

PONDICHERRY UNIVERSITY

(A Central University)

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH



MA-ENGLISH – First Year

Course Code:
60

Paper Code:
MAEG1006

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

DDE – WHERE INNOVATION IS A WAY OF LIFE

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INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Indian Writing in English

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Suggested Reading :

- A Bibliography of Indian Literature : Translation and Critical Studies Indian Literature 117 (1987) pp. 135 -142
- An Anthology of Indo-Anglian Poetry. Ed. Ashley E. Myles. New Delhi : Mittal Publications, 1991.
- Critical Thought : An Anthology of 20th Century Indian English Essays. Eds. S.R. Desai and G.N. Devy. New Delhi : Sterling, 1986.
- Critical Response to Indian English Fiction. Shyam M. Asnani. Delhi : Mittal Publications, 1986.
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- Indian English Drama: A Critical Study, S. Krishna Bhatta. New Delhi : Sterling, 1987.
- Makers of Indian English Literature. Ed. C.D. Narasimhaiah. New Delhi: Pencraft, 2000

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UNIT I

Indo-Anglian Poetry: Post-Independent period

Indo-Anglian Poetry in a recognizable form could be traced back to early 19th C to the contributions of the Dutt family. The Dutt family album consists of lyrics, ballads, translations etc and it reveals their love for the English language and their love for the romantic. Since, then it has come a long way. Poets like Rabindranath Tagore, Sree.Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu wrote beautiful verses in English. Their poetry revealed their spirit of freedom, their concern for the nation, their political and social ideologies and their spiritual inclinations as well. In the language of the British, they conveyed Indian thought and sensibility. As R.Parthasarathy says, ” In examining the phenomenon of Indian verse in English, it did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of British from India. An important characteristic of Indian verse in English is that it is in Indian sensibility and content and English in language. It is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment and reflects its mores, often ironically”

However, Indo-Anglian poetry could free itself from the image of being imitative only during the post-Independent period. The publication of Ezekiel’s *Five Volumes of Anthology* brought a change in the trend. He wrote in simple, free verse, without rhetoric and ornamental imagery. His tone was ironic. He had avoided emotion and sentiment. His style was refreshingly different. He did not write in the conventional rhythmic language of the past, but in the simple, direct, aphoristic style, which showed the influence of the modern western poets, like Dylan Thomas, Philip Larkin, T S Eliot and Rilke.

His style was generally accepted and most of the modern poets wrote in a similar style. For most of them were bilinguals and had the capacity to write fluently in English and in their mother tongue. For some of them like Ezekiel and Dom Moraes, English was their only language. Ezekiel’s language was direct and simple. The poets who followed wrote in an aphoristic style using metaphors. Themes were also varied. Most of Ezekiel’s poems were on love and sex. The poems of A. K. Ramanujan were about Hindu family situations and they revealed his search for the roots and the poems of R.Parthasarathy expressed his sense of alienation and his agony of leaving his motherland. The poetry of Kamala Das brought out the woman in her. She presented problems of man-woman

relationship from the feminine perspective. She wrote frankly and boldly about love and sex and about the predicament of women and male oppression.

Jayanta Mahapatra, Daruwalla, Adil Jusswalla, Gieve Patel are the other modern Indian-English poets and they present in their poems the changing ideologies, the problems of love and sex, problems of language and culture, diaspora and the sense of alienation. All these aspects and the reflection of various other shades and patterns of the life could be found in post independent Indo-Anglian poetry.

Nissim Ezekiel

Biographical Sketch

Nissim Ezekiel was born into a family of Bene Israeli descent in 1924 in Bombay. After his high school education in Bombay, he went to London for higher studies. He had to struggle hard for money and he took up odd jobs in order to make both the ends meet. After the completion of his course when he returned to Bombay, better opportunity knocked at his doors. A dynamic career then followed and he took up various activities like writing plays, doing editorial work, advertising etc.

His first book of poems *A Time to Change* was published in London in 1952. His other volumes are *Sixty Poems* (1953), *Five Volumes of Anthology*, *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *The Snake Skins and other poems* (1974) and *Hymns in Darkness* (1976). He received the Sahitya Akademi award for the *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982).

Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry

Ezekiel is a prolific writer and has carved a niche for himself in the world of Indo-Anglian Poetry. Considered as one of the major poets of Indo-Anglian poetry in the post – independent period, he has influenced many poets of the next generation. His prose like verse has become a model for many poets and is commonly used today.

Ezekiel translates all his experiences into poetry and says that his poems have a “self-therapeutic purpose”. His poetic career has different stages and it brings out the evolution in him. As Srinivasa Iyengar points out, “In his first two volumes Ezekiel deals with persons, places, memories, situations, ecstasies of flesh and the concept of mind and

heart. But his later poems are more matured... the development is from a search for identification to resignation”(p657).

The comment that Ezekiel is “the poet Laureate of the ordinary” (Mehrotra, 248) brings out the essence of his poetry. Ezekiel’s poems have a wide range of themes and experiences. He records every small experience like the experience of taking English tuition classes, his London experience and the morning walk in Bombay etc. in his poems. While describing a situation or a person or an incident he does not leave out even the ugly and the uninteresting aspects, thus giving a complete and a realistic picture of the subject taken. His description of Bombay for example tells about the slums, beggars and processions, bringing before our eyes the busy city with all its merits and demerits:

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

His early poems described people, places and situations with a sense of humour. His *A Very Indian Poem in Indian English* presents typical Indian situations. He teases the oddities of Indian English like the use of present continuous tense in the place of present tense, use of statements for questions, adding “no” with statements etc. Some of these techniques could be seen in this excerpt:

*I am standing for peace and non violence
Why world is fighting, fighting
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi
I am simply not understanding.*

(The Patriot)

His poems “Farewell Party to Miss Pushpa T, S”, “The Patriot”,
” The Railway Clerk “ belong to this group.

In the second stage, there are more of love poems. Love, sex, marriage, loneliness – these form the main theme of his poetry. Ezekiel is candid even to the point of bluntness in describing man-woman relationship. The passion, the desire for love and sex on one hand, the social norms and his own inhibition on the other hand lead to conflict and this could be perceived in many of his poems

His later poems of the third stage, have a philosophical strain and there is a quest for identity, a desire to unravel the mysteries of life.

*I've stripped off a hundred veils
And still there are more
that covers your creation.
why are you so elusive?*

Hymns in Darkness.

“The self” is, however, predominant in his poetry in all the three stages. His quest for identity, his sense of alienation; self-analysis and self-criticism occupy a major portion of his work. His ‘Background Casually’ is autobiographical and the poet tells briefly about his life - his ancestry, his childhood, school days, London experience and marriage. In 'Background casually' he talks about his Jewish origin and how he feels alienated in school.

*My ancestors among the castes
were aliens crushing seed for bread*
“Background Casually”

And in the same poem his struggle to overcome this sense of alienation is expressed.

“How to feel at home was the point”.

He considers Bombay, his birthplace as his home and expresses his sentiment strongly.

*Confiscate my passport Lord
I don't want to go abroad
Let me find my song
Where I belong*

“Egoist's prayers”

And says that he considers it as his missionary place.

*“As others choose to give themselves,
In some remote and backward place.
My backward place is where I am”*

“Background Casually”

The poet's conflicts and confusions, his doubts and frustrations, have found expression in his poetry. He reveals his weaknesses and prays to God to rescue him.

*The vices, I've always had
I still have.
The virtues I've never had
I still do not have
From this human way of life
Who can rescue man.
If not his maker
Do thy duty Lord.*

“Egoist's prayers”

He believes that self-fulfillment is important. If one is satisfied with himself, then he can be at peace and communicate with the whole world even if he is alone.

*I close the door and sit alone
In kinship with the world
I am nearer everybody
Being near myself alone.* ----- (Happening)

Ezekiel wrote in a style that was open, simple and passionate. His aphoristic and conversational style gave a dramatic colour to his poems. His imagery is functional. Ezekiel has been influenced by writers like T.S.Eliot and Rilke. When asked about the influences on him Ezekiel answered, “A clear influence is no proof of a poem's merit...All this talk about influences may be of some value when I write really good poetry during the next ten years or so, which I certainly hope to do”. (Karnani, 1974) He has indeed written many such poems and has influenced many Indo Anglian writers like P.Lal and Dom Moraes.

A Very Indian Poem in Indian English

*I am standing for peace and non-violence
Why world is fighting fighting
Why all people of world*

*Are not following Mahatma Gandhi
I am simply not understanding
Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct
But modern generation is neglecting
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing*

*Other day I'm reading in newspaper
(everyday I'm reading Times of India
to improve my English language)
How one goonda fellow
Throw stone at Indira behn
Must be student unrest fellow, I'm thinking
French Romans country men, I'm saying
(to myself)
Lend me the ears.*

*Everything is coming-
Regeneration, remuneration, contraception
Be patiently, brothers and sisters.
You want one glass lassy?
Very good for digestion
With little salt lovely drink
Better than wine;
Not that I'm ever tasting the wine
I am the total teatotaller, completely total
But I say wine is for the drunkards only.*

*What you think of prospects of world peace?
Pakistan behaving like this,
China behaving like that
It is making me very sad, I'm telling you.
Really most harassing me.
All men are brothers, no?
In India also*

Gujarathis, Maharastrians, Hindiwallas

All brothers

Though some are having funny habits.

Still, You tolerate me,

I tolerate you,

One day RamRajya is surely coming.

You are going?

But you will visit again

Any time, any day.

I'm not believing in ceremony

Always I'm enjoining your company

Explanation

Ezekiel's "A Very Indian Poem in Indian English" is a collection where in an exaggerated Indian English, the poet comments on the syntactic oddities of Indian English and the Indian political scene. The first part is titled 'The Patriot'. 'The Patriot' in his address says that he is a supporter of peace and non-violence and wonders why people do not follow Gandhiji's principles. He is frustrated that the modern generation fails to pay attention to the ancient wisdom and is going too much after fashion and foreign goods.

The Second part is presented as an ordinary conversation between an old man and another man. However, there is only one voice. The old man has been reading English newspaper from where he learns what happens in the country. He expresses his disapproval of the behaviour of a rebel throwing stones at Mrs. Indira Gandhi. This can be considered as a political commentary of Indira Gandhi's emergency period and 20-point programme for re-generation where contraception was encouraged. Here there is a mixture of English and Hindi words. The old man asks the listener if he would like to have a glass of Lassi. He adds that it tastes good with a little salt added to it. Then he modifies his comment and says that it tastes better than wine. He then hurries up to clarify that he should not be mistaken for a drunkard, for he is a teetotaler.

The old man also expresses his frustration about the behaviour of neighbouring countries like Pakistan and China. He tells about how united Indians are, in spite of the diversity (various languages and various cultures) When the neighbour is about to leave he asks him to visit again and adds in a cordial tone that he does not stand on formalities.

He distinguishes Indian English by the frequent use of present continuous tense (I am standing for peace/ I am not understanding / fighting fighting etc), “no” after statements use of English and Hindi words, mixing the syntactic and lexical elements from both, using noun as adjectives (Eg. Goonda fellow, Student unrest fellow etc.)

Some critics treat this poem as an alien’s view of Indian English, whereas the others treat it as a mild criticism where we are made to laugh at our own follies. Ezekiel, however, portrays an Indian who is cordial, worried about the country and the attitude of the people. This description makes one feel that it is not an alien’s view of India. Ezekiel says, “My poems in Indian English are rightly described as very Indian poems. So, they should not be considered as ‘mere lampoons’. The character and the situations projected are intended to be genuinely Indian and the humour in the English language as it is widely spoken by Indians to whom it is not funny at all.”(The Hindu, 2004) These poems have succeeded in depicting the Indian friendliness and warmth in Indian English.

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 quiet 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 nearly bent*

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

Explanation:

"Enterprise" is a notable poem for its thought content and lyrical language. The poem is allegorical, treating life as a pilgrimage. The first stanza describes the beginning of the journey. The pilgrims begin their journey. Curious and eager, ready for enterprise, they are prepared to face and endure all the burdens.

The mind is alert and the pilgrims are ready for all kinds of practical learning. This is brought out clearly where the poet says

*we stood it very well, I thought,
observed and put down copious notes*

but the mind is not receptive, not ready for great moment of revelation yet. The sun is hot.

In the second stage of the pilgrimage importance is given to factual details. Facts are observed and learnt enthusiastically.

*On things the peasant bought and sold
The way of serpent and of goat
Three cities were sage had taught*

The practical side of life demands the attention of the pilgrims.

The next stanza describes the next phase where differences arise among the pilgrims when they have to cross a desert patch. In fact, they lose a friend because of their difference. (A shadow falls on us and grows.) Gradually the pilgrims lose their interest in journey, i.e., in the pilgrimage. They stand divided among themselves. The pilgrims ignore every thing that would enlighten them (They ignored "what the thunder meant") since they were divided, and since their basic needs were not fulfilled. Thunder is symbolic of illumination. Hence it could be interpreted that the pilgrims are not so

enthusiastic now, like in the beginning of their journey and hence they miss the important details, which might promote spiritual enlightenment.

And there is only utter disillusionment at the end. And by the time the journey/pilgrimage comes to an end, they are puzzled as to why they had taken so much trouble to reach that place. They understand that they could not get any enlightenment from a pilgrimage when they are not receptive. They also realize that there should be growth 'within' first. We can 'gather grace' only at home, that is, in our place, and that too should begin from 'within' us.

The title "Enterprise" symbolically denotes the ventures in the process of spiritual evolution though in the superficial level it tells about the challenges one has to face during a journey.

