deeply affected by the partition of Bengal in 1905 and decided to join Indian Freedom Movement. Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Mahatma Gandhi were her ideal leaders. Her relationship with Mahatma Gandhi was of mutual respect. She became the second woman president of Indian national congress and First woman Governor of Independent India. Her birthday, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, is honored as Women's Day in India.

Beside her work in politics and freedom movement she gave a great contribution to Indian poetry also. She is famously known as *Nightingale of India*. In 1905, her first collection of poetry was published under the title *Golden Threshold*. Later she published *The Bird of Line* and *The Broken Wings* and collection of Essays based on her political beliefs and issues like women empowerment under the title *Words of*

*Freedom.* To honour the poetess the University of Hyderabad renamed its school of Fine Arts and Communication as Sarojini Naidu School of Arts and Communication.

**i) Indian Weavers**

WEAVERS, weaving at break of day,  
Why do you weave a garment so gay? . . .  
Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,  
We weave the robes of a new-born child.

Weavers, weaving at fall of night,  
Why do you weave a garment so bright? . . .  
Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green,  
We weave the marriage-veils of a queen.

Weavers, weaving solemn and still,  
What do you weave in the moonlight chill? . . .  
White as a feather and white as a cloud,  
We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.

*Sarojini Naidu*

**Summary and Analysis**

**Summary:**

The poem is a dialogue between the poetess and the weavers. The poetess asks some question to which the weavers answer. Through these questions and answers the poetess expresses the different stages of human life and the feelings and colours associated with these stages.

In the first stanza, the poetess asks the weavers that what kind of cloth you are weaving so early in the morning. The weavers reply that they are weaving a cloth for the robes to caress the new born baby.

In the second stanza the poetess asks the weavers that why they are weaving such a bright garment in the evening. The weavers answer that they are weaving the cloth with purple, green and plum of peacock color for the marriage-veils of a queen.

In the last stanza the poetess asks the weavers that what you are weaving in the chill moonlight in a solemn and still mood. The weavers reply that they are weaving shroud white as a cloud and feather for the funeral of a dead man.

**Analysis:**

In the poem *Indian Weavers* the poetess describes different stages of human life. The mood, emotions, human aspirations, rituals and the colors associated with it are described symbolically in an elegant manner. The first stanza describes the birth. The weavers are weaving early in the morning. It is the beginning of the day, beginning of life. It is associated with birth. The mood is happy, which is indicated through the phrase 'a garment so gay'. The weavers are weaving the cloth 'Blue as the wings of a halcyon'. The calm and happy color of the birds' wings brings happiness in the life with birth of a baby. The weavers are weaving the cloth for the robes of a new born baby.

The mood in the second stanza is associated with earthly pleasure. The time referred is evening. It shows the waiting of a beloved/ woman to be united with her lover/husband . The garment which the weavers are weaving is bright. Brightness is associated with happy mood and youth. Youth has brightness. The colours of the cloth are like the plumes of peacock, purple and green. These bright colors are associated with marriage and other happy rituals in human life. The weavers are weaving the bright and colorful marriage-veils of a queen. In India every ritual is celebrated with colorful clothes. Marriage is the most important one where every bride is a queen of the heart of her husband who is also a king for her.

The last stanza has a solemn and still mood. The time is night. The chill moonlight indicates the later time of night. It takes us towards the end. This end is the end of life, Death. Solemnly, the weavers are weaving a shroud for the funeral of a dead man. The color of shroud in Hindu culture is always white one. White is associated with purity and it indicates the journey of a soul towards salvation.

In the poem *Indian weavers* Sarojini Naidu had beautifully described three different stages of human life, the birth, marriage and death. These are three stages in the life of every individual. Sarojini Naidu has elegantly caught the moods associated with these events by indicating a simple action of weaving clothes by weavers. The two incidents birth and death, where the person associated with it, is unaware about the incident. The indicated mood is associated with the other people who share the

incident. Only marriage, the middle of life, where one can really enjoy the incident. That is the reason the middle stanza indicates multiple colors and moods.

### Terms to Remember

**Halcyon:** a tropical Asian and African kingfisher with brightly coloured plumage

**Plume:** a part of an animal's body that resembles a feather

**Solemn:** not cheerful or smiling, serious

**Shroud:** a length of cloth or an enveloping garment in which a dead person is wrapped for burial

### Check Your Progress

#### i. Fill in the blanks

1. Sarojini Naidu wrote a 1300 line long poem with the title \_\_\_\_\_.  
*The Lady of the Lake*
2. The weavers are weaving a cloth for the robes to caress the \_\_\_\_\_.  
new born baby
3. The weavers are weaving the cloth with purple, green and plum of peacock color for \_\_\_\_\_.  
the marriage-veils of a queen
4. The weavers are weaving \_\_\_\_\_ for the funeral of a dead man.  
shroud white as a cloud and feather

#### ii) Song of Radha, The Milkmaid

I carried my curds to the Mathura fair...  
How softly the heifers were lowing...  
I wanted to cry, "Who will buy  
The curds that is white as the clouds in the sky  
When the breezes of Shravan are blowing?"  
But my heart was so full of your beauty, Beloved,  
They laughed as I cried without knowing:  
  
Govinda! Govinda!  
Govinda! Govinda!

How softly the river was flowing!  
I carried the pots to the Mathura tide...  
How gaily the rowers were rowing!  
My comrades called, "Ho! Let us dance, let us sing

And wear saffron garments to welcome the spring.  
And pluck the new buds that are blowing."  
But my heart was so full of your music, Beloved,  
They mocked when I cried without knowing:

Govinda! Govinda!  
Govinda! Govinda!

How gaily the river was flowing!  
I carried my gifts to the Mathura shrine...  
How brightly the torches were glowing!  
I folded my hands at the altars to pray  
"O shining ones guard us by night and by day"-  
And loudly the conch shells were blowing.  
But my heart was so lost in your worship, Beloved,  
They were wroth when I cried without knowing:

Govinda! Govinda!  
Govinda! Govinda!

How bright the river was flowing!

*Sarojini Naidu*

## Summary and Analysis

### Summary:

In the poem *Song of Radha, The Milkmaid*, Sarojini Naidu tells us about Radha's eternal devotion and love for lord Krishna, who is also called Govinda. Mathura is the chief center of the mystic worship of lord Krishna. Radha, the milkmaid, carried the curd to sell at Mathura fair. The heifers are lowing very softly. She is worried that nobody is buying her curds. The curds are white as the clouds in the sky. The Shravan month breezes are blowing softly. Radha cries spontaneously the name of the Devine beloved Govinda, Govinda. People laughed on this reaction of Radha, but she is engrossed in the thoughts of Govinda. The River Yamuna is flowing softly.

Radha carried her pots to Mathura. The rowers were rowing happily. The companions of Radha were singing the song of spring. They were eager to wear saffron garments and pluck the new blooming bloods. But Radha's heart is engrossed in the music of the Lord Krishna; she cries again the name of Govinda. Her companions mock her uttering the same name. The river is flowing still happily.

Without selling the curd finally Radha takes this gift to Mathura shrine. The torches in the temple were glowing brightly. She folds her hands and at the altar and prays to guard her by night and day. At the same time the conch shell blows but Radha is lost in the worship of the Devine beloved. The companions become angry when unknowingly Radha recites the name of Govinda again and again. River Yamuna is flowing brightly with the happiness of love and devotion.

### Analysis:

The poem describes the eternal love of Radha towards the divine beloved Krishna-Govinda. It takes us to another world of fertility and abundance. Radha here is a symbol of mother earth. Like river Yamuna. She is carrying the liquid to Mathura. The heifers were lowing softly and happily. They herald her arrival in Mathura. The white liquid, the curds symbolizes affection and nurturing of life. She tries to continue this life energy to Mathura. The season is spring. The Shravan breezes are blowing softly. Through she shows the worry about selling the curds, in reality Radha doesn't want to sell it. She actually wants to offer it to her Devine beloved Govinda and in a mesmerized position she cries Govinda, Govinda. Her companions laugh on her reaction. The river is flowing swiftly. This swiftness of the show indicates the continuation of life. Lord Govinda is the energy of this

continuation. Mathura is the center of this life and abundance. Radha carried the pots there. The rowers are also in a happy mood and sing the song of spring and welcome the season. But Radha's heart is engrossed in the music of Govinda. She yearns for her union with the Devine musician. She is absorbed with heart and mind in his mystic presence she forgets the trade cry, which she needs to give. The words that come out from her heart are '*Govinda, Govinda*'. These words come out spontaneously which are rooted deeply in her unconscious mind.