Critical comments

- 1) What impresses one about Ezekiel is his remarkable sincerity. He is always himself, with in his range. His poems are generalizations of his own intimately felt experiences – Chetan Karnani
- 2) No intricate symbolism or far-fetched mythology haunts Ezekiel's work and yet the thing clicks. He believes neither in the bogus repetition of P.Lal nor in the shock tactics of A.K.Ramanujan, yet he creates an authentic effect. His poetry is simple, introspective and analytical – Chetan Karnani
- 3) The most prominent aspect of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry is, the private sensibility operating in the context of social and ethical changes in post-independent India - Harish Raizada.

A.K.Ramanujan

A.K.Ramanujan was born in Mysore in a Tamil Brahmin family in 1929. His father was a professor of Mathematics. He grew up in a multilingual environment and could speak Tamil, Kannada and English. He taught in various colleges in South India and later from 1962, he taught Linguistics in Chicago for about 30 years.

He has to his credit, four volumes of poetry. *The Striders* (1966) was his first publication which was followed by *Relations* (1971), *Selected poems* and (1976) *Second Sight* (1996). However, as A.K.Mehrotra points out, what brought him reputation was not his English poems, but his translation. He has translated from Tamil, Kannada and

Telugu. His important works of translation are the *Interior Landscape* (1967), *Speaking of Siva*(1973), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981) *Poems of the Love and War* (1985) and *When God is a Customer* (1994). He has also published a collection of proverbs in Kannada. He devoted much of his time in folk literature- Folk mythologies, puranas and traditions.

Some of his theories and techniques in translation have gained much recognition. He highlights on ‘intertextuality’ in his folklore studies. In his cultural essays such as “Is There an Indian Way of Thinking(1990), he explains cultural ideologies and behavioral manifestations in terms of an Indian psychology which he calls ‘context sensitive’ thinking.

Themes

“The search for the roots’ is the most dominant theme in A.K.Ramanujan’s poetry. He says, ‘the past never passes; either the individual or historical past or cultural past. It is with us, it is what gives us the richness of understanding’.

This statement clearly brings out his attachment to the past. Childhood experiences of love and exposure to contemporary urban life are some of his recurrent theme. Most of his poems have as the subject matter Indian culture, myth and heritage. Since he was an expatriate, it was probably a natural reaction to live in the past trying to bring from his memory the Hindu life, culture and family set up. Geetha Patel calls his poetry ‘exilic writing, where there is retrieval of fantasies of traditions’.(960) The following lines throw light on this aspect and his poetry abounds in such descriptions.

*Grand children who recite Sanskrit
To approving old men or bring
Betel nuts for visiting uncles (small scale reflectons)*

Though it is often the Indian Landscape or environment, his allusions are not limited. ‘They range over many disciplines – Literature, P-hilosophy, religion and folklore – and from the Taittiriya Upanishad to L.P.Hartley” (Mehrotra)

His wide reading and depth of knowledge are revealed in the various subject matters that one comes across in his poems.

*Suddenly, connections severed
As in a lobotomy unburdened*

*of history, I lose
my bearings, a circus zilla spun
at the end of her rope, dizzy
terrified,
and happy. And my watchers
watch, cool as fires
in a mirror (Looking for the center)*

He writes about Transnationalism and hybridity. His poetry reveals his love for India as well as America. He has humourously described himself as the hyphen in ‘indo-American’. His Chicago Zen exemplifies the theme of transnationalism. Here is an attempt to imagine himself as another hybrid image

*Now tidy your house
Dust especially your living room
And do not forget to name
All your children*

*Watch your step. Sight may strike you
Blind in unexpected places
The traffic light turns orange and
On 57th and Dorchester and you stumble,
- You fall into a vision of forest fires
Enter a frothing Himalayan river
Rapid, silent.*

The conflict in his mind about the traditional way of life and modernity is revealed in many of his poems. The following lines bring out his struggle to change from the traditional way and his failure in doing so.

*Yes, I know that. I should be modern
Marry again. See strippers at the tease
Touch Africa. Go to the movies.
.....
But sorry, I cannot unlearn
Conventions of despair.
They have their pride*

*I must seek and will find
My particular hell only in my Hindu mind.*

- 'Convention of Despair'

In another poem, he says how the control and traditional discipline 'crumble' in a tempting situation.

*'commandments crumbled
in my father's past, her tumbled hair suddenly known
as silk in my angry hand, I shook a little
and took her, behind the laws of my land.*

'Still Another View of Grace'

Techniques:-

Ramanujan is a keen observer, who had the knowledge of many fields and hence his images and similes are precise and powerful. His sound application of theme and form results in a forceful meaningful utterance, as in the following poem, about his father

*Skyman in a manhole
With astronomy for dream
Astrology for nightmare
.....
moving in Sanskrit zodiac's
for ever troubled
by the fractions, the kidneys

in his Tamil flesh
his body the great Bear
dipping for honey:*

Similarly in the following lines, where he describes his pain and his visit to the Doctor, one can see his wide knowledge and his sense of humour:

*Doctors x-ray the foot front face and back,
Left profile and right as if for a police*

*File, unearth shadow fossils of Neanderthals
Buried in this contemporary foot
They draw three test tubes of blood as I turn
My face away, and label my essences
With a mis-spelled name ('Pain')*

A.K.Ramanujan uses symbols and images abundantly in his poems. In 'Still Another View of Grace', he talks of "hungers that roam the street". In 'Breaded Fish, 'he compares memory to "coil on a heath". In his poem 'Birthdays" he writes

*.... Death can be sudden
and multiple, like pregnant deer
shot down on the run.*

Ramanujan shows variety in rhythm. He could express with the help of metaphors, precisely and accurately what he wants to convey. He could give expression to strong feeling in simple language with a surprising twist at the end.

*In Chicago
Donot walk slow
Find no time
To stand and stare
Down there, blacks look black
And whites, they look blacker.*

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 water gates
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 births.*

*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 body
with different diapers
to tell them apart*

“A River” describes the scenes that the poet saw in river Vaikai in Madurai, when it was flooded. The poet here describes some of the scenes that are generally not described by other poets.

Madurai is a city of temple. It is also a city of poets who sang about temples. Normally the river is dry and one could even see the rusted bars that had undergone repair, and straw, hair and other dust collected at the watergates under the bridges. Even the pebbles on the riverbed could be seen. The wet pebbles looked like the back of the crocodile and the dry ones looked like water buffalos.

The poet points out that the other poets had not described these scenes. They had sung only of the floods. The poet happened to be there on a day when there was flood. Water rose many inches on that day, and the flood washed off many houses, one pregnant woman and two cows named Gopi and Brinda (the poet comments on the conventional way of naming the cows Gopi and Brinda)

The new poets who wrote about the flood simply quoted the old poets and described the floods in the way the earlier poets had done but no one took care to mention the isolated incidents about the pregnant woman with twins and the cows that were washed by the flood.

He feels that the river has water enough to be poetic (That is, though it is normally dry it is flooded rarely and then the poets write only about the flood.) On the other hand, this poet here writes about the tragedy associated with the flood and criticizes other poets for neglecting these facts.

The poet uses the river as a symbol to bring out the fact that conventional poets describe the customary and the regular things only. The poet criticizes the inhuman leaving out of the specific and isolated incidents.

“Small Scale Reflections

on a Great House

*sometimes I think that nothing
that ever comes into this house
goes out. Things come in every day*

*to lose themselves among other things
lost long ago among
other things lost long ago;*

*Lame wandering cows from nowhere
have been known to be tethered,
given a name, encouraged*

*to get pregnant in the broad day light
of the street under the elders’
supervision, the girls hiding*

behind windows with holes in them

*Unread library books
Usually mature in two weeks
and begin to lay a row*

*of little eggs in the ledgers
for fines, as silverfish
in the old man’s office room*

*breed dynasties among long legal words
in the succulence
of Victorian parchment.*

Neighbours’ dishes brought up

*With the greasy sweets they made
all night the day before yesterday

for the wedding anniversary of a god,
never lever the house they enter,
like the servants, the phonographs,
the epilepsies in the blood,

sons-in-law who quite forget
their mothers, but stay to check
accounts or teach arithmetic to nieces,

or the women who come as wives
from houses open on one side
to rising suns, on another

to the setting, accustomed
to wait and to yield to monsoons
in the mountains' calendar

beating through the hanging banana leaves.*

*And also, anything that goes out
Will come back, processed and often
With long bills attached,*

*Like the hoped bales of cotton
Shipped off to invisible Manchesters
and brought back milled and folded

for a price, cloth for our days'
middle-class loins, and muslin
for our richer nights. Letters mailed

have a way of finding their way back
with many re-directions to wrong
addresses and red ink marks*

earned in Tiruvalla and Sialkot.

*And ideas behave like rumours,
Once casually mentioned somewhere
they come back to the door as prodigies*

*born to prodigal father, with eyes
that vaguely look like our own,
like what Uncle said the other day:*

*that every Plotinus we read
is what some Alexander looted
between the malarial rivers.*

*A beggar once came with a violin
to croak out a prostitute song
that our voiceless cook sang
all the time in our backyard.*

*Nothing says out: daughters
Get married to short-lived idiots;
Sons who run away come back*

*in grand children who recite Sanskrit
to approving old men, or bring
betel nuts for visiting uncles*

*who keep them gaping with
anecdotes of unseen fathers,
or to bring Ganges water*

*in a copper pot
for the last of the dying
ancestors' rattle in the throat.*

*And though many times from everywhere,
Recently only twice:
Once in nineteen-forty-three
From as far away as the Sahara,

Half-gnawed by desert foxes,
And lately from somewhere
in the north, a nephew with stripes

on his shoulder was called
an incident on the border
and was brought back in plane

and train and military truck
even before the telegrams reached,
on a perfectly good
chatty afternoon.*

Notes:- Alexander:- Alexander the Great, King of Macedonia, He was taught by Aristotle. He showed military brilliance. His Empire, the greatest that had existed to that time extended from Thrace to Egypt and from Greece to the Indus Valley.

Plotinus: Egyptian-Roman Philosopher. At the age of 27, he traveled to Alexandria where he studied philosophy for 11 years. For Plotinus, Philosophy was not only a matter of abstract speculation but also a way of life and religion.

A.K.Ramanujan's "Small Scale Reflections on a Great House" is an absorbing poem where the poet describes the activities and events in a Hindu family in the joint family system.

It is a great house where belongings are lost but not noticed. It is a house where even things from outside also find a place but are also lost with the other articles that are already lost in the house.

Cows that come from somewhere are tethered, taken care of and are encouraged to get pregnant. The unread library books in the house get old and silver fish developed its dynasty between the Victorian papers.

The poet gives a list of other goods that come to the house but do not go back. Dishes prepared by neighbours two days earlier for some religious celebration also remain in the house. Nothing seems to go back. Though the list starts with objects, it goes on to include people and even diseases that come and settle down but do not go back. The list includes servants, phonographs, epilepsies in the blood and sons-in-law who seem to have forgotten their mothers or women who come as wives from small houses. (The houses are so small that they could see the rising sun from one side and the setting sun from the other) The clause 'sons in law who seem to have forgotten their mothers' reveals the poet's sense of humour. It criticizes the sons in law who come for a small function to the father in law's house and overstay there.

The poet then remembers how even the things that go out also come back. The raw cotton that is sent to Manchester comes back as cloth. Similarly letters get redirected with more seals and addresses. Even the rumour that goes out of the house comes back in a developed form like the prodigies who resemble but do not exactly resemble their forefathers. Even the beggar comes back with the song that is sung by the cook of this house.

The list is long. Daughters get married and come back after the husband's death, the sons come back as grand children.

The body of the nephew who fought in the border is also brought to the house even before the arrival of the telegram.

It is interesting to note how as he is listing about the things that come back, he starts with the less serious events and goes on to graver incidents, The similes – raw cotton coming back as cloth and rumour coming back in a different form like the prodigies who partly resemble their ancestors are captivating. The poetic beauty lies in the use of precise words, sharp thought provoking images and apt similes.

Critical comments

- 1) He is like one caught in the crossfire between the elemental pulls of his native culture and the aggressive compulsions of the Chicago milieu, On one side, the metaphor of the family with its ineluctable inner filiations, and on the other, the

self-forged prison of linguistic Sophistication.

- K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar.

- 2) “One of the recurrent concerns in Ramanujan’s poetry as a whole is the nature of human body and its relation to the natural world”.

– Vinay Dharwadkar.

- 3) Full of paradoxes, with also a gift for making them; often autobiographical, but seldom transparently so; tight-lipped, but fantasizing about stripping; deadly serious but never more so than when being playful; this was Ramanujan - A .K. Mehrotra.

-oOo-

R.Parthasarathy

Rajagopal Parthasarathy was born near Trichy in 1934. He was educated in Bombay and in England. He was, for several years, literary editor with Oxford University Press, Chennai and Delhi. His first book, *Rough Passage* was a runner up for the commonwealth poetry prize in 1977. Recognition followed publication and the book received a fairly good critical attention. His second book *A House Divided : Poem Of Love and War* tells about the turbulent history of the sub continent. He has also edited *Ten Twentieth Century Poets*. R.Parthasarathy, like A.K.Ramanujan, is interested in translation and has translated many Tamil works in to English. One of his major works in translation is the translation of *Silappathikaram* (The Tale of an Anklet) in to English.

R.Parthasarathy feels that more attention should be given to translation and that through translated works we can learn about the cultures of the different parts of the world. He says for a multilingual society like his native India, translation is essential. “A nation renews itself through translation. If it is indifferent to it is in danger of falling of the globe”

His works:

Rough Passage is R.Parthasarathy’s masterpiece, which brought him a lot of critical attention and appreciation. It is autobiographical. It has three parts – ‘*Exile*’, ‘*Trial*’ and ‘*Home coming.*’ *Rough Passage* narrates the experiences of a person who leaves his motherland and gets settled abroad for better prospects. It brings out the sense

of alienation experienced by him in the other country and also the feeling of guilt for having left his own land, people and language. The poet expresses his sense of alienation and his desire to continue the thoughts of the past to escape from this sense of alienation.