Finally Radha takes all the offerings to the shrine of Mathura. The temple torches are burning bright. She folds her hands and praise the lord to protect everyone in this cycle. The spontaneity of her worship is natural.

The brightness has entered the flow of rivers, somewhere the light and water is united. The devotional love is symbolized here. Radha is presented in the poem in first person. She narrates her experience. How perfectly her heart and mind has become one in worship of lord Govinda, when she utters the name Govinda, Govinda...

There are only two female characters here, Radha and River Yamuna. Both worship lord Krishna. Both are eager to touch the feet of lord Krishna. The flow of water and the flow of Radha's offering shows eternal flow of devotion towards lord Krishna.

### **Terms to Remember**

**heifer:** a cow that has not borne a calf, or has borne only one calf.

**rowers:** a person who rows a boat, especially as a member of a racing team.

**comrades:** a colleague or a fellow member of an organization.

**shrine:** a place regarded as holy because of its associations with a divinity or a sacred person or relic, marked by a building or other construction.

**altar:** a table or flat-topped block used as the focus for a religious ritual, especially for making sacrifices or offerings to a deity.

**wroth:** angry.

### Check Your Progress

- i. Answer the questions in one word.
  1. Where does Radha carry her pots of curd?
  2. What are the words that Radha utter spontaneously?
  3. Who are the two female characters that have been referred in the poem?
  4. What is the poem about?

#### 4.3.2 R. Parthasarathy (B.1934)

Rajagopal Parthasarathy is one of the greatest poets in Indo-English poetry, from South India. He has had a variegated career ranging from teaching to editing and the ambience of his poetic world has also been varied as he has moved from place to place, from Srirangam to Bombay, to Madras, to Delhi, to England and back. The disturbing and moving experiences he has had, from this extreme mobility, form the matrix of his poetry making it primarily poetry of experience.

He was born in 1934, at Tirupparaiturai near Tiruchchirapall, Tamil nadu, India. Parthasarathy experienced the first trauma of transplantation when he moved to Bombay to be educated in Don Bosco and later in Bombay University. He worked as a lecturer in English in Ezekiel's department at Mithibai College, Bombay. This is the period Parthasarathy is referring to as "He had spent his youth whoring/after English gods". He was a British Council Scholar at Leeds University where he worked for a diploma in English studies.

The year 1963-64 in England was significant for Parthasarathy as it proved to be a culture shock — "My encounter with England only reproduced the by-now familiar pattern of Indian experience in England: disenchantment" ("Whoring After English Gods") This 'disenchantment', however, was extremely productive as it brought forth some of the finest poems in Indian English poetry on cultural encounter. ('Poems of Exile' — 1963-66). Giving up teaching, Parthasarathy entered publishing and joined Oxford University Press as its Regional Editor in Madras and later moved over to Delhi. Parthasarathy's other interests include music, film, theatre and painting. Of late, Parthasarathy is emerging as a bilingual writer and more importantly, as a translator of Tamil and Sanskrit writings into English.

He has edited a number of anthologies of poetry, and significant among them are Poetry from Leeds (1968) and Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets (1976). He started writing poetry at the age of 16 and has published widely in journals in India and abroad, in Encounter, London Magazine, Poetry India, Times Literary Supplement and New Letters and his poems are included in many anthologies. He won the Ulka Poetry Prize of Poetry India in 1966.

Cultural conflict is at the heart of R. Parthasarathy's poems. As a young student he was infatuated with England and the English language. But his life in England put an end to his anglomania! He was caught in a cultural dilemma. His poetry is the product of this cultural dilemma. The first section Exile. reveals that the poet's infatuation with the English language and culture is under strain . The more he sees alien English life. the more he becomes conscious of his Tamil roots. Parthasarathy says: "English forms part of my rational make-up, Tamil my emotional make-up ". This discovery, which must have been very painful to the poet, is expressed in the first section. His infatuation with English has taken its toll. He has lost his Tamil identity! The poet's enlightenment is expressed in these lines of haunting beauty

*"You learn roots are deep*

*That language is a tree, loses colour*

*Under another sky."*

As a poet R Parthasarathy is much ahead of his times. His vehement denunciation of Westernization may not be readily appreciated by a generation dazzled by the glitter and glamour of Western civilization. He will definitely have more and more admirers when people realize that a nation dies when it loses its cultural identity and starts worshipping "wrong gods".

**i) Exile from Homecoming**

My tongue in English chains,  
I return, after a generation, to you.  
I am at the end  
of my dravidic tether,  
hunger for you unassuaged.  
I falter, stumble.

Speak a tired language  
wrenched from its sleep in the Kural,  
teeth, palate, lips still new

to its agglutinative touch.  
Now, hooked on celluloid, you reel  
down plush corridors.

And so it eventually happened –  
a family reunion not heard of since grandfather died in '59  
– in March

this year. Cousins arrived in Tiruchchanur  
in overcrowded private buses,  
the dust of unlettered years

clouding instant recognition.  
Later, each one pulled,  
Sitting crosslegged on the steps

of the choultry, familiar coconuts  
out of the fire  
of rice-and-pickle afternoons.

Sundri, who had squirrelled up and down  
forbidden tamarind trees in her long skirt  
every morning with me,

stood there, that day, forty years taller,  
her three daughters floating  
like safe planets near her.

I made myself an expert  
in farewells. An unexpected November  
shut the door in my face:

I crashed, a glasshouse  
hit by the stone of Father's death.  
At the burning ghat

relations stood like exclamation points.  
The fire stripped his unwary body  
of the last shred of family likeness.

I am my father now.  
The lines of my hands  
hold the fine compass of his going:

I shall follow. And after me,  
my unborn son, through the eye of this needle  
of forgetfulness.

With paper boats boys tickle her ribs,  
and buffaloes have turned her to a pond.  
There's eaglewood in her hair

and stale flowers. Every evening,  
as bells roll in the forehead of temples,  
she sees a man on the steps

clean his arse. Kingfishers and egrets,  
whom she fed, have flown  
her paps. Also emperors and poets

who slept in her arms. She is become  
a sewer, now. No one has any use for Vaikai,  
river, once, of this sweet city.

The street in the evening tilts homeward  
as traffic piles up.

It is then I stir about.

Rise from the table and shake the dust  
from my eyes. Pick up  
my glasses and look for myself

in every nook and corner  
of the night. The pavement turns informer  
hearing my steps. A pariah dog

slams an alley in my face.  
I have exchanged the world  
for a table and chair. I shouldn't complain.

I see him now sitting at his desk.  
The door is open. It is evening.  
On the lawns the children play.

He went for the wrong gods from the start.  
And marriage made it worse.  
He hadn't read his Greek poets well:

better to bury a woman than marry her.  
Now he teaches. Reviles verse  
written by others. Is invited to conferences

and attends them. How long it had taken  
him to learn he had no talent  
at all, although words came easy.

One can be articulate about nothing.  
Or, was it simply  
his god had left him?

Peddalling his bicycle glasses, he asks,

'What's it like to be a poet?  
I say to myself, 'The son of a bitch

fattens himself on the flesh of dead poets.  
Lines his pockets with their blood.  
From his fingertips ooze ink and paper,

as he squats on the dungheap  
of old texts and obscure commentaries.  
His eyes peel off.

Where would His Eminence be  
but for the poets who splashed about  
in the Hellespont or burned in the Java Sea?'

I am no longer myself as I watch  
the evening blur the traffic  
to a pair of obese headlights.

I return home, tired,  
my face pressed against the window  
of expectation. I climb the steps

to my flat, only to trip over the mat  
outside the door. The key  
goes to sleep in my palm.

I fear I have bungled again.  
That last refinement of speech  
terrifies me. The balloon

of poetry has grown red in the face  
with repeated blowing. For scriptures  
I, therefore, recommend

the humble newspaper. I find  
my prayers occasionally answered there.  
I shall, perhaps, go on

like this, unmindful of day  
melting into the night.  
My heart I have turned inside out.

Hereafter, I should be content,  
I think, to go through life  
With the small change of uncertainties.

*R. Parthasarathy*

### **Summary and Analysis**

The poem expresses the poet's feelings when he returns to his home town after spending sometime abroad. But he finds himself unfit to the present culturally, linguistically, sociologically and psychologically. He finds himself alienated from his own surroundings. In spite of all the familiar things around he finds himself isolated and it creates the feeling of exile in him.

The Persona opens the poem stating his inability to use his mother tongue. He is not fluent with Tamil and his tongue is tied by English. He finds himself at the end of his Dravidic tether. He is unable to speak Tamil fluently. He expects that everyone there should speak good old Tamil that has been used in scriptures and literatures. But he finds that everyone is using a kind of high-breed language that is articulated by the characters of celluloid world.

He attempts to establish the relation with his relatives. He has returned after a long time. The family members have gathered there after 1959, when his grandfather died. The relatives came there loaded in bus with dust of many years of memory. Everyone has his or her own personal memories. The poet too had his memories. The relatives gathered there sit in groups. There is no formality amongst them. The gap of years, to some extent, has faded away there. All of them eat the packed food they have brought for lunch. He finds Sundari, probably his relative, who had squirreled up and down on the tamarind trees with him in the childhood. Now she is married and had three daughters. Her daughters move safely around her like her planets. He

cannot relate himself with his relatives. He remains aloof and detached. He feels guilty of losing his familiar tradition. He feels that with death of his father, everything had ended. He remembers the funeral of his father at the burning ghat. The fire stripped the unwary body of his father and the last shred of the family ended there.

He realizes his self. He feels that now he himself is his father. He says he will also follow the same path of his father. But he is not sure about his unborn son.

He visits the river *Vaikai*. He is not satisfied with the sight of the river. He calls it as river once, now it is barren and empty without water. Children get into the river and play with paper boats. Buffaloes also loiter in the river and they diminish into a pond. The so called river and ponds are filled with hair and stale flowers. Though the banks of river are full of temples and other sacred things, people do most unsacred things there. They clean their arse and what not. No poet or Emperor will boast about the river *Vaikai*, which was flowing once sweetly and softly through the city of Madurai.

The poet walks home. The roads are dusty. The streets are jammed with traffic. His thoughtful walk is answered by the barking dogs. He feels that he has exchanged the world for a table and chair. The world has contracted for him. He has lost contact with the natural surroundings.

The poet persona becomes fed up of things around the world. He considers himself as a poet and a creator. As a poet, he reads verses and the commentaries on it written by others. He is invited to conference, he attends them. Although words come easily to him, it had taken a long time for him to learn that he had no talent at all. While returning home, peddling his bicycle glasses, he asks himself “What is it like to be a poet?” He tries to answer his own question. He calls the poet a son of bitch. He is someone who has become fat by reading many old poems and poets. He is a person who has grown up on the flesh of dead poets. He lines his pockets with their blood. Being a poet he is against himself and abuses himself of being one. His greatness remains there in the Hellespont or burned in the Java Sea.

The poet is finally willing to retire from life, yet he is not content with life. He establishes himself as a freelancer. He prays to God that a few of his articles should be published in newspaper and his prayers are sometimes answered. He concludes

the poem with a compelling thought of satisfaction that he should go through life with the small change of uncertainties.

### **Terms to Remember**

**tether:** tie (an animal) with a rope or chain so as to restrict its movement.

**unassuaged:** not soothed or relieved

**falter:** speak hesitantly.

**wrench:** a sudden violent twist or pull.

**agglutinative:** tending to express concepts in complex words consisting of many elements.

**celluloid:** the cinema as a genre.

**plush:** richly luxurious and expensive.

**arse:** a person's buttocks or anus.

**paps:** a woman's breast or nipple.

**sewer:** an underground conduit for carrying off drainage water and waste matter.

**Vaikai:** The Vaikai (Vaigai) River is a river that starts flowing from Varusanadu Hills, Periyar plateau of the Western Ghats range. This river flows east towards Tamil Nadu.

**pariah dog:** an Indian dog breed.

**reviles:** criticize in an abusive or angrily insulting manner.

**articulate:** having or showing the ability to speak fluently and coherently.

**obscure:** not clearly expressed or easily understood.

**Hellespont:** ancient name of the narrow passage between the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara. Today, it is known as Dardanelles.

**Java Sea:** The Java Sea is an extensive shallow sea on the Sunda Shelf. It lies between the Indonesian islands of Borneo to the north, Java to the south, Sumatra to the west, and Sulawesi to the east.

## Check Your Progress

Answer in one word/sentence.

1. Why the poet was unable to speak Tamil fluently?
2. When were the relatives gathered last time?
3. With whom the poet played in his childhood?
4. What does the poet feel after the death of his father?
5. What is the location of the poem?
6. What does the poet think about himself as a poet?
7. What does the poet want to do at the end?

### 4.3.3 Patrick Fernando (B. 1931-D.1982)

Patrick Fernando is considered to be the most significance voice in Sri Lankan poetry. He was born in 1931 to a catholic middle class family on the southwest coast of Sri Lanka and worked as a tax official in the Inland Revenue Profession. He was actively involved in literary activities. He was the first Sri Lankan poet who published his work in London. His poetry is a living and enduring response to the luxuriant growth of nature. He had excellent command over Sinhalese, English, Greek and Latin. He had a great passion for nature and birds which is invariably reflected in his poetry. His “Meticulous, mannered poetry” was well-inspired and shaped by his western classical learning and literature.

Fernando wrote about his life in general or universal issue such as growing up, love aging, transience of life, religion, death and the conflict between Man and nature. Most of the time the subjects of his poetry were people, things and places that he had been in close contact with. Collection of his poems *The return of Ulysses* was published in 1955 and *Selected Poems* was published posthumously by his friend Dennis Bartholemeusz.

His famous poems are A Fallen Tree, Adam and Eve, The Fisherman Mourned by his Wife, Elegy for December, Meditation over Fire Graves, Oedipus: The Last Days, Pictures for a Chapel of the Passion, The Lament of Paris and Elegy For My Son.

The present poem *Elegy for My Son* resounds with a deep note of pain and agony causing lifelessness at the colossal loss of the poet's admiration, beauty, pride and love by "some strange excess of love" of earth, wind and sunshine. Fernando was totally broken when his youngest son died in 1980. He couldn't endure the strain and shock of his son's death. Due to the excessive grief and memory of his son he died in 1982.

**i) Elegy for My Son**

There must be some terrible power  
In the earth and wind and sunshine  
How else could the young tree,  
A favourite of these three  
Sicken in a single say and die?

And I who took some pride over  
Planting and tending it  
And caught its assent to life  
The sun's and wind's keen sponsorship of

This fine young tree, more admiring than proud.  
There must be some strange excess of love  
In earth and wind and sun that  
With notice of just a little day  
Took such a fine young tree away.

Whenever I stand in the empty place, thoughts  
Brandished wildly sign and sing in memory.  
Earth, wind and sun go about their work  
As if nothing has occurred,  
Calm as conspirators after the deed  
Driving me to almost believe nothing  
Has happened. I am the tree that's gone,  
That tree and I being one.

*Patrick Fernando*

## **Summary and Analysis**

### **Summary:**

Patrick Fernando has written this Elegy to lament the death of his youngest son. He compares the death of his son with death of a young grownup tree. He says there must be some terrible power in the earth, wind and sunshine. Otherwise how is it possible that a tree which was favorite of all these three elements got sicken in a single day and died?

The poet took pride over the tree. He planted and tended it, seen it growing and becoming young with full bloom. The sun and wind, its energy was also there to support the growth.

He had more admiration than proud for this fine young tree. But he feels that there must be some excess of love from every element. The love from the earth, the wind and the sun was so excessive that they took the young tree with the notice of just a little day.

The poet stands in the empty space of the tree, observes it every day. Thoughts wave widely in his mind. He remembers the lost young tree (his son). But the change is there in the space and mind only. The earth, sun and wind continue the work as if nothing has happened. He thinks they are calm conspirators. They have taken the fine young tree away from him and drive him to believe that nothing has happened. He feels he himself has left this world along with the tree because he cannot separate himself from the tree. Both are one.

### **Analysis:**

Patrick Fernando's Elegy for My Son is lamentation on the death of a young son. The poet expresses his uncontrollable grief over the loss of his youngest son. Here the poet compares his relation with the son with that of a gardener and a tree. He himself had planted and tended the tree, seen the growth day by day. Always felt proud about the creation. The tree is loved by everyone. The poet feels that the earth, wind and sunshine all must have some terrible power. The elements that protect and nurture the tree, have taken it away. The tree was favourite of them all. The tree sickened in a single day and died.

The poet was proud that he was the father of that son. He had more admiration than pride for his son. But one day suddenly he lost his son. He feels that there must

be some strong excess of love among all for this son. Nobody had expected this. No one expects such thing. But with notice of just a little day the destiny changed. The poet lost his youngest son. He couldn't control his grief for him the world has stopped. For him it was the end of everything.