*“ I confess I am not myself
in the present. I only endure
a reflected existence in the past.”*(Trial 15)

His love for his mother tongue finds expression in many of his poems. It is this deep attachment to the mother tongue that makes him feel the loss intensely. He regrets his “whoring after English Gods”. He writes in his “Home Coming”,

*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.*

“ Home Coming”

At times, he is very sensitive about his ‘deculturation’ and the loss of his roots. At other times he is philosophical, ready to compromise.

*I have exchanged the world
For a table and chair. I should not complain*

“ Home coming”

Many of his poems in *Rough Passage* and in other collections are confessional poems. The poet tells about his life, experiences, love, his achievements, his marriage and his frustrations. His disgust about his achievement is expressed beautifully in the following lines.

*At thirty, the mud will have settled
You see yourself in a mirror
Perhaps refuse the image as yours* “Trial”

And also in the following lines

*The years have given me
little wisdom
And I've dislodged myself to
Find it. "Under Another Sky"*

He has also written lighter poems on different topics like "Towards an Understanding of India", "Two Cheers for the Poet" etc. R.Parthasarathy's language is aphoristic, because of the economical use of words and because of his skillful way of using metaphors and images. The following examples would bring home the fact that metaphor is a regular feature in his poems.

*It's time I wring the handkerchief
of words dry. Dipped it
in the perfume of silence.- "Home coming"*

In 'Homecoming', Tamil is seen as a bull –
"the bull Nammaluvar took by the horns"

In another poem he compares words to ripples:

*And words, surely eve no more than
Ripples
In the deep well of throat*

He describes the feeling of futility and his frustration with fate in the following way in one of his poems.

*I've rolled my fate
Into a paper ball and tossed it
Out the window.*

His use of adjectives instead of clause, help him in brevity. Expressions like 'forbidden tamarind trees' 'rice and pickle afternoon' are plenty in his poems. Subtle irony and wry humour characterize his poems.

Under another Sky

*It's a tired sea accosts the visitor
between Fort.St.George and San Thome*

*Here once ships bottled the harbour
With spices, cinnamon and cloves.
Inland, an old civilization hissed
In the alleys and wells the sun
has done. Its worst. Skimmed
a language, worn it to a shadow*

*the eyes ache from eating too much
of the ripe fruit of temples. Bridges
comb unruly rivers the hour glass
of the Tamil mind is replaced
by the exact chronometer of Europe. Now
cardboard and paper goddesses (naturally
high breasted) took down on Mount Road
There is no fight left in the old beat.
Time has plucked his teeth. Francis Day
has seen to that what have I come
here for from a thousand miles?
the sky is no different. Beggars
are the same every where. The clubs
are there, complete with bar and golf-links
the impact of the West on India is still
talked about, though the wogs have taken over
A grey sky oppresses the eyes:
Porters, rickshaw pullers, barbers,
hawkers, fortune tellers, loungers
compose the scene. Above them towers
the bridge, a pale diamond in the water.
Trees big with shade, squat
In the maidan as I walk my tongue
Lunchbacked with words, towards Jadavpur
To your arms: you smell of gin
And cigarette ash. Your breaks*

*Sharp with desire hurt my fingers
 Feelings beggar description,
 Shiver in dark all alleys of the mind,
 hungry and alone. Nothing
 can really be dispensed with.
 The heart needs all.
 The years have given me little
 wisdom and I've dislodged myself to find
 it. Here on the banks of the Hoogly
 in the city Job charnok built.
 I shall carry this wisdom to another
 City in the bone urn of my mind.
 These ashes are all that's left
 Of the flesh and brightness of youth.
 My life has come full circle: I'm thirty
 I must give quality to the other half.
 I am alone now, loving only words.
 Spring is no more the young season
 I've forfeited the embarrassing gift
 Innocence in my scramble to man.*

Notes:

1. **Francis day:** In 1639 Francis day, Chief Factor of the East India company's station at Amazon obtained from the Raja of Chandragiri, a descendant of the old Rajas of Vijayanagar, the grant of a strip of land on the coast of coromandel about 6 miles long by one broad. The following year works were begun on fort St.George, which was finished in 1653. This was the White Town. Out side the walls was the Black Town. The whole was at first called Srirangarajapattinam. British rule in India began in Madras. The Portuguese however arrived before the English in San Thome. in South Madras. The apostle St.Thomas was martyred and buried in the Cathedral at San.Thome. Also Valluvar, poet and author of the Kural, lived in Mylapore, near San.Thome, in his Second Century AD.

2. **Job Charnok:** In 1690 Job charnok, Chief Factor of the East India Company's stationed at Hoogly, rented the Villages of Sutanati, Govindpur and Kaligata (which

became anglicized as Calcutta) from Emperor Aurangzeb. Fort William was built in 1696. He helped the English to gain a foothold in what had been a province of the Sultanate of Delhi.

Explanation:-

R.Parthasarathy records his feelings about the changed Madras when he returns after a long gap. There are comparisons about the old and the new city. He expected that a trip to his home country would make him happy. But he is only disappointed because the place has changed completely. Staying away from the country for a long time he does not feel at home even in his hometown.

The sea between Fort St.George and San Thome is tired now. Earlier it used to have many ships exporting spices like cinnamon and cloves. Madras at that time was not modern but followed an old civilization. There were only alleys and wells. But now everything has changed. The language has also changed now with the passage of time.

The poet sees the native town with a mixed feeling. He is happy to see the temples and the bridges that have been constructed on wild rivers. But at the same time he is not entirely happy also. This is revealed by the expression, "Eyes ache". He is tired of seeing too many places without any particular attachment since the changed scenes do not remind him of the past. The earlier hourglass has now been replaced by the European Chronometer. The present Madras is different with the cutouts of actresses on the buildings in Mount Road.

The poet does not have the old enthusiasm. He wonders why he has come to this place from thousand miles away. The sky is the same everywhere. Beggars are the same everywhere. Life style is also similar with clubs and bars and golf links made available now even in India. Though Indians are free from the westerners the impact is still there.

The next part tells about the poet's feeling as he is walking on the banks of Hoogly River. He could see under the grey sky porters, rickshaw pullers, barbers, hawkers and fortunetellers, the shady tree, the river and the bridge. He thinks about his ladylove in Jadavpur and expresses his intense desire to be with her.

The next part brings out the poet's regret about losing the pleasures of his motherland. He has given up certain things in life to get some other things. He has chosen a busy life in another land and has lost the pleasures of living in his motherland. In his

desire to become a man he has lost his childhood innocence. The poet records his regrets about this and also expresses his desire to carry the wisdom that he had acquired in the “bone urn” of his mind to another sky. He has lived thirty years. He considers that as one full circle. Spring is not the season that would kindle sensuous feelings in him anymore. He wants to give quality to the rest of his life. It appears that he has taken a decision to share through his writing, the wisdom and knowledge he has gained.

The language is surprisingly flexible in the hands of the poet. The use of metaphors, personification, the choice of words that express his mood and his word pictures enhance the poetic effect. Unpredictable collocations like

Old civilization hissed in the alleys and wells,

Bridges comb unruly rivers

and metaphors like, ”bone urn”, help in brief and powerful expression. Expression like, tired sea, eyes ache, grey sky, “ there is fight left in the old beat”, ‘ Time has plucked his teeth” tell about the frustrated mood of the poet and the lack of vigour in him.

The descriptions of the sea, the river, the city with the cut outs of actresses etc., bring out the poet’s keen observation and his artistic ability to give an exact picture of the scenes.

River-once

*With paper boats
boys tickle my ribs
and buffalos have turned me to a pond
there’s eaglewood in my hair
and stale flowers ,
every evening
as bells toll
in the forehead
of the temples
I see a man
on the steps
clean his arse
kingfishers and egrets*

*whom I fed
have flown my paps
Also emperors and poets
who slept
in my arms
I am become a sewer
now, no one
has any use for vaikai river, once
of this sweet city.*

Notes:

Vaikai: - The Vaikai flows through Madurai, the “sweet city”, and capital of the Pandiya Kings. Tamil tradition tells of three literary academics (CANKAM) that met at Madurai.

Explanation

“River Once” is an interesting poem on the deterioration of River Vaikai. The river tells its own story. The river is personified. The river says that the boys play with paper boats and tickle its ribs. The buffaloes that are wallowing in the water have turned that particular spot into a muddy pond. On the floating river could be seen eagle wood and stale flowers. People throw waste materials into the river. During the evening when the temple bell rings a man comes there to wash his bottom. Small birds like Kingfishers and egrets drop semi solid food in the river. Even emperors and poets lie in the arms of the river. The river sadly utters that it has turned into a sewer and no one has any use for Vaikai, which was once beautiful river of the sweet city, Madurai.

The poet points out the carelessness of people maintaining the purity of the river. Since the river is polluted now, no one has any use for it. The river sadly expresses its frustration about its condition. The poem is engaging because of the presentation from the river’s point of view. The personification is effectively maintained through out the poem. (Small boys tickle the **ribs**, stale flowers on the **hair**, emperors and poets in the **arm** and so on).

R.Parthasarathy’s disappointment about the changed appearance of the some of the places in his home country as expressed in the poems ‘*Under Another Sky* and “River Once”, bring out the frustration of the émigré who comes back with the hope of finding

happiness but only has disappointment since, things are not the same and he is not the same person.

Critical comments

1. Sensitive, observant, truthful, the mind in unease, the muse most reticent – no wonder the poems are so few, but they are marble- images of integrity.

- K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar.

2. ‘He has the imagination and the word to enclose an image totally, in its symbols, universal, as well as natural context’.

– Gauri Deshpande

3. Parthasarathy is ambivalent throughout Roughpassage because basically he is extra-sensitive. He approaches life, culture, and language with inflated expectations and is therefore subsequently disillusioned.

- G.N.Devy

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P.Lal

Purushottam Lal was born in 1929 in Punjab’ He is an accomplished poet with a delicate sensibility, a prolific literary journalist and the founder of ‘writers workshop’. Lal has to his credit five books. ‘*Parrots Death and Other Poems*’, (1960). *Love’s the First* (1962), ‘*Cchange! They Said*’(1960) , and *Calcutta: A long Poem*.

He has also translated many Sanskrit works in English. His translations include *Sanskrit love lyrics* (9166) *Great Sanskrit plays in Modern translation, the Dhammapada* (1967) the *Mahabaratha*, the *Mahayana* and the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishads*. He has lectured on Indian Literature in American Universities. He has published a dozen volumes of literary criticism, several books of stories for children and a number of literary anthologies.

Lal’s another important contribution is his effort to collect the opinions of different writers on Indo Anglian poetry. ‘*Modern Indian Poery in English, An Anthology and Credo*, edited by P.Lal has in its introductory part the answers for the questionnaires by

writers like Nissim Ezekiel, A K Ramanujan and others on why they chose to write in English and also their opinions about Indo Anglian poetry.

Lal has, in his several collections, written on many subjects. He believes in celebrating the reality of moment and tries to record every experience of life. Lal says, “God, nature or the human beloved – whatever the subject or “theme”, poetry’s source is compassion rooted in love” .Lal believes that even in the simple passions of life, there is truth. He also feels that one must be ready to face all kinds of experiences in life – joys and sorrows. He sees every small event in life and every small thing in nature as God’s manifestation. As P.Shivkumar says, “for him each one of Gods’ manifestations, the leaf, the bird, the squirrels, the homing sparrows and even the innocent pleasures such as the tea before sunset, conversation with fellows – communicates a meaning that remains ultimately inexpressible”.

*But this is my friend’s rose garden
You shall come here as bird or leaf
Here are afternoon pleasures
Tea before sunset and conversation
Squirrels and homing sparrows
The meaning of this rose world communicates
Syllables more splendid than ‘life’*

--- (The Rose-World)

Lal, through his admiration of every small thing in nature, reveals his sense of wonder about the mystery of God’s creations

*Hollow the snell, until
Upon the blinding sand
Ocean rumours fill
And fold into prayer
A break lifeless air
This I understand ----- “Prayer”*

Lal is often appreciated for the lyrical quality of his poems. He is sensitive to music. Amar Kumar Singh writes “in his early poetry he is fascinated by the sound of words”. The melodious pattern is significant to him” (p.199)

He writes in an aphoristic style. The use of metaphors and imagery gives a pictorial quality to his poems though some critics have pointed that some metaphors are ‘vague’. His images are evocative. He is sensitive to rhythm. H.M.Williams says. that “his poetry is appreciated for brevity”.

The Poet

*For all his wild hair like an aureole
Stammer at parties, slipping from a tram,
Putting off the mending of a sole,
And putting on a mock-heroic damn!
He notices the spider's intestines
Claim windy harlot and blackmarketeer
And in the clicking grin his eye divines
A moody world of artifice and fear*

*Above all, this: when a woman turns
Black clouds of hair with a rhythmic hand
Weaving their silk in the possessive sun,
He sees her common eyes stretch to a land
O lost, lost: as when repentance yearns
For hope, and love and finds that there is none.*

This poem brings out some of the special qualities of the poet and thereby presents a different perspective of the poet.

The first stanza describes the appearance of the poet and throws light on the attitude of the poet. The poet's hair is unkempt. He stammers at parties. He slips from a tram. He keeps on postponing the mending of his shoes and puts on an appearance as if he does not care for these matters. The above description throws light on the characteristics of the poet. The poet is not bothered about social approval or criticism. That is why he does not give importance to dress. He does not have the capacity to socialize since he is most of the time preoccupied and lives in the world of imagination and thought. His mind

is not alert to the present moment. He does not bother about the mending of his shoes since he is careless about appearance. He puts on an appearance as if he is not bothered about trivial matters like that.