But whenever he tries to feel the presence of his son, he finds the empty place. The memory of the last son the movements shared with him and the days of his growth seen and enjoyed brandish in the mind of the poet.

Everything is stopped for him. But time doesn't stop for anybody. The routine of the day continues. The earth wind and sun go about their work as if nothing has occurred. The poet feels that they are conspirators. They have taken his son away. They even make the poet believe that nothing has happened. But the father is completely broken. His heart is full of grief. He cannot remain away from his son. He says "I'm the tree that's gone". For him the father and son relationship is not merely the earthly one. He wants to follow the son. That's why, he says 'That tree and I being one'. Through the allegorical relationship of a gardener and a tree, the poet tries to express his grief over the death of his youngest son.

#### **Terms to Remember**

**assent:** the expression of approval or agreement.

**brandish:** wave or flourish (something, especially a weapon) as a threat or in anger or excitement.

**conspirator:** a person who takes part in a conspiracy

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. With Whom does the poet compare the death of his son?
2. How did the poet's son die?
3. Which country Patrick Fernando belongs to?
4. Why does the poet feel that there was excess of love?
5. What does the poet think about the earth, sun and wind?

#### **4.3.4 Yasmine Gooneratne (B. 1935)**

Yasmine Gooneratne was born in 1935 in Sri Lanka. She completed her graduation from the University of Ceylon in 1959 and received Ph.D in English Literature from Cambridge University in the year 1962. She has versatile personality

that makes her stand apart as a stalwart among the south Asian writers. She is a university professor, literary critic, editor, bibliographer, novelist, essayist and poet. In 1972, she became a resident of Australia. She was the Foundation Director of the Post colonial Literatures and Language Research Centre from 1988 to 93. Gooneratne has sixteen books on her credit her first novel *A Change of Skies* (1991) won the 1992 Marjorie Barhard Literary Award and was shortlisted for Commonwealth Writers Prize. Her second novel *The Pleasure of Conquest* (1996) was also shortlisted for the 1996 Commonwealth Writers Prize.

Gooneratne's poems deal with various themes. She has raised one major question on her poetry is, what is poetry? Her poetry engages with different aspects of immigration, reflection of past. A critical awareness of Sri Lankan social reality has also been recorded in her poems. She uses her poems as a political allegory.

**i) On an Asian Poet Fallen Among American Translators**

Two hundred years.  
Time enough to build an empire  
or build a nation  
but a span too brief it seems  
for the building of craft or courtesy,  
shaping  
of skills.

That Puritan grimace  
to begin with –  
death in the heart, and in the loins  
where poetry takes birth  
and breath  
a gaping emptiness  
under layer on layer  
of tenuous talent, brash  
gestures, a spreading  
taste for the macabre.

There is death in your touch  
America.

Hold no cigarette to our lips  
Do not light up your  
maudlin dreams  
with cryings out of our names  
“Do you hear me? Are you there?”  
We are not there, never have been  
nor ever shall. Take  
your hand off our shoulders  
our names from your computerized prize lists  
and your leprous fingers off  
our poetry.

No wonder Eliot ran away from you  
and Pound went crazy  
Turning away from your deserts  
Frost found a small satisfaction  
then fell silent.

Here and there  
is “one who gathers samphire – dreadful trade”  
Lingering on the shores of childhood  
some wait,  
hoping the tide will turn  
bringing in more than driftwood  
and broken stones.  
Others try to save  
something of the past  
searching diligently among shards and rubble  
for possible images.

America  
empty of grace  
graveyard of art  
monster  
living on lazar-house know-how

and hot-house pretensions  
America, new found land  
long lost, it seems,  
to poetry

*Yasmine Gooneratne*

## **Summary and Analysis**

### **Summary:**

In the poem *On An Asian Poet Fallen Among American Translators*, Yasmine Gooneratne has shown the politics of language and exploitation of the South Asian poets and writers by America. The poet describes two hundred years is enough time to build an empire or nation. But it is too short span for building of craft or courtesy, shaping of skills.

There is Puritan grimace. The heart which creates poetry has now fear of death. The gaping emptiness has filled under layer on layer of tenuous talent, the condition has become terrible.

The poet says that there is a death in the touch of America. She yells her cries and asks not to hold cigarette in her people's lips, not to light up their maudlin drams. She asks the American translators to take their hands off from her people's shoulders. She asks them to delete the names from the computerized prize list and even the leprous fingers off from there poetry.

She refers the American poets like Eliot, Pound and Frost have become ilent now. She hopes for the better future. The tide of poetry will bring such things that will create, build new images. The poets try to save something of the past and search with great efforts possible images among shards and rubble.

The poet curses America as empty grace. She calls it a graveyard of art, a monster living on lazar-house. She says the new found land for poetry in America is long lost. Now there is only commercialized poet.

### **Analysis:**

*On An Asian Poet Fallen Among American Translators* deals with the 20<sup>th</sup> century American commercial attitude. The poet describes how 200 years of history is sufficient to build a nation but it will fail to develop the craft, courtesy and shaping of skill. The real talent of the poets is hidden and has become useless. America is

trying to make the people/ poet addicted to cigarette and wine. The touch of the American translators is treacherous and deadly. By poets, America is building its literary trade market. For them literature is nothing but a trade. They can give this or that prize to a particular poet and commercialize the sale. They have the computerized list so simply they select one name. The poet here knows this literary politics. She calls this a dreadful trade of ‘gathering samphire’.

Still there is a hope of good future. The poet thinks that the tide of poetry will bring new images. The past will be saved by searching the possible images among shards and rubble.

The poet has lot of hatred for these American translators. She calls the country is a graveyard of art. The American translators are the monsters living on the lazarus-house. The poet says that the new found land America is long lost at least in poetry. There is only a commercial market attitude that had entered the literary field.

### **Terms to Remember**

**grimace:** an ugly, twisted expression on a person's face, typically expressing disgust, pain, or wry amusement.

**gaping:** wide open.

**tenuous:** very weak or slight.

**brash:** self-assertive in a rude, noisy, or overbearing way.

**macabre:** disturbing because concerned with or causing a fear of death.

**maudlin:** highly sentimental

**samphire:** a European plant of the parsley family, which grows on rocks and cliffs by the sea. Its aromatic fleshy leaves are sometimes eaten as a vegetable.

**driftwood:** pieces of wood which are floating on the sea or have been washed ashore.

**diligent:** having or showing care and conscientiousness in one's work or duties.

**shards:** a piece of broken ceramic, metal, glass, or rock, typically having sharp edges.

**rubble:** waste or rough fragments of stone, brick, concrete, etc., especially as the debris from the demolition of buildings.

**lazar-house:** house for a poor and diseased person, especially one afflicted by an unpleasant disease such as leprosy

**hot-house:** a heated greenhouse in which plants that need protection from cold weather are grown.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. What are the major aspects of Gooneratne's poetry?
2. What does the poet explain in the present poem?
3. What does the poet ask the American translators to take their hands off from her people's shoulder?
4. What does the poet call America?
5. What is the theme of the poem?

### **ii) There was a Country**

There was a country where fine poems lay  
close to the surface. Under every hedge  
each passing shower would bare a glittering edge.  
No stream but, sifted, yielded poetry.

I kicked a stone aside in irritation  
and saw its under – surface start to gleam  
and there beneath my feet there waited seams  
so rich, the merest movement brought creation.

Here it is not the same. Though poetry  
occurs, they say, I have not glimpsed it yet,  
stumbled upon or caught it in a net  
of words. I feel that poems here must lie

Deeper than opals, deeper far than oil  
and all the tools I am accustomed to  
- love, anger, pity, wit-will hardly do,

blunt as this air has made them, for such toil.

There was a country where, when sorrow grazed  
the heart but once the Muse brought forth her plenty  
to twos and fours, half-dozens, twenties.  
The mine seemed inexhaustible, a dazed

Discoverer, wondering, merely poured them down  
on paper. Grief would need to strike so deep  
here, that I'd rather let creation sleep  
than mine the diamonds for a poet's crown.

*Yasmine Gooneratne*

## **Summary and Analysis**

### **Summary:**

The poem *There was a Country* is a movement in past and present., a comparison between the past and the present time. The poet narrates that there was a country where every simple action yielded poetry. Fine poems lay close to the surface. Every hedge, passing shower and streams produced poems.

The poet in an irritation kicked a stone and under her feet found the rarest gleaming poem. The merest movement even made the creation possible.

For the poet the present is not the same. She says though she creates poetry, others say she has not really sensed it. She merely stumbled and caught it in a net of words. She feels that the poems must lie deeper than opals, far deeper than oil. All the tools of creation that are love, anger, pity, wit have become blunt for this act of creation.

The poet says that in that country, when sorrow grazed the heart, the muse brought forth the plenty of possibilities of poetic creation. But her effort seemed inexhaustible. As a dazed discoverer she poured the words and feelings on paper and tried to create something. She thinks that for the creation grief has to strike deeper. She is ready to let the creation sleep than to create a diamond for a poet's crown. The movement in the past and present shows the difference in the creativity of the poets.

### **Analysis:**

*There was a Country* by Yasmine Gooneratne deals with a nostalgic mood. There is a comparison of past and present condition of poetry. The poet also comments on her own creativity, what she thinks of poetry and what others think about it. In the beginning she mentions the glorious traditions of the past where every natural action resulted into creativity. New poems yielded though the simple action. The passing shower, sounds off stream were the causes of creating a poem.

Wherever the poet searched she found fine poems, even kicking of a stone aside in irritation also resulted in a new creation. The appearance of waited seams beneath the feet gave rise to fine lines of creativity. Here every simple action, not only natural but physical actions, made creativity possible.

Immediately the poet comes into the present world of reality. For her the condition is not same. Though she writes poems she thinks the readers are not satisfied with the poems she had written. For them she just has stumbled upon the words or caught it in a net of words. She feels that her poetry should lie deeper than opals or far deeper than oil. Then only real poetry will come out. She uses the regular tools of poetry- love, anger, pity, wit. But for her, these tools are not sufficient. Despite the great efforts these tools have now became blunt. They will not help the real creativity. It will be just a patchwork or collage of feelings.

She again enters the world of ancient poetry. When sorrow gazed the heart, this deep rooted sorrow made the creation possible. Even muse gave plenty of efforts for the creation. The poet compares her own efforts and feels that her efforts are inexhaustible. She calls herself a dazed discoverer. She wonders and merely pours the words on paper. This act she thinks is not poetry. She feels that for the real act of creation grief must strike deeper in the heart. She is ready to suffer to any extent than creating merely an imitative work.

### **Terms to Remember**

**hedge:** a fence or boundary formed by closely growing bushes or shrubs.

**seams:** an underground layer of a mineral such as coal or gold

**muse:** (in Greek and Roman mythology) each of nine goddesses, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, who preside over the arts and sciences.

## Check Your Progress

### Fill in the blanks.

1. There was a country where, when \_\_\_\_\_ grazed the heart.  
a) Sorrow                      b) grief                      c) happiness                      d) health
2. The poet feels that the present creativity is the \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ of feelings.  
a) Colourful or happy view                      b) Patchwork or Collage  
c) Mixture or Unification                      d) Expression or reflection
3. The poet is ready to \_\_\_\_\_ than to create a diamond for a poet's crown.  
a) let the company continue                      b) let the work done  
c) let the creation happen                      d) let the creation sleep
4. I feel that poems here must lie deeper than \_\_\_\_\_.  
a) Diamonds                      b) Sea                      c) Opals                      d) Earth
5. The merest movement even made the \_\_\_\_\_ possible.  
a) Creation                      b) Happiness                      c) Dream                      d) Rarest Thing

### 4.3.5 Ahmed Ali (B. 1910-D. 1993)

Ahmed Ali was among the trend-setter Urdu short story writers and poets. He was born in Delhi in 1910. His ancestral history traces back to the great Muslim mystic teacher, Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani of Baghdad (1078-1166 A.D). His father was An Extra Assistant Commissioner in the Punjab Civil Services. Due to his father's job, he received early education at a number of schools in Punjab and after the death of his father in 1919 in he got education in the United Provinces. He completed his matriculation from Aligarh Muslim University in 1926. He enrolled in an English poetry class with Eric C. Dickenson. This minor Oxbridge poet and Professor and Chairman of the Department of English became the young Ahmed Ali's mentor. At this place Ali met another student of Prof. Dickinson, Raja Rao. In 1927 Ali published his first English short story, *When the Funeral was crossing the Bridge*. The following year he graduated in first class, scoring highest marks in

English in the History of the university. He also received prestigious White Memorial Scholarship.

During his stay in Britain for thirteen months, Ali made acquaintance with many writers from the Bloomsbury and New Writing Groups. His collections of Urdu short stories *Twilight in Delhi*, *Hamari Galli* (1942), *Qaid Khana* (1944) received with great applause by readers in India and abroad. In 1944 he joined the Bengal Senior Educational Service and was appointed as Professor and Chairman of the Department of English, Presidency College, Calcutta. In 1945, he published the fourth volume of fiction *Maut Se Pehle*. He also hosted Forster's visit to Delhi in the same year. In 1948 Ali shifted to Pakistan and started his career in the Pakistan Civil services as Director of Foreign Publicity for the Govt. of Pakistan.

In 1949, Ali published the first anthology of Modern Indonesian Poetry in English translation with the title *The Flaming Earth: Poems from Indonesia*. His other anthologies include *The Flacon* and *The Hunted Bird* (English translation of Urdu poetry), *Purple Gold Mountain: Poems from China* (1960), *Ghalib: Selected Poems* (1969), *The Golden Tradition* (1973).

Ahmed Ali was awarded the Sitare-E-Imtiyaz (Star of Distinction) by the Government of Pakistan in 1981 for his exceptional service to the country.

Karachi University conferred him the degree of Doctor of letters in 1993. On 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct. 1993 Ali left for his heavenly abode.

Alamgir Hashmi says, "Ali's poem reflected the influences imbibed from the Chinese lyric, English Romantic, Urdu and Persian traditions... Ali's poems achieve a certain distance and 'impersonality' while dealing with personal details of human, moral and with metaphysical themes, they also lend themselves both to personal and political allegories".

**i) 'On the Tenth Night of the Tenth Moon I Walk by the West Lake and Meet Another Me.'**

On the tenth night of tenth moon  
I walked by the West Lake contemplating  
The wind and clouds. My shadow  
Walked ahead of me, another me  
Facing my graying head shaking,

Not with palsy, but to attract my gaze.

“Who are you that walk in pursuit of me?”  
Said the shadow. “Wherever I go you follow me.”  
“I thought,” said I, “that it were you  
Who always walked ahead of me  
Or dogged my steps wherever I went.  
It’s time this pretence came to end.”  
And I pulled my sword and raised  
It in the air to settle for ever this duality.

Empty laughter filled my ears as I cut  
The frosty air, my enemy performing  
The same gesture. “You are not you,  
Nor I am I,” said he, and opened his arms  
Which I put around my neck, and met  
Li Po embracing the moon in the Nether World  
Across the Yellow Springs.

*Ahmed Ali*

### **Summary and Analysis**

#### **Summary:**

The poem is a search of the self and the identity. The poet says that he walked by the west lake on the tenth night of the tenth moon contemplating the wind and the clouds. His shadow was ahead of him. He identifies it as another self. The shadow was facing towards him and trying to catch his attention by shaking its head. It was not due to any paralyzed effect.

The shadow asks the poet about his identity and why is he walking in the pursuit of the shadow? It also says that wherever it goes the poet follows it. The poet replies that it was the shadow that always walked ahead of the poet. As a sticker it dogged the steps of the poet wherever he went. The poet thinks that somewhere this must have an end. So he pulls out his sword to settle this duality forever.

He tries to cut the shadow from himself. He cuts the frosty air. But the atmosphere is filled with empty laughter. Every action of the poet is performed by

the opponent. Finally, the shadow replies, “You are not you, nor I am I”. Saying this, the shadow opened its arms. The poet put it around his neck and met Li Po embracing the moon in the Nether world across the yellow spring.

**Analysis:**

The title and the first two lines of the poem are very symbolic. 'On the Tenth Night of the Tenth Moon I Walked By the West Lakes and Meet Another Me.' It, somewhere, may have the reference to the war of Karabala. Yazid called Hazarat Hussain to state that he is ready to accept his discipleship. But on the arrival of Hazarat Hussain, Yazid kept them at the shore of Nile river and tortured and killed Hazarat Hussain along with all his followers.

In this poem the poet tries to search the enemy within. The enemy is not outside but it is hidden somewhere within us, in our own mind and body. On the tenth night of tenth moon the poet walked by the west lake. His contemplation on the wind and clouds shows the atmospheric element where human beings do not have control on them. His own shadow was walking along with him and trying to attract his attention by shaking the head. The hidden enemy always tries to catch our attention by certain actions.