But the poet has an ability of a different kind. He could notice (understand) how a prostitute or a black marketer is infected and troubled inwardly. “Spider’s intestines claim windy harlot or black marketer” is a figurative expression that means an infection that is not visible. It reveals the poet’s deep insight. Even if there is outward smile on a prostitute or on a black marketer’s face, the poet understands that it is only an outward smile and that there is only unhappiness and restlessness inside. Even if a grin veils her fear and her moodiness and artificiality he could identify it.

The Second stanza presents another situation as an illustration to tell about the poet’s capacity to read the human heart. Even when the poet watches a woman while she is combing her hair with her fingers, he could notice that she is lost in the world of imagination. Her thoughts are probably one of repentance and hope. She realizes perhaps that there is no chances for her love and hope. Though the woman does not express anything openly or outwardly the poet could still read her worried mind. What the ordinary man misses, the poet is able to see. He has such a deep insight.

Though the poet appears to be careless about superficial aspects of life he has the capacity to understand the feelings of others.

This poem has 14 lines and is in the sonnet form, with an octave and a sestet with abab cdcd efef gg rhyme pattern (eg. Aureole / sole, tram / damn, intestines / divines, marketer / fear etc).

The Lecturer

*Listening was an experience
of fingers of filigree feeling
The worst made excellent sense
The best was all concealing*

*On truth’s brink he stood,
His works memorable cool*

*Lovely lingering on the good,
The true, the beautiful.
You couldn't tell truth from fiction,
Such elegance, such capable
Diction, such distinction the mind recalls*

*All ritual
All false, unutterably false.*

Notes:

Filigree: delicate ornamental work of fine gold, silver, or copper wire.

Explanation:

The poet here recalls the memory of a lecturer whose lecture was captivating but had no depth in it.

The lecturer had the capacity to make his lecture absorbing by the ornamental, rhetorical presentation. He could make even the worst appear in the best form. The poet recollects sadly that the lecturer had not taken effort to bring out the real facts. (The best was all concealing.)

The lecturer stood on the brink of truth. The word “brink “ suggests that he did not plunge into the matter, which implies that he did not have a full knowledge of the facts. By his diplomatic choice of words, he could evade the deeper aspects of matters like truth, beauty etc. The listeners were so fascinated by the lecture that they did not think about the depth of the matter when the lecture was being delivered. The poet remembers after so many years how artfully he had chosen his word. He realizes now after many years of learning and experience that the lecture was lacking in depth.

The title “The Lecturer” as differentiated from the word “Teacher” would help us to realize this point. “Teacher “ is one who teaches i.e., there is more of involvement for the truth of the subject. On the other hand a lecturer is a person who only gives a talk. To make the ‘lecture’ interesting is the aim of the lecturer.

Critical comments:

1) Lal's is a tireless and restless talent, and what he writes usually carries the stamp of his commitment

- K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar.

2) The distinctive element in the aesthetic experience of Lal's poetry, it appears to me, is a sense of the numinous oncretized through a sensuous apprehension of the physical surroundings.

- P.Shiv Kumar

3) His free verse flows with unusual lyrical quality. He is sensitive to beauty like Keats.

- Amar kumar singh

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GAURI DESHPANDE

About the Author:

Gauri Deshpande was born in 1942. Her mother Irawati Karve was a popular Marathi writer. Deshpande was writing poems and short stories in English. After her mother's death she wrote an article about her mother in Marathi. Since, the article was received well, she started writing in Marathi also. She is now a well known Marathi writer and translator. She has published poems, essays and short stories both in English and Marathi. Her bold, untraditional ideas created strong waves in Marathi literary scene.

She is one of the popular Indo-Anglian poets of the post Independent period. "She is" as Abedi puts it, "a marvellous chaffinch of Indo-English poetry"(199). She has brought out three Volume of poetry. *Between Births* (1965), is her first collection that was followed by *Lost Love* (1970) and later by *Beyond the SlaughterHouse* (1972)

Her Works:-

Gauri Deshpande is known for her short lyrics. Generally her poems are short, except for a few poems in the second volume, *Lost Love*. She often takes up a single situation or a small scene or some particular experience as theme for a poem. Hence, often they are small. 'The People Who Need People' (the prescribed poem) is a good example for her short lyric.

Many of her poems are on love and death. Death, in fact is a major pre-occupation. Some of her poems are nostalgic and bitter. In *'Self Portrait'* she is critical about herself and conveys the feeling of emptiness.

*If I peel away, layer by layer
At memories, deposits of habit
Residues of virtue, I find
myself an onion
layer after layer of seeming meaning
and intent, sufficient by itself
leading to no heart.*

Her *Between Birth* is a collection of 26 poems, a major part of which deals with death but there are also poems about human relationship and love. The following lines exemplify how in very few lines she successfully brings out her pining for lover.

*Do I think of you
As rain whips my face
and the feathery clouds up
and the paddy green grounds here whip past.*

*Do I think of you
When I hear a step and put on the light
to find an empty room
or when swift dying laughter sounds across
the street.* "Do I think of You" *Between Births*

She is frank and honest in her expression of love:

*I am earth
Vast, deep, and black
And I received the first rains
Sweet generous
Lashing and throbbing*

and expresses her anguish for the lost love in many ways. Some times she tells about how she misses him

*You are gone now
the perfect mouth that kissed my words
No longer by
And as the clouds heap and
Heap upon the West
I lie empty, barren and bereft.*

and at other times about the feeling of emptiness and helplessness at the loss of her love.

*I wanted to weep for you
And me.
But I had already spent
All tears in useless mourning
So now I watch arid eyed
As my fingers open slowly
And let you go. ----- 'I wanted to weep' (Between Births)*

There are no similes or metaphors. Yet they are poetic because of the direct and forceful expression of emotion. The alliteration and rhyme (eg. Barren and bereft, 'as the clouds heap and heap upon the west') and the repetition of the important words and sentences add to the poetic beauty.

Being a woman poet, she focuses on the female psyche, enunciating feminine sensibility. Her *female of the Species* is of this category. Her poems are as candid as that of Kamala Das. She is bold and straightforward in her expression.

THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

*Sometimes you want to talk
about love and despair
and the ungratefulness of children.
A man is no use whatever then.
You want then your mother
or sister
or the girl with whom you went through school,*

*and your first love, and her
first child-a-girl –
and your second.
You sit with them and talk.
She sews and you sit and sip
and speak of the rate of rice
and the price of tea
and scarcity of cheese.
You know both that you've spoken
of love and despair and ungrateful children*

‘The Female of Species’ as the title suggests is about women. It tells about how a **woman’s** company is preferred in certain difficult situations by **another woman**.

Sometimes...second.

Sometimes a woman feels like discussing traumatic personal matters like love, despair and about ungrateful children. A woman does not find the company of man useful then. She finds it comfortable to share it with another woman. It could be her mother or sister or her school friend. It could be another woman, whom she admired or even her first child or even her own daughter.

You sit.....children

The poet goes on to say that there is no need even to discuss the problematic matters. Both of them can talk about general matters like the rate of rice, the price of tea and the scarcity of cheese. Yet the companion, who is a woman, will understand what is in the heart of the other woman even without being told. A woman has such innate capacity to understand another woman’s problems. It could also mean that the other woman’s presence itself is comforting and that there is no need to discuss the embarrassing matters. It also implies that men do not have this skill. They cannot understand and their company will not be comforting. The poem is direct and simple the beauty of the poem lies in the suggestive presentation.

The poem could also be interpreted in a slightly different way .It could mean that a **man** prefers a **woman’s** company when he wants to talk about traumatic personal matters.

A man does not find another man's company useful then. The phrase 'Your First Love' could be interpreted as a man's first love.

"The people who need People"

THE PEOPLE WHO NEED PEOPLE

*It's the only landscape --
a sea of people bordering
the bitter limit of the sea.
If all the noses were one nose
and all the heads were one
they'd outstone
Gomateswara, and be monument
to brotherly love, for yet
no one has picked my pocket
nor into my house broken,
I, as yet, not run over by a bus.*

Notes:- Gomateswara : The tallest statue (50 feet high) in India located at Saravanbelagola in Karnataka

"The people who need People" a small poem of eleven lines tells about brotherhood and unity. Deshpande writes, that in this land, which is up to the limits of the seas there are a large number of people. She says that if all the noses and all the heads were brought together, a statue bigger than Gomateswara can be created and this would stand as the monument of brotherly love. This means that if all the human beings living in different parts of the world live united then we can together become a symbol of brotherhood.

She ends her poem with an optimistic note and her reason for being optimistic is that the society has not become entirely bad and the destiny is not so negative. She says that there is not much of theft, violence and greediness in this world. The line "I am not run by a bus" brings out that we are not ill fated either. This poem brings out her faith in humanity and also her positive thinking. She does not want to think negatively of people just because a few people might be bad. She means to say that violence or theft is not a regular event. Hence there is hope. She has given a great message of love in simple, direct language

Critical comments

1. Gauri Deshpande is essentially a lyric poet and the short poem is her forte. In this respect she comes closer to Shiv K.Kumar than to any other poet but whereas Shiv.K.Kumar depends on his deftly chosen imagery to create in his short poems and inspired iridescence, Gauri Deshpande mostly works without image and metaphor.

– S.Z.H. Abidi

2. There is in her poetry a tremendous nostalgia, of lost love remembered over and over again.

-Monika Varma

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UNIT II

KAMALA DAS

Kamala Das was born on 31, March at Malabar in Kerala. She is the daughter of the famous Malayali Poetess, Balamani Amma. Her grand uncle was Nalapatu Narayana Menon, the well-known poet-philosopher of Kerala. She belongs to the matriarchal community of Nayars. She has had no formal education but studied mostly at home. At the age of fifteen, she was married to K.Madhava Das. She has three children. When she was eighteen, she began writing under the pen name Madhavikutty. She, being a bilingual writer, has written thirty novels in Malayalam and three books of poems in English – Summer in Calcutta, The Descendants, and The Old Play House and other poems. In English, she has recently published a fiction A Doll for the child Prostitute and other stories. In both languages, she published her autobiography My Story, she was at once recognized as a poet of promise after the publication of Summer in Calcutta. She was awarded the Asian P.E.N. poetry prize for her poem, “The Sirens” In 1969, she won the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award for her fiction “Thamuppu”. For her fearless journalism, she won the chinanlal Award. For sometime, she worked as the poetry editor of the Illustrated weekly of India.

THE OLD PLAY HOUSE

The title suggests that it is not a new or an attractive playhouse, where people frequent to witness a play. It is an old playhouse where the play was enacted without freshness, novelty or delight. The poem, as such deals with physical love offered possibly in extra-marital relationship.

By nature, the poet has inherent urge for freedom. She was a “swallow” seeking freedom. As she was ‘caught in the trap of lust set by man, she is tamed and she has forgotten the “urge to fly”. Therefore, she is denied freedom. She comes to a man to realize the true self but instead she receives only a knowledge of “yet another man”. So she is forced to comprehend the ultimate selfishness of man. She comes to a conclusion that man is completely self-oriented in their relationship with women. She is frustrated because man is only concerned with her “body’s response” to his best and not to her emotional response. She looked forward for a spiritual or psychological transformation through sexual experience. But unfortunately, her male partner considers the sexual experience as an orgy rooted to bodily response. This physical gratification of the male against the

female ignites her revolting spirit against the male supremacy. The repetition of the pronoun 'you' at the beginning of successive clauses suggest the poets' antipathy towards the sex. She comes to her man to learn what she was but instead she loses her identity and thereby liberty too. She is cowed down and made a dwarf by his dominant ego. Therefore she is deprived of "all the natural mirth and clarity and thinking" She feels that the female psyche is only a dumb animal to be sacrificed at the altar of the last-centered male supremacy. Her freedom of "endless pathways of the sky" is now confined to a room "lit by artificial lights" and with the "windows" shut to the nature outside. Her freedom is satisfied in this male dominated arena. The wife is reduced to the status of a slavish dwarf and life has shrunk into the dimensions of a little room. The little room itself is heated with disgust. Even the air-condition does not help. The dullness of "love" degraded to "lust" which the husband has been administering to her leave her disgusted and disappointed wife. She is like a disappointed theatregoer who visits an old play house-an oft-frequented playhouse with the same play being repeated with no novelty or freshness. The excessive roses of lust-love serve to please the male partner but to the poet it is "lethal doses" that made her life dull, joyless, dark and passive. Hence, she equates love with Narcissus – a youth who fell in love with his reflection in water. Narcissus is a symbol of the male ego. She seeks a spiritual transformation through the physical cravings with this man or with another. But her quest for such a reposeful, spiritual experience can be quenched only by transcending the barriers of the physical as symbolized by the braking of the mirror and the erasing of the water that reflects male ego.

The other poem "The Freaks" too deals with the theme of unfulfilled love. A freak is an eccentric person and hence is unusual or abnormal in behaviour or ideas to a conventional society. The title is plural which suggests that she speaks not only for herself but also for all the similar women who seek an ultimate transformation through physical love.

The poem begins with a description of a man who happened to be a womanizer and so "sun-stained / check"; further it symbolises of his frequenting different women at different intervals of time. With his talk and "skin-communicated" ecstasies tries to delight her and draw her towards him. His mouth "a dark cavern" is suggestive of his excessive passion for indulgence in sex. His right hand on her knee is meant to stimulate sexual desires in her and entice her into lustful entanglement. But that very act is a remorseless one for the male partner stagnates at the level of lust. His capacity ends by unleashing only

the “skins lazy hungers” which she, the poet refuses to identify with love. She aims at the higher reaches of fulfillment but the male partner is rooted to bodily responses and hence, he is not the right match who can surge her on wings of love. Her heart is an “empty cistern” and love is enthroned not in emptiness but in fulfillment. She is for such an ultimate creative fulfillment through love. Therefore she is “coiling snakes in silence suggesting her failure to be quickly roused by him. Finally, she comes to a conclusion that though her male partner is below her expectation, she pretend to be responsive to him for the conventional society.