Actually the existence of the shadow is depended on the body. It cannot exist without it. But here the shadow asks the poet about his identity. The dependee asks the depender about his own existence. The poet is worried. He thinks the shadow as an external enemy and wants to cut it away from the self. He raises the sword and performs the action to end this duality of self forever. But he can't do that. No one can do this. The hidden enemy, the Satan within is very difficult to be removed.

The action results in the empty laughter. The shadow, which the poet considers the enemy, performs the same action. On the other hand the shadow ends this duality by stating the relationship. It shows that both are not separate entities but dependent on each other. The body is not the body and shadow is not shadow. Both are interdependent. If the body were not there, shadow's existence will not be possible and it is the existence of the shadow itself that authenticates the existence of the body. The poet accepts this reality and puts around his own neck the opened arms of his shadow. Then he met the Chinese poet Li Po embracing the moon on the Nether world across the yellow springs. This has a reference of poet's stay in China and his study and translation of Chinese poetry into English.

### Terms to Remember

**palsy:** paralysis, especially that which is accompanied by involuntary tremors.

**dogged:** follow (someone) closely and persistently.

**Nether world:** the underworld; hell.

Yellow Springs:

### Check Your Progress

Answer in one word/sentence.

1. What does the shadow ask the poet?
2. What does the poet do to settle the relation with the shadow?
3. What does the shadow say at the end?
4. Whom does the poet search?
5. Where does the poet meet Lee Po'?

### ii) Dialogue with Lee San

When young the thought of death  
Had never crossed our minds, Lee San.  
We had no time for it; and even when  
We sought it in the bitter frustration of youth,  
It was fulness of experience and old-age maturity  
We desired and falsely assumed, never thinking  
That when we are old and weary and full  
Of the sadness of life, no friend  
Shall visit us from the past  
To keep us company in the loneliness of age.  
Perhaps, having passed beyond the circle of death,  
You have found the secret of peace in the Nether World.

“Deep under the frozen earth,” said Lee San,  
“The moss dreams of Summer the Winter long,  
And, thrusting the cold crust of snow,  
Raises its face towards the light

With patient persistence braving the wind  
To make for itself a place in the sun.  
Green grow the weeds, the flowers fade away.  
Nothing lives, nothing dies: only these  
Alterations of night and day  
Bring news of the seasons eternally.”

But the shame of one’s own actions, said I,  
And the feeling of regret in the bones at the failure to meet  
Life’s obligations with life’s failing strengths,  
And the sense of the guilt of many wrongs,  
Of meeting favours with pride, love with arrogance,  
Multiplies and remains.

“A man’s life,” said Lee San, “is like  
A frog’s in a well that looks at the patch  
Of the sky that alone is visible, which he takes  
For the universe. We think, so we are.  
Cease to think, you will pass beyond being:  
To be uncreated, identify.”  
Alas, said I, the cares of the moment  
Fill the vision like the peaks of T’ien Shan.  
And alas for man’s ingratitude!  
Bent under the load of years no choice has he  
But to bear the burden of insults and the ironies of life.  
Can you ask for atonement of wrongs  
Done to yourself by your own hand?

“Not so,” he replied as he sat on his jade throne,  
Pointing to the earth in a gesture of peace.  
“The source of right and wrong is the same.  
You seek and do not find. So turn from desire  
If you wish for poise and tranquility,  
Look at the bamboo and the pine, for ever green,  
Filled with the calm of awareness and oneness of being.

You surround yourself with vanities that lead  
In the end to a gossamer of cares the spider weaves  
Into a web of the dream of passing things,

Prayer without faith, song devoid of song:  
A lonely line of geese  
Flapping its wings across the emptiness of space.  
Detract and gather and narrow the circle to the point,  
Disperse the caravans bearing  
The merchandise of nothing to nothing.  
And be ready to embrace  
The beginning in the end.”

*Ahmed Ali*

### **Summary and Analysis**

#### **Summary:**

The poem is in the form of a dialogue, between the poet and Lee San, ruler of the Joseon Dynasty of Korea (R 1776-1800). Jeongjo of Jeseon, popularly known as Lee/ Yisan. His mysterious death in 1800 became the source of many literary productions.

The poem is divided into six stanzas; each stanza shows the ultimate reality of human existence.

In the first stanza the poet addresses Lee San and states that the thought of death never crosses minds at the young age. No one has time for it. At some moments of frustration it appears. Everyone desires of matured old age with full experiences. No one thinks that when we are old and weary and full of sadness, no friend from past shall visit and accompany us in the loneliness of age. He says perhaps there will be secret peace in the Nether world only beyond the circle of death.

Lee San replies to the poet and shows the cycle of nature. He says deep under the frozen earth the moss dreams of summer during the long winter. Pushing aside the cold crust of snow it raises above towards light. It makes its own place in the sunny air. It is born again, grows, blooms and dies. These are the alterations of day and night. Nothing is permanent, but it is continuous eternal cycle of nature. Human life is also like this.

The poet comments on the human actions. He says we must be ashamed of our own actions. We fail to meet the obligations of life. There is a sense of many wrong deeds. We meet favours with pride, love and arrogance. It is our response to human emotions and it multiplies and remains constant because we are unaware about the ultimate truth 'Death'.

Lee San replies that ' a man's life is like a frog's in a well'. The frog looks at the patch of the sky and considers it as universe. The human beings also think this way. The poet regrets on this stating that the cares of the moment fill the visions like the peaks of T'ien Shan, and regrets about man's ingratitude. The human beings are leading the life without any choice and carrying the burden of insults and ironies of life. How can one ask for oneself about the wrongs done by his own hands towards himself?

Sitting on his jade throne and pointing to the earth in a gesture of peace Lee San replied that 'it is not so', 'The source of right and wrong is same'. You search but will not find it. If you really wish for poise and tranquility then (turn away) leave desire, get rid of desire. He asks the poet to look at the bamboo and the pine. They are evergreen, because they are filled with calm of awareness and oneness of being. Human beings surround themselves with varieties which lead in the end to gossamer of spider's web. It is a web of dreams and cares. The prayer without faith and song devoid of song is useless. A lonely line of gees here are flapping its wings across the emptiness of space. They detract and gather and make narrow circle. In the journey the caravans disperse. The merchandise bears nothing to nothing. One must be ready to embrace the beginning in the end because in reality end is a new beginning. The cycle of life is continuous.

#### **Analysis:**

The poem is about life, death and human reaction to it in the form of a dialogue between the poet and Lee San. The poet interacts with Lee San about man's reaction to death, youth is full of pleasure, when nobody even entertains a single thought of death. The desire to have a complete mature life doesn't allow the human beings to face the reality of growing age. Nobody will be there with us at the end peace could be achieved in the Nether world after death only.

Lee San answered the dilemma of the poet stating that life and death is a cycle of nature. The seed dreams of better spring in the long winter and comes out by

thrusting the cold crust of snow. Human life is like this. The soul departs the body, waits for the birth and gets a new form. It is a continuous process, which is eternal one.

The reaction of the poet to this is quite usual one. The youth never cares for anybody. But when this is a failure to meet life's obligations, the sense of guilt becomes prominent. People always do wrong things when they have the strength. The reaction to favour and love is not usual one. Rather pride or arrogance in them keeps them away from the feeling of universal brotherhood.

Lee San's reply shows how human beings are caught in the trap of life. How everyone among us think about our own world, our own pleasure. No one is ready to see the world outside. Like a frog living in the pond, we are complacent with the patch of sky we see. We are not ready to see that there is a world more than this and a great one. Lee San mentions here the peaks of T'ien Shan which mean mountains of heaven or Heavenly Mountains located in the Central Asia. The highest peak in the T'ien Shan is Jengish Chokusu of 7439 meters high. The poet wants to fill the vision like these peaks. He thinks that human life is full of insults and ironies. Throughout the life, human beings carry this burden. They cannot ask for the wrong deeds that they have done to themselves. They try to continue the life with this burden till the end.

Lee San comments that the source of right and wrong or good and bad things is the same. The difference is of perception only. The more we try to search for peace we go away from it. If one wants to get poise and tranquility, peace of mind then one has to get rid of desires. The human beings desire one thing and slowly it becomes a spider's net. The man gets caught in the net of his own desire. He loses faith, his prayers become empty without faith, his songs become devoid of song. He tries to get pleasure from many sources, gathers them again and again but fails to realize that these trading will lead to nothing. He must realize that the end is not the end it is the beginning of new life. To begin again, one has to end somewhere.