KAMALA DAS AS A CONFESSIONAL POET

Literature by and large happened to be an instrument in the hands of the writers to express themselves. They chose the genres to fulfill their need to express themselves. In the twentieth century, the poets made use of confessional poetry to communicate their in-depth feelings to the outer world as they had felt it. Sometimes, the confessional poet struggles/strives to relate her/his private personal experience as it is to the world. There is a constant series of shifting moods in the confessional poetry. It happened to bloom beautifully in the hands of Kamala Das, an Indian poet in English. Kamala Das in her confessional poetry makes a bold revelation of her inner feelings, her love experience, yearnings and unfulfilled longing. There is no other poet in India who could poignantly bring out the inner urges in such a original manner.

Kamala Das makes a frank admission and bold treatment of her personal and private life in these two poems – “The Old Play House” and “The Freaks”. The title of the former symbolically suggests that it is an old playhouse where the plays are enacted without any novelty, freshness or originality. She comes to her husband/loves to learn about her ‘self’ but to her shock she finds only the male-strength. Hence the frustration and disappointment felt by her. She is even disgusted with the sex-obsessed male because his concern for her is only at the body level, “body’s response, its weather, its usual shallow convulsions.’ The male dominated sexual experience that is devoid of love frustrates her. The frequent reference to the anatomy of human body makes it clear that she intends not to conceal her aversion to sex. She is utterly disappointed by the male supremacy and hence “my mind is an old / Play house with all its light put out. She ends the poem with her wish for a pure freedom.

The other poem “The Freaks” too is a reflection of her unfulfilled love. The male partner is a contrast to her in the sexual life. He is interested in satiating his thirst for pleasures through her body. That is why, his mouth a “dark cavern” symbolic of his passion for lust. Whereas, the poet expects her man to help her surge on the wings of love. Her inability and incompatibility to be aroused by his sexual advances is suggested by her heart, “an empty cistern” “with coiling snakes of silence”, she has her own doubts and mistrusts whether this man can be a true match to her to seek the highest fulfillment of love. She makes a social pretence after finding him to be an inadequate one. Hence, she carries an aversion to sex.

These two poems reveal the varying moods of the poet in her private life. The shifting of moods from the description of the old house to the confinement of married life with the growing dullness of her oft-repeated bed room experience is brought out through different images. Her confessions are moving, sincere and hold.

ADIL JUSSAWALLA

Adil Jussawalla was born in 1910. He studied at Oxford. He taught at a Language school in London between 1965 and 1970. He has edited an anthology of new Indian writing for Penguin Books Ltd. His first book of poems *Land's End* was published by writers' workshop in 1962. These are the poems of a young man, largely experimental but often sharp and strikingly powerful.

THE WAITERS

Adil Jussawalla in the “The Waiters” has pictured the pathetic condition of the waiters at the hotels in a alien land. It is discernible that the poet has keenly observed a day's life of the waiters. The poet's description and comment blend with sympathy and understanding to create a deeper poetic tone. His sketch of the waiters is something like a photograph or a still life. These waiters are “Blacker than Wine... / Blacker than mud, their Tamil minds recall.” They are alien to France and hence their “Tamil minds” have to “recall” to their memory about the blackness of the mud in their native land. These “dark skinned” people serve food the whole day to the “Sallow” in the white land. They “sweat more nights than grapes blood”.

Here, the poet hints at their living condition. The waiters are not living in well-ventilated houses; theirs is a place perhaps the underground because grapes become wine after being processed and kept buried under the ground. Therefore, their residing and sleeping rooms may be the chute of the Metro, the Paris underground Railway Station and hence they “slip to their sleeping places / in the throat of the feasted, pink-faced city.” They cannot have “better prospects” in life. Their “clients won’t allow” and so these dark people in a white land have to “button up their manners with the past” Their day’s work begin with “polite speech, punctilious, guarded, kind.” They are even experts to entertain the “epicure’s stuffed heart.” “As guardians of good taste” they know the requirements of the customers. Their keen observation of the customers enables them to know “the soiled and cluttered kitchens of the mind.” of the people. They also watch the external polite manners of the public. Their day passes by observing the customers and serving them; they are not allowed to get involved in the merry-making party world for “the stand aloof”. Watching other ‘eat’, the waiters have to work “guarding the emending appetite” In doing their duty of serving food to others, they have lost all interest and joy for food and so “they dream of a foodless heaven.” Their day’s work “Slacken” or come to end by about midnight and then they “shrug off their coats like priestly coats of pity” and slip to their sleeping places, an ill-ventilated underground Railway Station in Paris. Thus the poet sketches or gives a video clipping of a day’s life of the waiters. Here, his keen observation ends up in the description of the pathetic life of the waiters in the alien land. His picturization with a comment on the life of these wage earners strikes the note of poetic sympathy.

SEA BREEZE, BOMBAY

The poem centres round the theme of partition and how it had affected the lives of many. The poet who is in a foreign country has become sensitive to the turmoils of partition and the sufferings of the poor. The helplessness of these refugees is pictured vividly through this poem.

During the time of partition, the affected people frayed across “the cut-country” stitched shrouds from a flag and “reknotted” himself or herself in Bombay. They flocked into the city. Initially, the refugees found the city as a post but in due course of time, “the surrogate city of banks” harboured them. It was abode of comfort for the refugees. Bombay is economically well developed by being the centre of stocks and share market. The settlers started constructing brick buildings. The buildings are situated here and there

like a “skin spotting the coast.” “Scanning the Sea from the north” the Tibetans come “Dazed” and the pouring in of the refugees seems to be never ending. The sea breeze is neutral and unaffected by the flocking of the refugees. The poet is disturbed by the fact that the early Settlers of the island too are indifferent and hence they enjoy and garrulous evenings with unruffled temper. From the expression “Restore us to fire” we infer that the poet wishes the natives to be warm in accepting the refugees. The sea Breeze in Bombay is neutral and untouched by the turmoil of partition. It never “uncovers the root” of any of the people, settled there and “settles no one adrift of the main lands’ his tones. However, the poet wishes for restoring “fire”-emotional warmth amidst the natives in receiving and accepting the refugees, because their indifference must have disturbed him.

ADIL JUSSAWALLA AS A POET

Adil Jussawalla’s poetry is authentic because it is rooted in deep, personal experience; it is promising in that it reaches out to larger and more universal themes. He has a feel for language within the structural cage of a poem. From almost, any of his poems, it is possible to extract lines that both woke and bespeak an individual prism. Sentimentality never obtrudes, lustiness is kept in abeyance; there is a disciplined fastidiousness which juxtaposes image against image. The series of thought become the architecture of the poem.

In the poem “The waiters” Adil Jussawalla has successfully evoked a density of mood through the use of images. Within a taut structure of word and association, the poet evokes both the humiliation of the wage-earners in an alien-white land and the rich luxurious life of the whites in their native place.

The poet observes a day’s painful, pathetic events in the lives of the waiters. The humiliation inherent in the blackness of black Tamil waiters is expressed in these lines – “Blacker than mud. Their Tamil minds recall Dark skins serving dishes to the Sallow”. The ‘black’ can be associated with gloominess and ‘dark’ ignorance. These ignorant wage-earners have to serve the “Sallow” the whole day and their living condition is worse for they “slip to their sleeping places/ In the throat of the feasted, pink-faced city” Their dreams are nullified at the very budding state for they have “to button up their manners with the past.” They are humble and so they “as guardians of good taste” watch the white epicurean hearts and know “the soiled and cluttered kitchens of the mind” and they stand aloof to the situation. The day’s service of serving food to the whites the whole day, ends

with their loss of interest in food and hence, they dream of a “foodless heaven”. Their duty “slackens” by midnight and they sleep in the chute of the metro Paris underground Railway Station. The living condition of the Tamil waiters with a day’s toil of is juxtaposed against the white natives’ “pasted smiles” with “epicure’s stuffed heart”. His observation and comment on the lives of these wages – earners in an alien white land blend to create a poetic sympathy.

In the other poem “Sea Breeze Bombay” too, he juxtaposes the “unruffled temper” of the islanders with their “garrulous evenings” against the “fraying” of the settlers from “cut/country”; trying to reknit themselves on this island. The struggle of the refugees against contradictions of life leaving their native place, as a consequence of partition and the islands neutrality to those is pictured effectively through the juxtaposition of images.

With a lyric grace and sharp imagery Adil Jussawalla remains an individual voice in Indo-Anglican poetry. His poems are personal experiences without being intensely emotional. His poems “focus on the existence of the colonial inside the native and the need for the oppressed native to free himself.”

GIEVE PATEL

Gieve Patel was born in 1940. He is a doctor by profession and is also a pointer and playwright. He is not a prolific writer. Nissim Ezekiel published his first collection of poems in 1966. Theatre group, Bombay in 1970, produced *Princes a Play*. He has published two volumes of poetry, *Poems* (1966 and “How do you withstand, Body” (1976) and three plays. The two collections of verse being separated by a decade reveal a vast difference in quality. “Servants” and *Nargol*” from *Poems* appeared in *New Commonwealth Poets ’65*. The earlier work *Poems* is a record of the poet’s responses to people, events, attitudes encountered especially during the “growing up” years and it also successfully conveys a sense of uncertainty of a sensibility groping for an identity.

THE SERVANTS

The peasants from the village flock to the city to become ‘servants’ in the city. It is true that their life in the village was “insufficient” and so they have decided to come to the city in search of a better life. Initially, the poet points out that the migration of the villagers to the city is perhaps due to “insufficient stock”. They are new to the city life. After dinner, the lights are shut off, there is a “city blur”. The peasants are seated with a smoke in their

“hard” fingers. After a day’s physical work, their fingers have turned “hard”. The darkness around them is not completely dark but it is “brown”; perhaps the “City blur” suggests the groping of the peasants for identity in the thickly populated city. There is a “glow” as they lighted it and an orange sport as they inhaled it. In the process of migration from village to city, the peasants “sit without thought” after the day’s work. The eyes are gazing into the emptiness for they are not informed of the city life. Everything appears to be new and they feel alienated from the place. They are spellbound. The reason for their silence is unknown. Whether the peasants have gained by becoming “Servants” in a city or whether they have best roots, personal relationships in the proves migration, is not revealed in the poem. The lyrical suggestiveness of “Never have traveled beyond this/ Silence”... springs into the next two short, sharp phrases. “They sit like animals/I mean no offence” The poet’s compassion to these peasants is brought out with further description of their state. Just as there is reflection of light in the eyes of the animals, their eyes are open and they reflect the “oil flame”. Theirs (“the servants”) are “large protruding beads”/ Actually best / Behind the regular grind / of the jaws”. The poet is sympathetic towards the condition of the peasants in the city. He concludes the poem with a romantic picture of them sitting mute and unawakened “like animals”. Whether the new masters are tyrants or not and whether they are happy after becoming “Servants” in a city is left to the readers’ imagination

DILWADI

While “Servants” describes the migrated-peasants to the city, “Dilwadi” pictures the process of migration. For about four months, the villagers have been resisting migration completely. After four months, the landscape is bare with empty sheds. At the moment of the decision, there was hesitation among the peasants. But with all their indecision and resistance, the officials first took the move. A “fortnight” passed. The people disapprove of the migration. They are “drawn back/To the everlasting village.” Because they have their roots in the village. Their settled trees” indicates their affinity to the village. But when the spreading project engulfed the villages, “they will accommodate change” The Sheds are undisturbed and unperturbed and hence “stand complacent.” The evacuation of the seven villages started. Two families started their journey on one fine morning. What ever they could take along with them, they have done. “cattle, bed spreads, bondless of stress/goats, vessels, dung, drums, bicycles” etc. if they had power to remove the trees and re-plant them in the place where they move to, they would have done it. Slowly, a new establishment began in the town. They with the help of the “stocks,

bamboos/on one tin side make an extra room.” Their fantasy blooms with their upcoming houses. To make their houses cool, they dumped the keep off straw on the roof. They seem to settle down easily in a new surrounding for each cubicle “sends roots/Then shoots, sprouts bows/ Turns, moves, curves its side/And takes a circle.” They get adjusted to the new surrounding, so easily that they have taken “a circle”. Though “the circle” the poet perhaps suggests that they try to establish in town. There was a sigh of relief from the contractor because form an “unpromising seed/Dilwadi blooms into a makeshift town” Initially the villagers were replacement to move to town but having come to town they have created a “makeshift town” with their blooming fantasy.

GIEVE PATEL AS A POET

Gieve Patel, a doctor by profession though not a prolific writer has published two volumes of poetry, each being separated by a decade. His poetry has established a distinctive place in Indian poetry. His sense of involvement in Indian situation evokes apathy to the poor and illiterate. In the poem, “Servants” his sympathy for the peasants who have migrated to the city is gradually brought to light in the course of the poem. The beginning oh the poem appears to be neutral or almost a deep-pan description of “Servants”. But, gradually, his pity evolves into a lineament of compassion. The situation described in the poem depicts the poets’ feelings but he keeps it under his control.

There is a direct beginning without any sugar-coated words. The detachment of tone here distances the poet but never undercuts his pity or compassion for them. Most of the situations described in his poems pertain specifically to India and also to the human condition. In “Servants” the description of the migrated-peasants relate not only to the Indian situation but also to the human-condition. After dinner, when the lights were shut off, “the city-bluer” enters and picks modulation on the skin i.e. either “links body to body / or is dispelled.” The peasants sit dazed at the city circumstances with no thought but just with “the lighted end of tobacco”. Their present position in a city as servants brings them happiness or not is unknown. Like a painter, the poet draws the peasants in a city “without thought Mouth slightly open” and the eyes show no recognition or familiarity with the place because the “Never have traveled beyond this/silence”. They were sitting mute and unawakened like “Animals resting in their stall” It does not show whether the peasants have gained by becoming “Servants” in a city or whether they have lost roots, personal relationships in the process of migration. But through an economy of words and a careful alignment of thought and image, the poet develops the emotion. The mere picture of the

migrated peasants sitting like animals in the stall with the eyes like large beads reflecting the light create pity and a certain empathy.

The other poem “Dilwadi” sketches the process of migration of their villagers. The villagers resisted the evacuation from their “everlasting village” to the city for four months. But when a group of officials vacated the village, “an empty fortnight” followed with no move of the villagers. Life in the village had made a deep marking in them, “yet, they will accommodate change” They had to because no other option is left for them. The “engulfing” Project certainly would lead the village to “stand complacent.” As a consequence, the “evacuation / will start” There is a limit a gloominess regarding their migration. But once decision is made, it was with cheerfulness, they started the migration. What ever they could carry from the village, they carried to the city. With their shrewdness is architecture. They established “barracks” in the city. The contractors heave a sigh of relief because “Dilwadi” blooms into a new makeshift town” from an “unpromising seed” The seed here perhaps refers to the villagers, themselves. Because, initially, they were unwilling to move to a city.

The real strength of the poet lies in his ability to weld unrelated images with association. His constant awareness of the Indian scene stems from a sense of involvement in India and thing humanitarian.

ARAVIND KRISHNA MEHROTRA

Aravind Krishna Mehrotra born in 1947 at Lahore, lives in Allahabad. He teaches English at the University of Allahabad and co-edits damn you / a mag of the arts. His published work includes Bharatmata, A Prayer (the ezra-fakir press, Bombay, 1966) woodcuts on paper (gallery Number Ten, London, 1967) and Pomes / Poems / Poems. (Uishchik Press, Baroda, 1971) The poem “The Sale” appeared in 1970 in the New York Quarterly.

His pretty is marked by a remarkable sense of precision and order, in spite of the fact that it is so often a poetry of fantastic moods. Reading his poems, one becomes vaguely aware of “voice” that has something imperative about it. In other words, it is difficult to ignore that “voice” His poetry has something shocking and refreshing at the same time. It is a product of an extremely alert mind]. The poem “The Sale” is a storehouse of facts and fantasies. In the I section of the poem, the poet assumes the

personality of a seller trying to sell the continents like selling things casually. We feel that everything is seen as in a dream. Here in this poem the description of the continents as “scarecrow Asia” “that grown Africa”, “amputated Australia” looks as if he tries to sell them, like a vegetable vendor. The shocking images like “This skull contains the rivers” “a mummy” and the pyramids came and knocked at his gate for a long time baffles the reader at first reading. But then, his poems have something playfully baffling about it – something that seems to belong to the realm of the games that children play. The poem “The Sale” is the right example of this kind. It takes the reader to a journey into a zoological park and natural scenery and an attic. The reading poem is a surrealistic adventure into the depth of the poets’ mind. The bizzare, shocking or seemingly unrelated images in his poems account for it. For instance in the poem “The Sale”

“This skull contains the rivers
of the I’m sorry. Had you come
yesterday I might have given you two.

.....
Come into the attic
That’s not a doll – its’ the
Photograph of a brain walking
on sand and in the next one
it is wearing an oasis-like crown

.....
I have a skeleton too
It is full of butterflies
who at down will carry away
the crown.

He describes death metaphorically

As a hook that takes his uncle to the sky. The impact of The Hindu myth of death could be perceived in these lines. Reading his poetry is like looking into a world of objects that are inanimate yet watchful, each with a terrible personality of its won. There is a fusion of observation and reflection.

In his poem “Index of First Lines” he deals with something meaningful and genuine. There are three sections in the poem are beautiful. The whole poem is about a woman who is everything to him.

“She is snake, she is wind, she is leaf, She will cry as if a hand were knocking and I’ll let her enter”.

By the end of the third section, the woman has become everything which the poet wanted her to the poet must have chosen to live in universe for which the “woman” in the true and proper representative she has become the symbol of all time and all space. The poet moves into her “country” that is full of the ghostly things that are gone. It may be a country of memory and history. It may be even a “mousetrap”. The poet is unaware of the imprisonment and hence feels sad about his failure to “nibble like a mouse”. His poetry makes the reader feel that there is something incomplete and locking. It can be understood with a reference to that “country” of fear of which the “woman” is the perfect representative.

Mehrotra’s poetry is difficult but it cannot be ignored. Because, his poems demand more than one heading. Reading his poems is like going down with Alice into the “wonderland” the pleasure of reading his poems lies in discovering correspondences between the “wonderland” of his dreams and our own everyday world of hard facts.

UNIT III

The Man Eater of Malgudi

- R.K. Narayan

His Life and Works:

The 'R' in the novelist's name stands for **Rasipuram** in Salem district where he was born in 1906 and the 'K' stands for the name of his father, Krishnaswami Iyer, a humble school teacher who migrated to Mysore with his other children, leaving behind Narayan to grow with his grandmother in Madras. Narayan was very unimpressive at school, failing repeatedly in the High School and Intermediate examinations, a bitter experience reflected later in the character of Balu in **The Financial Expert**. After graduating from Maharaja College in Mysore in 1930., Narayan had to support the family, which he did by working as a clerk in the Mysore Secretariat and later as a teacher in a village school. This phase of his life is reflected in the novel **The English Teacher**. He was soon fed up with the teacher profession and started writing novels and short stories in English. Many of his novels won him worldwide recognition.

Narayan fell in love with a young girl by name Rajam and married her even though their horoscopes did not tally. He employed a money-minded astrologer who 'at the sight of rupees', readily green-signalled the marriage. However, after five years of happy married life, Rajam died of typhoid in 1939, leaving Narayan distraught. This was the gloomiest period of his life. He did not write anything for nearly six years after which period he started writing novels at regular intervals.

Narayan's first novel **Swami and Friends** (1935) was a phenomenal success. Graham Greene acclaiming it as 'a book in ten thousand!' The novel is about the amusing pranks of school children, their clashes and reconciliations.

Narayan's second novel **The Bachelor of Arts** deals with Chandran's College days.

Narayan's third novel **The Dark Room** depicts a husband's ill treatment of his wife. Ramani, the inhuman husband, falls in love with a divorcee, Shanta Bai, and harasses his wife Savitri beyond the limits of endurance.

Narayan's next novel, **The English Teacher**, published in 1945, seven years after the publication of **The Dark Room** is highly autobiographical. Krishna, a teacher teaching English in Albert Mission College, loses his dear wife and is grief-stricken. During his wandering, he meets a sanyasi who helps him contact the spirit of his wife.

Mr. Sampath, published in 1949 in London and later in India in 1959, is full of hilarious turning points. Sampath is a printer who undertakes to print Srinivas's ambitious journal *The Banner*, Sampath next becomes a film producer, venturing on the production of the film *The Burning of Kama*, with himself playing the role of Shiva and a beautiful actress by name Shanthi acting as Parvati.

Narayan's sixth novel, **The Financial Expert** (1952) is about the rise and eventual fall of a village moneylender by name Margayya. Insulted openly by the secretary of the Co-operative Bank in front of which he sits and transacts money-lending business.

Narayan's seventh novel, **Waiting for the Mahatma** (1955), is about the romantic love of a young man Sriram for a devout follower of Gandhi by name Bharati.

The Guide, published in 1958, is Narayan's most popular work. It won him the Sahitya Akademi Award. The film version of *The Guide* was a tremendous success. The novel is about the 'Railway' Raju's acting as a guide to tourists.

The Sweet Vendor, published in 1967, is the latest of Narayan's novels. Like Balu of *The Financial Expert* demanding his share of the family property. Mali of his novel demands two and a half lakh rupees from his pious father, Jagan, who is a vendor of sweets.

An Outline of the story of 'The Man-Eater of Malgudi'

Nataraj is the owner of a press on the Market Road in Malgudi. He is frequently visited by his two friends, a poet engaged in writing a monosyllabic epic on Lord Krishna and a journalist by name Sen who is inordinately interested in exposing the flaws of the Nehru government. One day an aggressive taxidermist by name Vasu brings a forestry officer and asks Nataraj to print the latter's volume of golden sayings. A few days later, seeing Nataraj's unoccupied attic, Vasu installs his office there, brushing aside Nataraj's mild objections. One day Vasu takes Nataraj in his jeep to a nearby village called Mempi. Leaving Nataraj in the tee-shop of one Muthu, Vasu goes away in pursuit of a tiger. Thanks to Muthu's good offices, Nataraj manages to come back home even though he does

not have any money to pay the bus fare. The next morning Vasu brings to his office the body of the tiger that he shot down in the Mempi forest on the previous day. Nataraj is aghast to find in the attic a stuffed garuda. Vasu views the animals that Nataraj considers sacred as saleable objects. This is the major cause of a growing friction between the two men. In an attempt to evict Vasu from his attic, Nataraj one day asks him if he has found any suitable place to shift to. Vasu says that Nataraj is insulting him. He writes a complaint to the rent control officer that Nataraj is trying to collect a huge rent for his uninhabitable attic. To appease the officers Nataraj seeks the help of the adjournment lawyer who cunningly charges Nataraj a heavy fee even though he has not paid Nataraj the charges for printing his daughter's wedding card. Another of Vasu's stratagems to put down Nataraj is to bring to the attic a notorious prostitute by name Rangi.

Nataraj decides to bring out his publication of the poet's epic on Lord Krishna with befitting pomp. The day of publication coincides with the day of the local temple festival. Nataraj arranges through Muthu to bring the temple elephant from Mempi to lead the procession on the day of the publication. Rangi informs Nataraj of Vasu's plan to shoot down the elephant when it is taken in procession along the street where he lives. Nataraj appeals to Vasu not to kill the elephant but Vasu turns a deaf ear to his appeal, saying that Nataraj is talking sentimentally and not scientifically. Nataraj's friends also appeal to Vasu in vain.

On the appointed day, the procession starts very late. Vasu goes to sleep, with Rangi by his side fanning away mosquitoes. Irritated by the mosquitoes settling on his temple, Vasu hits his forehead with his palm. The hit is so hard that his skull is fractured and he dies instantaneously. Nobody knows the truth. A police enquiry is conducted but the truth is not got at. All people suspect and shun Nataraj. Finally, Sastri (Nataraj's assistant) gets to know from Rangi what really caused Vasu's death. He informs Nataraj how Vasu, the terrible man-eater of Malgudi came to be killed by his own hand, like the legendary evil-doer Bhasmasura, a terror to all, who caused his death himself by touching his head with his own hand.

TEXTUAL ESSAYS:

1. Circumstances leading to Vasu's settling in Nataraj's attic:

There is a filthy attic in Nataraj's press where he dumps all unwanted things such as old account books, unclaimed copies of a school magazine, etc. A Muslim hawker

offering to buy all the musty journals, Nataraj is ready to dispose of the rotting heap but is disheartened by the low price quoted by the hawker. Intense haggling ensues between the buyer and the seller. It is at this moment that Vasu, the taxidermist, appears on the scene. Wishing to help Nataraj, he gets into the dusty attic himself. After all the useless things are removed Vasu proposes to convert the attic into his office.

Nataraj feebly objects to Vasu's proposal. Without heeding his objecting, Vasu makes necessary arrangements for inhabiting the attic. He gets the room dusted and whitewashed and brings all his belongings there, including a big bedstead and a few pieces of furniture. Nataraj remains a passive on-looker. The only attempt made by him to prevent the aggressive Vasu from entering the press as and when he likes is he (Nataraj) arranges a side entrance to the premise that helps Vasu to have access to the attic direct without upsetting Nataraj.

It takes time for Nataraj's boon companions, the poet and the journalist, to adjust them to the change. At first, they are scared of Vasu and manage to sneak away the moment he enters. But soon they get over their fear and decide to make common cause against Vasu's bullying ways. When Vasu loudly condemns the journalist's animadversions against the Nehru government, the latter fearlessly retaliates. The two are almost on the point of coming to blows but discreetly desist. This incident teaches Vasu to be civil towards Vasu's friends.

2. Circumstances leading to Nataraj's first trip to Mempi:

The forestry officer to shoot down only ducks and deers and not dangerous wild animals licenses Vasu. He does not like such a tame life. He wants to hunt down wild creatures, stuff them and sell them at a huge profit. It is Vasu's tendency to involve others in all the evil that he does. Now he forcibly takes Nataraj in his jeep, brushing aside his feeble protestations that he has to pay personal attention to the printing of some marriage invitations. He promises to bring Nataraj back to the press in five minutes. We learn later that Vasu gives this assurance only to silence Nataraj.

Vasu drives straight to Mempi. He stops in front of a teashop where a villager sells bun, coffee and bananas by name Muthu. A knot of rustics who gather round Vasu's jeep inform him that a tiger has been prowling around and that its pug-marks are seen here and there. Vasu is engrossed so much in poaching that he forgets his earlier promise to take Nataraj quickly back to his office so as not to dislocate his business schedule. Asking

Nataraj to remain in the tea-shop till he returns Vasu hurries away at break-neck speed in his jeep, without even bothering to ask him if he has enough cash to meet petty expenses. This callousness is quite characteristic of Vasu.

Nataraj waits long. He becomes bored. He has no Wordsworthian eye for the beauty of nature. He draws Muthu into a conversation by informing him that he is a printer. Muthu is delighted to hear this as he has some matter to be printed. He points to a distant temple and says that he renovated it at his cost. He wants to celebrate the temple festival grandly by printing thousands of invitations and distributing them to all and sundry. Nataraj offers to undertake the printing. Muthu is elevated and gives him all the refreshments that he needs. He does not understand that Nataraj has subtly coaxed him into meeting his needs.