### **Terms to Remember**

**thrusting:** push suddenly or violently in a specified direction.

T'ien Shan

**poise:** composure and dignity of manner.



c) man's reaction to faith

d) man's reaction to everything

**iii) The Year of the Rat: 1984**

In this Year of the Rat the gopher's granary is full;  
Only men die of hunger, greed and hate.  
Like the leaves of Autumn falling one by one  
The tree of life is being denuded of its dress.

The Year of the Rat revives the call of dead desire  
Across the gulf of sun-drained shores, the silent seas,  
The fresh foot-prints of love  
Seeking the lost imprints of lovers' feet.

In this Year of the Rat one should not die  
Celebrating with youthful revellers the promise of Spring  
Waving the branches of weeping-willow, dancing  
The tiger dance to the din of loud drums.

When the year comes to an end  
Hope will have shed its flowers at the altar of age-god,  
And only a shell would remain  
Clutching the curious bones of faith.  
In the Year of the Rat the last refuge of man  
Is life in death.

*Ahmed Ali*

**Summary and Analysis**

**Summary:**

In the poem *The Year of the Rat: 1984* Ahmed Ali speaks about how the year affects human life. It has reference of Chinese zodiac. Rat is the first in the 12 year cycle of Chinese zodiac.

The poet describes the condition in the year 1984. In that particular year of rat the gopher's granary was full with grains. The animals knew the future well. The

human beings were dying due to hunger greed and hatred. Like falling of leaves in autumn people were dying quickly.

The year reviews a call of dead desire. It is an attempt to search the lost love and peace. The poet says that in this year one should not die celebrating youthful revelers, the life like weeping willow or the tiger's dance to the prolonged noise of drums.

The poet feels that at the end of the rat year hope will have shed its flowers at the altar of age-God. The curious bones of faith will have some support. At the end, life will be present in death only.

### **Analysis:**

The poem is a symbolic one. It has multiple ramifications. One of the years, 1984 refers to the political activities in Pakistan. In 1984 general Zia put forward a referendum order. He wanted to establish a pseudo-democracy in Pakistan, with a continuation of him as president under civilian setup. The poem tells us the condition of common people in Pakistan during that particular year.

The second reference it has to the Anti-Ahmadi activities. Anti- Ahmadi activities grew stronger. General Zia' Government also took part in it and passed ordinance XX. This ordinance prohibited the practice of Islam and the usage of Islamic terms and titles for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. As a result of this ordinance Mirza Tahir Ahmad (The head of the worldwide Ahmadiya Muslim Community) had to migrate to England.

The two major events get reflected in the poem. ***The Year of the Rat: 1984.*** The political creed of general Zia made the life of people difficult. The term 'Gopher's Granny is full' shows, how the hidden agenda was implemented under a political referendum and ordinance XX by general Zia Government. The two events destroyed the hope of a good nation. People had to leave country or life. The continuous presence of death shattered the life in Pakistan. Ahmed Ali symbolically comments on these two issues.

### **Terms to Remember**

**Year of the Rat:** Rat is the first in the 12-year cycle of Chinese zodiac. **The Years of the Rat** include 1912, 1924, 1936, 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008, 2020, 2032...The Rat is the first of all zodiac animals. According to one myth, the

Jade Emperor said the order would be decided by the order in which they arrived to his party. The Rat tricked the Ox into giving him a ride. Then, just as they arrived at the finish line, Rat jumped down and landed ahead of Ox, becoming first.

**gopher:** The gopher is a small squirrel-like rodent which lives in burrows underground.

**weeping-willow:** a Eurasian willow with trailing branches and foliage reaching down to the ground, widely grown as an ornamental in waterside settings.

**din:** a loud, unpleasant, and prolonged noise.

**reveller:** a person who is enjoying themselves in a lively and noisy way.

**denude:** strip (something) of its covering, possessions, or assets.

### **Check Your Progress**

**Answer the question in one word/sentence each.**

1. What does the 'Year of Rat' refer to?
2. According to the poet what is the cause of human death in this year?
3. Does the poem have any reference of history?
4. Who will be the last refuge of man?
5. What does the 'Year of Rat' attempt to search?

#### **4.3.6 Razia Khan (b. 1936 - d.2011)**

Razia Khan was a Bangladeshi novelist, poet, playwright, essayist and short story writer. She started writing at the age of 18. (But Tolar Upannyash 1958) At that young age she wrote a full-fledged novel. For many years she taught at the University of Dhaka.

She was born to a Politician and Social activist father Maulvi Tamizuddin Khan. She completed her Bachelor and Master in English from the University of Dhaka. For the higher studies she received a scholarship from the British Council and went to University of Birmingham.

Besides novel she wrote poetry. The collections of picturesque versus entitled Citra-Kabya (1980) shows her unique literary style. She had been conferred by PEN

Literary writing Award (1956), Pope Gold Medal (1957) Bangla Academy Literary Award (1975), Anannya Literature Award (2003). She was awarded Ekushey Padak in 1997 for contribution to education by the Government of Bangladesh.

### 1. My Daughter's Boy-friend

Importunate knocks on the door  
Sending tremors of foreboding  
Through the frame; that eyeless  
Face, unaware of me, excludes  
Me from every consideration  
The flesh of my flesh is now to be  
Nothing to me any longer;  
All those sleepless nights over  
The sick infant's cradle;  
All the agony of birth and rearing  
Are to be nothing; only this  
Total omission is palpable.  
To have woven such silvery dreams  
Around a fragile flower  
To be snatched off my branches  
By a thoughtless hand  
Is a thought I never entertained  
When I first swelled with pride  
With her in my insides.

*Razia Khan*

### Summary and Analysis

#### Summary:

The poem expresses the fear of a mother. This is the fear about transfer of young daughter's love from parents to lover. The boyfriend of her daughter enters the house with a knock. The knock creates a feeling of insecurity. The boyfriend enters the home unnoticed by the mother. Straightaway he enters the room of the poet's daughter. He doesn't even have a consideration of the presence of the mother there.

The mother is worried about her daughter and the future. The girl who is part of her flesh, her own body will not be her in the future. All the efforts the sleepless nights over the sick infant's cradle, the pangs of birth and the efforts taken for rearing the children will make no difference for her. The relation will no longer continue as it was previously. The mother's omission from the daughter's life in future is now clear to her.

The poet had woven a silvery ream around the delicate flower. She had always thought about the future of this girl. Now this flower is going to be snatched off from the branches (poet) by a thoughtless hand.

The poet had never thought about such a thing which is now supposed to take place. The realization of the conception had given her a proud feeling. The presence of baby inside the womb created motherly possessive affection for the daughter. But the insecurity of losing this possession tortures the poet all the time.

#### **Analysis:**

The poem deals with a mother's feelings when her daughter's love shifts to the lover. It is a natural and universal phenomenon when the grown up girl's love is shifted to the other person, her life partner. The mother here feels insecure. She feels she is losing the parental affection and love from her daughter. Every time when her daughter's boyfriend enters the home this feeling of insecurity increases. The boyfriend doesn't pay much attention towards the mother. He straightaway enters the room of the daughter. That's why the poet calls him 'that eyeless face'. She feels so because he doesn't even sense her presence there. He excludes the mother from every consideration.

The daughter is the part of poet's flesh but now she will be nothing to the mother. The poet becomes nostalgic and remembers the sleepless nights when her daughter was sick. Every now and then she had worried about the daughter. As a mother she had suffered a lot for rearing the baby, suffered the birth pangs, which in return gave her tremendous pleasure. But it is clear that everything will end now. She will be omitted from the life of her daughter. Her secure place in her daughter's life will be taken by somebody else, and this 'Somebody's presence is always there in her home. She had seen many dreams for her daughter, also had planned many things about her future. But the 'Fragile Flower' will be snatched off from her branches by a 'thoughtless hand'. She calls this hand thoughtless because the boy never cares about

the relationship of a mother and her daughter. She recalls the moment when she first swelled with pride, sensing the presence of the baby in her womb. At that moment and even after that till the present moment, the thought of separating from the daughter never entered in her mind; rather she had not entertained it. But now it is very clear. The daughter supposed to go away from the poet. This feeling of separation and losing the close bond, creates insecurity and feeling of otherness for daughter's boyfriend.