Nataraj is gripped by the childish fear that, if the tiger escapes, the disappointed Vasu will shoot him down, instead. So he wants to return to his office before Vasu finishes his job. Unfortunately, there is inordinate delay in the bus making its last trip to malgudi. Another problem that Nataraj has to solve is that he has no money to pay the bus fare. He requests Muthu to persuade the conductor to allow him (Nataraj) to travel ticketless. The bus arrives at long last and the conductor agrees to accommodate Nataraj even though he has no money to buy a ticket. The bus stop for a long time till a circle inspector comes. Everybody in the bus heaves a sigh of relief when the inspector catches the bus and the bus starts lumbering along. It stops often to take in more and more passengers even though the bus is already overcrowded. The conductor pockets a sizeable portion of the day's collection to realize his dream of owning a taxi. As soon as the inspector gets down, the driver drives at a terrific speed and reaches Malgudi at midnight. Nataraj has great difficulty in pacifying his irate wife.

The next morning Nataraj handles the adjournment lawyer also tactfully. The lawyer storms into the press, determined to withdraw his order but Nataraj wisely delays returning the original script to the lawyer till the latter calms down and consents to wait till the invitations are printed. When Nataraj is immersed in the work that has accumulated due to his absence on the previous day, Vasu calls him. Irritated Nataraj goes to Vasu's jeep and is aghast to find inside the carcass of the tiger killed by him in the Mempi forest on the previous day. Taking Nataraj to the attic, Vasu proudly shows him stuffed dead bodies of the birds and beasts that he has so wantonly killed. Nataraj's pet cat that used to rub its soft body against his leg has been killed and stuffed by Vasu. He justifies his killing

of a crow, saying that it will frighten away other crows from pecking the hides that he hangs out to dry. Nataraj is appalled to find a golden eagle stuffed with its eyes glittering as if alive. Nataraj regards the golden eagle or garuda as the vehicle of Lord Vishnu. Vasu says with his tongue in his cheek that he has made Vishnu learn to walk by destroying his means of transport. He also remarks that he can sell the stuffed garuda at a profit to some pious lady who could install it in her puja room and worship it. Nataraj shudders at such blasphemous jokes. He decides to evict Vasu from the attic but does not know how to do it.

3. Efforts taken by Nataraj to celebrate the publication of the poet's epic on Lord Krishna.

One of Nataraj's boon companions is an ambitious poet striving to write an epic on Lord Krishna using only monosyllabic words. When a polysyllabic word becomes unavoidable, the poet overcomes the problem by splitting the word into monosyllabic parts. This arbitrary act sometimes makes it difficult for the reader to follow his verse. Nataraj admires the poet's skill and allows him to sit on the Queen Anne Chair in the parlour of his press. The poet writes slowly. When he finishes the canto on the celestial marriage of Radha and Krishna, Nataraj is overjoyed, regarding it as the coda of the composition. He decides to publish the volume with due pomp and paraphernalia. First of all, he has to fix up an auspicious day. The astrologer with whom Nataraj consults makes many devious calculations and finally recommends three dates of which Nataraj chooses one because that is the day of the local Krishna temple festival. The astrologer half-heartedly accepts the date, warning at the same time that some mishap may occur on that day. Nataraj brushes aside the astrologer's feeble objection and sticks to the date, accepting Sastri's philosophic view that 'when it comes, it comes; when it goes, it goes'.

The trio-Nataraj, the poet and the journalist, plan an elaborate ritual, a procession, and a feast for a thousand poor people. A large amount of money is necessary for the purpose. The journalist Sen writes a notice, stressing the greatness of the Krishna cult and the poet's monosyllabic verse and winding up with an appeal to the public to contribute liberally. Thousands of notices are printed and scattered all over Malgudi. Not many volunteer to donate. The aerated-water dealer K.J. is the first to dodge. Nataraj who expects at least a hundred rupees from him turns down Vasu's offer of ten rupees. Vasu collects a lot of money on Nataraj's behalf and appropriates it himself.

Nataraj works day and night and finishes printing the volume a day prior to the festival. He arranges to get two copies bound with eye-catching cloth by the local binder. They plan to send copies to all VIP's. Sen is particular about sending a copy to the Sahitya Akademi, as he is quite hopeful that the book will get an award. The Municipal Chairman who immensely likes being in the limelight agrees to inaugurate the function but Sen has to prepare the speech for him! Cunningly, Sen inserts into the speech all his personal prejudices against the Nehru government for its lack of interest in literary activities. A special stage is erected with coconut thatches. The Chariman sits on this stage and reels off his address, without anybody listening to it. The chariot is resplendently decorated by two specialists from Jalapur. Cartloads of chrysanthemum, jasmine and other flowers are used for the purpose, causing a steep rise in the price of flowers in Malgudi. A party of singers sings songs in praise of Lord Krishna in such a raucous manner that nobody listened. Children have a nice time, running here and there defying all parental control. A piper and a drummer, stars in their line' are caught hold of by Nataraj who has to arrange conveyance for them and yield to all their whims and fancies. Rangi, the local prostitute, glamorously dressed up, dances without much impact on the spectators. The sight of the elephant Kumar, brought from Mempri by Muthu gives immense pleasure to the children who swarm around it and ply it with sugarcane.

Many businessmen make money out of the festival. A wealthy rice merchant supplies rice and jaggery free for the making of sweet 'pongal' to be offered to God and distributed free to the devotees. But he stipulates that his rice and grocery must be given due publicity. The aerated-water dealer K.J offers to sell his product free but in reality sells his water-filled bottles profitably. Many toy-dealers make money by selling their flimsy products to innocent children.

The only threat to the festival is that posed by the taxidermist Vasu who plans to shoot down the temple elephant Kumar from his window and sell parts of its body at a huge profit. Nataraj's appeal to him to desist from killing the sacred animal is in vain. Finally, an accident saves Kumar. Vasu, comfortably ensconced in his attic is waiting for the elephant to pass along the road, leading the procession. A swarm of mosquitoes buzz around his face. The irritated Vasu hits his temple with his palm to ward off mosquitoes. The hit is so powerful that it causes his death then and there. Kumar passes by leading the procession and the festival goes off without a hitch.

4. The encounter between the Inspector of Police and Vasu:

Obsessed with the prospect of Vasu killing the temple elephant Kumar, Nataraj shouts a prayer to Lord Vishnu to save the elephant and the innocent devotees. All are stunned by Nataraj's outburst. He is carried to a secluded place in the temple. An anxious crowd soon collects round him. The Municipal Chairman stops his harangue and comes running to Nataraj. He is rattled by Nataraj's appeal to him to take necessary steps to protect the elephant. He would rather wriggle out of this delicate situation somehow or other. Nataraj's wife is greatly upset. She thinks that his mental tension will abate only if he takes complete rest. So, she takes him back home without minding his protestations. At home, he is visited by his sincere friends, Muthu, the poet, the journalist, and the veterinary doctor. Nataraj informs them how Vasu is planning to shoot down the elephant for money from his window. The men are aghast. They decide to appeal to the District Superintendent of police for quick action. But the District Superintendent of police is an evasive man. He tells the men that, as Vasu is licensed to hold a gun, he cannot be deprived of it. He says that he cannot take any action 'unless there is concrete evidence'. He says that even the magistrate cannot issue an order to arrest anybody without a casue. Thus the loopholes in the law enabled the District Superintendent of Police to evade his responsibility. He dexterously shifts his work on to his subordinate, the Inspector of police, by asking him to take suitable action against the man who is planning to disrupt the festival. The Inspector is brisk and positive. He walks with the men to Vasu's attic.

A fierce verbal battle ensues; Vasu faces the Inspector and the four complainants unnerved. He has a curt answer to intimidate and silence every one of them. He says that he can easily pick up all of them and toss them downstairs. When the journalist voices the suspicion about the disruption to the procession, Casu coolly asks him to divert the procession along some other safer route. Muthu is in a fiery mood. He says that the elephant belongs to the goddess on the hill and before he could finish saying that any attempt to harm the animal would be resisted, Vasu asks him to confine himself to the business of keeping flies out of his tea-shop. The veterinary doctor gives a broad hint that the elephant is in perfect health and cannot be driven crazy by anybody to justify killing it. Vasu retorts that the doctor, despite his American degree, knows nothing about animals. He asks the doctor to be content with drawing his 'sinecure allowance' and not to interfere in others' affairs. The journalist says that if Vasu does something that causes a stampede

and results in the death of hundreds of women and children, he will not watch it passively. Vasu says with unconcern that death should be viewed philosophically. The person who dies is, according to the Hindu doctrine of re-incarnation reborn with 'a brand-new body'. He also says with supreme effrontery that melas and festivals, with their melees and stampedes causing the death of a large number of people, are meant to keep down the rising population and not, as the journalist fancies, to take man closer to God.

It is at this point that the Inspector breaks in asking Vasu whether he has a gun. Vasu replies that he has two, a rifle and a revolver and tosses his license. The Inspector asks whether the guns are loaded. Vasu admits that they are but adds mischievously that they are not 'toys'. This is a thinly veiled threat that he will not hesitate to open fire on the inspector and the other men, if necessary. When the Inspector said that he has the D.S.P's order to investigate, Vasu asks haughtily whether he has a warrant to enter his (Vasu's) premises and conduct an enquiry. He threatens to move the Inspector-General and the Home Minister to take action against the Inspector for trespassing into his house. The Inspector realizes that Vasu cannot be threatened into submission. So he assumes a friendly tone and suggests keeping Vasu's arms in the police station till the festival is over. Vasu flares up and orders the Inspector not to touch his (Vasu's) gun. The Inspector is provoked. He counter-threatens that he can lock up Vasu under the Public Safety Act. He is about to whistle to bring in more constables to execute his order but, with lightning speed, Vasu snatches the whistle and throws it away and also hits the Inspector's wrist and dislocates it. To display his strength, Vasu then hits the iron frame of his cot and cracks it. The Inspector is acutely pained. But he has the temerity to shout at Vasu: 'I'll get you for this...' Vasu is least afraid. He catches the sneaking poet and asks him to send his 'patron saint', that is, Nataraj, who has instigated all the others. The threats of Muthu and the journalist only provoke Vasu's mirth. The men beat an ignominious retreat, with the doctor advising the Inspector to go to a hospital at once and get his wrist dressed up. This episode brings out Vasu's brute strength and invincibility.

5. The final encounter between Nataraj and Vasu

Nataraj is the kind of man who can never harbour hostility to anybody, even to a confirmed malefactor like Vasu. After many days of sullen silence, he initiates 'over-tures of peace' by going to Vasu's attic uninvited, carrying some homemade delicacies for him. The first object in the attic that attracts his attention is a stuffed tiger cub. This gives

Nataraj an opportunity to open a tete-a-tete with Vasu, who says that he stuffed the little animal only a week back. He ignores Nataraj's tender concern that the mother tiger would miss its baby. When Nataraj says that he could have reared the little animal, Vasu retorts that rearing and maintaining animals is the work of a zookeeper and not a taxidermist like him. He is contemptuous of the zookeeper's vocation. To mitigate his anger, Nataraj gives him the cakes made by his wife. Vasu's anger does not subside. He makes some peevish comments on the dish and goes on to run down the religious festival as 'tomfoolery'. He says that time for him is money and that he has wasted a good deal of his precious time by going around and raising fund for the festival. He forestalls Nataraj's demand for the money collected by saying that he has spent more than two thousand rupees out of his pocket. He condemns the people's obsession with the poet's monosyllabic verse, calling the celebration a waste of national energy.

Nataraj at last opens the topic for which he has come there. He asks Vasu not to harm the temple elephant Kumar. Vasu laughs away at Nataraj's remark by saying that the elephant's skin is too thick to be penetrated even with a bodkin. He says heartlessly that the elephant will be more valuable dead than alive as every organ of the elephant could be sold at a huge price. The tusks, weighing forty pounds, would fetch a fortune. The legs could be mounted as umbrella stands. Women for making rings and bangles fancy the hairs on the elephant's tail. Vasu expects to amass as much as ten thousand rupees by selling different parts of the dead elephant. He describes the elephant as a 'perfect animal' not for its beauty and grandeur but because all the parts of its mammoth anatomy are saleable. He hopes to retire for a year on the proceeds of the elephant. He says that he has already got orders for different parts of the elephant from France, Germany and Hong Kong.

Nataraj says that Vasu may be justified in killing wild animals in the forest but not the mild-natured temple elephant. Vasu counters that the red streaks in the temple elephant's little eyes are a sure indication that it may go wild at the slightest provocation, causing stampede and large-scale destruction of human lives. Vasu does not give any hint as to how he proposes to drive the elephant crazy. As for Nataraj's observation that killing the temple elephant is unethical, Vasu says that Nataraj talks 'sentimentally' like a widow. He describes shooting an animal as a matter of mere 'give and take' – the bullet issuing from a gun is merely 'received' by an object in front of it. He views Nataraj's aversion to killing as unscientific. He says that his book that is in print throws light on why killing of

animals, if viewed scientifically, is welcome. Nataraj hopes to win Vasu by offering to print his book in his (Nataraj's) press. But Vasu says cuttingly that another printer has already started printing it and refuses to reveal the printer's identity. He coldly dismisses Nataraj who has to walk away crestfallen. Nataraj feels like 'a man working towards a disastrous end carrying a vast crowd with him'. The 'rolling downhill' has begun and nothing can check its 'momentum'.

Later that night, Nataraj, egged by an urge to make a last ditch attempt to save the elephant, steps into Vasu's attic noiselessly, prepared even to assault him and die, if necessary for the noble cause. Finding Vasu reclined on an easy chair, Nataraj concludes that he is fast asleep. His gun is lying on the floor. There is an alarm clock on a nearby stool. The procession has started passing along the road with the elephant in the lead. Nataraj crawls inch by inch and picks up the gun. Standing behind, Nataraj intends to shoot down Vasu, should he try to kill the elephant, or at least terrorize him into inactivity till the elephant safely passes by. The elephant does pass by safely and the procession does cross the street without any disruption and still Vasu does not wake up. (Nataraj does not know the truth that Vasu is lying dead). Suddenly, the alarm bell rings. Frightened that Vasu would get up and maul him. Nataraj drops down the gun and runs back to his office. Nataraj who stepped into the attic like an undaunted warrior now scampers like an arrant coward.