### **Terms to Remember**

**importunate:** persistent, especially to the point of annoyance.

**tremors:** a sudden feeling of fear or excitement

**foreboding:** a feeling that something bad will happen; fearful apprehension

**palpable:** so intense as to seem almost tangible

### **Check Your Progress**

1. Why is the mother afraid of?
2. What is the mother's anxiety?
3. What are the feelings of the mother?
4. Are the feelings of the poet limited to her only?
5. Can the poet avoid this upcoming event?

## **2. The Monstrous Biped**

The low whimper  
Of a street dog  
Hit by an unmindful wagon  
Stabs like a knife  
Stays with me like a scar  
Left by bullets.  
The more defenceless  
The creature the more  
The cruelty; indifference.

If the dog could show his teeth,  
Dig them into the eyes of the killer,  
He might learn to be human.

*Razia Khan*

### **Summary and Analysis**

#### **Summary:**

The *Monstrous Biped* is a poem about human cruelty. It shows how cruel the human beings are. The poet had seen a strayed dog hit by a wagon. The low whimpering of the dog creates sympathy for the wounded animal. The incident always tortures the poet. It has created a permanent mark in her mind as a scar left by bullets. The unmindful wagon hit the animal and left. The indifference and cruelty towards the animal is more when it is defenseless. The dog doesn't know the human nature. The poet says if the dog could show his teeth and dig them into the eyes of the killer he might learn to be human.

She compares this with her own situation. She says the two feet monstrous animal rides her chest as soon as she stops for rest. The constant watch of the men tires her. She would rather breathe a little, love, laugh and bask in the sun and to be good to everyone. But she has to point her gun at the men who make her kneel at their dirty feet, or even at women who steal her peace when she courageously tries to handle the situation.

#### **Analysis:**

*The Monstrous Biped* is a poem by Razia Khan which tries to describe the situation of a woman in the world of men. How the patriarchal society treats a woman. Her condition is not better than a defenseless animal. The poem is divided into two stanzas of 12 lines each. Both the stanzas deal with two different events but have one common thing, i.e. cruelty of human beings, especially men.

The first stanza deals with an event where a street-dog is hit by an unmindful wagon. The wagon is unmindful because the person who drives it doesn't care for the animal. He doesn't stop to see the wounded animal. The whimpering of that animal leaves the scar on poet's heart like of a bullet. This cruelty and indifference depends on the nature of the animal. If the animal is defenseless, no one cares about it. The cruelty and indifference increases accordingly. The poet feels that the animal must

learn the human nature and be cruel towards the killer. He must show his teeth and dig them deep into the eyes of the killer.

The second stanza deals with her own experience, a woman's experience. This experience a woman can get anywhere, in the market, in a bus, at any public place or sometimes even at home. The moment any woman stops or rests the two feet animal (men) rides her chest. The eyes of men move on women chest, sensing the physicality with the eyes. This constant watch tires the poet. As a free woman she wants to do everything. She wants to breathe freely, love and laugh freely and even bask in the sun freely and to be good to everyone. But the male dominated social system doesn't allow a woman to do these things. Unlike the street dog she has learnt to protect herself. She is even ready to go against those women who do not support her stand and tries to take her peace away. She doesn't want to be a defenseless dumb animal and suffer the torture. She wants to protect herself and ready to go to any extreme for her own rights and for her self-esteem. She criticizes the patriarchal system here because the system treats women as defenseless animal and is cruel and indifferent towards them (women).

### Terms to Remember

**biped:** an animal that uses two legs for walking

**whimper:** make a series of low, feeble sounds expressive of fear, pain, or unhappiness

**indifference:** lack of interest, concern, or sympathy.

**bask:** lie exposed to warmth and light, typically from the sun, for relaxation and pleasure

### Check Your Progress

#### Fill in the Blanks

1. The monstrous biped is a poem about \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) human cruelty
  - b) human affection
  - c) human faith
  - d) monstrous feelings

2. The indifference and cruelty towards \_\_\_\_\_ is more when it is defenceless.
  - a) the woman      b) the man      c) the animal      d) the society
3. If the dog could show his teeth and dig them into the eyes of the killer he might learn \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) to be animal      b) to be great      c) to be happy      d) to be human
4. The second stanza the poet compares this monster with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) men      b) animal      c) woman      d) all
5. As a woman the poet wants to \_\_\_\_\_ freely, \_\_\_\_\_ freely and even \_\_\_\_\_ freely and to be good to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a) Live, work and try, care the children, her baby.
  - b) breathe, love and laugh, bask in the sun, everyone.
  - c) work, live and die, help others, her partner.
  - d) move, enjoy and encourage, support the family, her in-laws.

#### 4.4 Self Assessment Questions:

1. Comment on the themes and trends in South Asian Poetry
2. Elaborate the complexity of human emotions in south Asian Poetry with the help of the poems you have studied.

#### 4.5 Key to Check Your Progress

##### 4.3.1 Sarojini Naidu

###### i. Indian Weavers

Fill in the blanks

1. *The Lady of the Lake*
2. new born baby
3. the marriage-veils of a queen
4. shroud white as a cloud and feather

**ii. Song of Radha**

Answer the questions in one word.

1. Mathura
2. Govinda, Govinda
3. Radha and River Yamuna
4. The poem is about Radha's eternal love for Lord Govinda (Krishna).

**R. Parthasarathy**

**Exile from Homecoming**

**Answer in one word/sentence.**

1. He has returned after a long time to his native place and has last contact with his language.
2. In 1959, when the poet's grandfather died.
3. Sundari
4. The poet feels that he himself is his father now.
5. The poem describes Madurai city and the Ghats of Vaikai River.
6. He calls poet a son of bitch who has become fat by reading many old poems and poets.
7. He is willing to retire from life.

**4.3.3 Partrick Fernando**

**i. Elegy for my son.**

1. He compares the death of his son with the death of a young grown up tree.
2. The poet's son got sicken in a single day and died.
- 3.
4. The poet feels that there was excess of love from the earth, the wind and the sun that they took the young tree with the notice of just a little day.
5. The poet thinks that they are calm conspirators.

#### 4.3.4 Yasmin Gooneratne

##### i. On an Asian Poet

1. Immigration and reflection of past are the major aspects of Gooneratne's poetry.
2. The poet explains the politics of language and exploitation of South Asian Poets and Writers by America.
3. Because there is a death in the touch of America.
4. The poet calls America a graveyard of art, a monster living on lazar-house.
5. 20th Century American commercial attitude is the theme of the poem.

##### ii. There was a country

###### Fill in the blanks.

- 1) a) Sorrow
- 2) b) Patchwork or Collage
- 3) d) let the creation sleep
- 4) c) Opals
- 5) a) Creation

#### 4.3.5 Ahmed Ali

##### On the Tenth Moon

##### i) Answer in one word/sentence.

1. The shadow asks the poet about his identity and why he is walking in the pursuit of the shadow.
2. The poet pulls out his sword to settle the duality with the shadow forever.
3. The shadow at the end says, "you are not you, nor I am I".
4. The poet tries to search the enemy within.
5. The poet meets Lee Po in the nether world.

**ii) Dialogue with Lee San**

**Fill in the Blanks**

1. a) Circle of death
2. a) moss
3. c) pride, love and arrogance
4. d) a frog's
5. a) same
6. b) faith, song
7. a) beginning in the end
8. b) man's reaction to life

**i) The year of the Rat : 1984**

**Answer the question in one word/sentence each.**

1. The year of Rat refers to the first in the 12 year cycle of Chinese Zodiac.
2. During this year the human beings were dying due to hunger, greed and hatred.
3. Yes, 1984 refers to the political activities in Pakistan. It refers to General Zia's referendum order and the ordinance XX passed in the same year.
4. Life in death will be the last refuge of man.
5. It is an attempt to search the lost love and peace.

**4.3.6 Razia Khan**

**i. My Daughter's Boyfriend**

1. The mother is afraid of the transfer of young daughter's love from parents to her lover.
2. The mother has anxiety because the boyfriend of her daughter enters the home unnoticed by the mother.

3. The mother feels that the flower is going to be snatched off from the branches (poet) by a thoughtless hand. There is insecurity of losing this possession. It tortures her all the time.
4. No, these are universal feelings.
5. No. It is not possible, on the other hand the poet is preparing herself for this upcoming event.

**i) The Monstrous Biped**

**Fill in the Blanks**

1. a) human cruelty
2. c) the animal
3. d) to be human
4. a) men
5. b) breathe, love and laugh, bask in the sun, everyone.

**4.6 References to further study:**

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