6. The enquiry of the police into the death of Vasu:

Vasu death proves as much troublesome as Vasu alive. The postman Thanappa is the first to discover that Vasu is lying dead in his attic. Stepping into his attic to deliver a registered letter, Thanappa is shocked to find the body of Vasu lying inert on the easy chair. Immediately, he reports the matter to Nataraj and to innumerable others. The District Superintendent of Police arrives on the spot in no time. Ensconcing himself on the Queen Anne chair in Nataraj's parlour he starts his investigation by putting questions to all those who were connected with Vasu in some way or other. Muthu, the Veterinary Doctor, the Journalist, the Inspector of Police, Nataraj and his wife are some of the people interrogated by the D.S.P. They suspect one another but nobody openly incriminates the other. After examining Vasu's body, the pathologist says that the death was due to a concussion of his temple with a blunt instrument. As for Nataraj, he hushes up the fact that he visited the attic a few hours before the death occurred. The food-carrier brought by Rangi draws the

D.S.P.'s attention. But Rangi did not admit that the vessel is hers. She is scared that Nataraj might expose her. But Nataraj does not do so to her immense relief. Nataraj merely says that Vasu got his food from several quarters. This piece of information unnecessarily complicates matters. The D.S.P. glares at Nataraj as he has said more than he was required to say. The D.S.P. proves very evasive. He knows through long experience that it is unwise to voice personal views. He merely records the evidence given by others. The others want the food-carrier to be sealed and he promptly seals it. The D.S.P. maintains an air of impartiality by putting questions to the Inspector also who easily extricates himself and established his innocence by saying that he was in the government hospital getting his dislocated wrist plastered and then with the D.S.P. reporting the matter to him.

The police enquiry generates an atmosphere of suspicion and vilification. The poet and the journalist suspect one another. The poet tells Nataraj that he saw the journalist hiding a blunt instrument in his room. He must have used it to deal a deathblow to Vasu. The others also suspect Muthu. The elephant belonged to him and he might have committed the murder to save his pet animal. Even, the Inspector of Police is not beyond suspicion. As he was insulted and manhandled by Vasu, he might have employed some things to murder Vasu. All the people unanimously suspect Nataraj whom, they think, might have been provoked by Vasu's constant harassment to murder him. Even Nataraj's wife and son suspect him. It is with great difficulty that Nataraj pressurizes his wife to tell the D.S.P. that he (Nataraj) was at home at the time of the procession. As for Nataraj's son, he is all admiration for his father for having murdered a rakshasa single-handed. Because of the general suspicion of Nataraj, nobody visits his press. Even the poet and the journalist shun him. Nataraj's assistant Sastri applies for long leave on some flimsy ground and keeps away from the press, leaving Nataraj to do all the tasks by himself.

7. Circumstances leading to the death of Vasu:

The people of Malgudi feel that Nataraj, constantly harassed by Vasu, might have murdered him. Even Nataraj comes to believe that he might have committed the dastardly crime, spurred by a sudden impulse, and later on forgotten all about it. He is sad to find his friends, the poet and the journalist, studiously avoiding him. One day Nataraj catches hold of the poet and tries to thrust on him the stuffed tiger cub that he had picked up in Vasu's attic, saying that it is his present to the poet for his epic. The poet is shocked and runs away, never to return. The journalist also proves unreliable by keeping himself away from the press on the ground that he has an important assignment with some Madras-based

newspaper. Even the adjournment lawyer who is yet to clear his debt to Nataraj tries to dodge him.

Nataraj is engulfed in despair. It is at this time that his sole assistant Sastri comes with a cheering piece of information. He first attributes his long absence to his pilgrimage to Rameshwaram with his wife and children and then repeats Rangi's narration of the circumstances that led to Vasu's death. On the day of the festival, Rangi went to Vasu's attic with a hamper containing food for him. She had mixed up some sleeping drug with the food to make Vasu fall asleep at the time of the procession, so that no harm would be done by him to the elephant or the processionists. But Vasu was in an unpleasant mood on that night and did not eat the food. Instead, he sat on an easy chair near his window. Coming to know that the procession would be very late, he went to sleep on the chair, asking Rangi to remain by his side, fanning mosquitoes away. Some mosquitoes landed on his temple. Vasu hit the spot with his palm. The hit was so hard that the skull bone was fractured and Vasu died then and there.

Sastri gives a philosophic twist to his narration by saying, that rakshasa like Vasu whom the world considers invincible ultimately destroyed himself. He cites the example of Bhasmasura whom nobody could destroy but who ultimately burnt himself inadvertently by touching his head with his own fingers. Vasu is equated to the self-destroyer Bhasmasura.

SUCH A LONG JOURNEY

-Rohinton Mistry

LIFE AND WORKS:

Rohinton Mistry (b. 1952), an Indian-born novelist settled in Canada, is a powerful chronicler of contemporary social and political life. He shot into fame recently on being shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize for his latest novel *A Fine Balance*. Earlier he published a collection of short stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag* and the critically acclaimed novel *Such a Long Journey*, which was a runner up for the 1991 Booker Prize. Mistry has the rare distinction of winning Commonwealth Fiction Prize twice. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Mistry's fiction is that it brilliantly captures the crowded, throbbing life of India.

Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay in 1952. He immigrated to Toronto in 1975 where he worked for ten years in a bank, studying English and Philosophy part-time at the University of Toronto. He has won several awards for his creative work. His stories have been published in a number of Canadian literary journals and anthologies. These are published in book form in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. He is also the author of two novels – *Such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance*.

Rohinton Mistry, the socio-political novelist, has emerged as a formidable writer on the world literary scene. As an Indian who now lives in and writes from Canada, he is a writer of the Indian Diaspora. He is by no means a prolific writer; he has published, within a span of ten years, only three works. His maiden anthology of short stories *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) was followed by a remarkable first novel *Such a Long Journey* (1991) that heralded his arrival as a gifted novelist. His latest novel *A Fine Balance* (1995) has received a worldwide acclaim, and is considered a landmark in the history of Indian fiction. No wonder, there has been a widespread growth of interest in his writings. The relation between literature and life seems the object of increased attention in his writings; his novels are closely linked with the social and political background. Like Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Khushwant Singh and Shashi Tharoor, he is deeply involved with history. It is desirable therefore to analyze Mistry's fiction in order to understand the whole range of the novelist's use of history, which helps us to see how it impinges on the nature and scope of his fictional style. One further discovers that history-fiction interface, practiced by Mistry, is fascinating and culturally significant.

2. SUCH A LONG JOURNEY – A STUDY

The heart of the novel *Such a Long Journey* is Mistry's recreation of the life and times of Gustad Noble, an aging Parsi. Gustad, his wife Dilnavaz, their two sons Sohrab and Darius and daughter Roshan live in the Parsi residential colony of Khodadad Building in Bombay. Gustad is the grandson of a prosperous furniture dealer, a lover of books and tasteful living, whose fortunes were squandered by an alcoholic son, Gustad's uncle. Gustad's father was too gentle and weighted down by the sense of family loyalty to salvage his share of the inheritance. Gustad now works in a bank and lives in straitened circumstances, among other Parsis. His grandfather's taste survives in Gustad's nostalgic day-dream of building a bookcase, in collaboration with his son Sohrab, to house his

decimated collection of books. His father's goodness and compassion inform all of Gustad's actions and relationships that constitute the novel.

The inhabitants of Khodadad Building are representatives of a cross-section of middle-class Parsis expressing all the angularities of dwindling community. All the characters in *Such a Long Journey* are individualized and memorably drawn with humour and compassion.

The characters outside Khodadad Building who come alive in the pages of this novel are Gustad Noble's bank associate Dinshawji with his salacious puns and comic mask, his childhood friend Malcolm Saldhana initiating Gustad into the intricacies of western music and the miracles of the church of Mount Mary; the physician Dr. Paymaster forever unable to shed the name plate of his predecessor Dr. Lord; Peerbhoy Paanwala dispensing varieties of Paan and anecdotes to the visitors on their way to the cages of prostitutes, the unnamed pavement artist graduating to a wall-artist and back again; the bank manager Mr. Madan who is stingy in granting leave; the office peon Bhimsen collecting newspapers with photographs of Nixon and Kissinger for the toilet training of the children in his Jhopadpatti.

The title *Such a Long Journey* comes from T.S. Eliot's poem "Journey of the Magi", which provides one of the three epigraphs to the novel:

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey....

Rohinton Mistry portrays the picture of this period in this novel. The novelist offers commentary on the socio-political situation and raises a national debate on corruption in high places. Some characters in the novel make really illuminating comments. For instance Gustad thinks about the position of the Parsis in Bombay and comments thus: "No future for minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America – twice as good as the Whiteman to get half as much". (55)

Major Bilimoria's reappearance on the scene of action disturbs the already precarious position of Gustad. Through the enactment of Nagarwala case, he makes an important political statement. Nagarwala received nearly sixty lakh rupees from a bank

manager in Delhi, allegedly on the strength of a phone call from the Prime Minister which, it was said, he imitated. Nagarwala was dead after a few months. Nobody knew where the money went. Since this involved a member of Parsi community, the Parsis were considerably perturbed and the death of Nagarwala itself raised many eyebrows.

On the whole, *Such a Long Journey* is Rohinton Mistry's masterpiece. It expresses the author's feelings about his community. This particular novel contributes in advancing the notion of Community Literature.

3. THEME OF THE NOVEL

The title has a symbolic significance and refers to the life of Dr. Gustad Noble, the central character of the story. Gustad was a teller in a bank. As an ordinary man, he had to face many trials in life. But he had his own dreams about the future. He also had plans for his eldest son, Sohrab. But one by one the aspirations crumble down like a pack of cards. Traditional family ties are witnessed loosening. The reticent attitude of his wife, Dilnavaz is explicit when she re-assuringly says to him, "We must be patient". However, Gustad has borne this far too long and it seems that his patience has been tested to the last string. "What have we been all these years if not patient? Is this how it will end? Sorrow, nothing but sorrow." The family gets more and more involved in suffering as Darius, the second son, falls in love with Mr. Rabadi's daughter and Roshan, the daughter, keeps ill health. Yet all these do not deter Gustad from facing life stoically.

Fortunately, Gustad Noble had a few good and understanding friends like Major Jimmy Bilimoria and Dinshawji the latter working with him in the bank. One day Jimmy suddenly left Khodadad Building, where he lived, without a word even to Gustad, which upset the latter. He was already disillusioned with the indifferent behaviour of Sohrab and now the disappearance of a close friend made matters worse. After some time, Gustad gets a letter from Jimmy, who desired Gustad to receive a parcel from him. Gustad readily does so in the name of friendship. However, on opening the parcel, he finds himself entrapped in an intricate and apparently inextricable snare of difficulties.

The parcel contains ten lakh rupees to be deposited in the bank in an account held under the name of a non-existent woman, Mira Obili. Gustad takes the help of Dinshawji for accomplishing this task. As soon as the work is done Jimmy wants the money back. This is another uphill task. Then Gustad has to go to New Delhi to see the ailing Jimmy.

Gustad feels utterly lonely and lost as two of his friends depart from this world one after the other, first it was Dinshawli and then Jimmy.

As the years roled by Gustad Noble modifies his dreams and trims his expectations in life. Experience makes him into a stronger, more enduring man. He finally resolves to face life stoically and not to be crushed by the forces of destiny. This attitude is his greatest triumph in life.

Rohinton Mistry, as mentioned earlier, is indebted to Eliot for the title of this novel, "*The Journey of the Magi*". Eliot's poem is highly symbolic. The journey of the three wise men to the birthplace of Jesus Christ is not merely an ordinary physical journey; it is symbolic of man's spiritual quest in which he has to undergo numerous hardships. Later, one of the Magi gives an account of his toilsome journey for the benefit of a listener. He distinctly reveals how he was impelled to proceed merely because of his faith. He succeeded in overcoming all the impediments that befell his way. The end of the journey was rewarding and satisfying, for he had reached his destination and found that the prophecy of the birth of Christ was true. *The Journey of the Magi* is also symbolic of the re-orientation that is absolutely essential to attain higher and nobler values in life.

Gustad's journey of life is so close to the journey of the Magi. Gustad was keenly desirous of the fulfillment of his dreams and aspirations. At every stage of his life's journey, he met with unprecedented obstacles and the working of inexplicable forces. However, he is not the one to give in; he is like the wise man who very subtly pushed aside the hindrances of life, did not allow them to overpower him and went ahead with faith that the journey will surely end at a particular destination.

The variegated experiences of life helped Gustad to come to a very significant conclusion. "Luck is the split of the Gods and Goddesses".

Mistry also emphasizes the role of chance. In his opinion, life should be treated as a gift from God, and even if it is full to the brim with misery and misfortune, it ought to be relished and lived to the lees. It is true that men become 'confused and discontented' as they await 'the uncertain future'.

Hope is a powerful anchor for the troubled mind. Man attempts to solve his problems by wishing for miracles to happen, through many time miracles and misfortunes come simultaneously. During the course of the story Mistry mentions that when people are desperate, their prayers seem to be unheard, the future seems to be bleak and there appears to be no alternative, then they resort to exorcism. Coincidentally, it works and at least for the time being things seem to be set right.

Such a Long Journey views and reviews a vast canvas of Indian life. It discusses minutely and realistically the ups and downs of an average Indian and also touches certain explosive chapters of the Indian politics and the three wars that took place between 1962 and 1971.

4. DEPICTION OF PARSI COMMUNITY IN THE NOVEL

The Parsis migrated from Iran to the west coast of India to escape religious persecution in the eighth century. They were permitted by local rulers to stay and practice their faith. In spite of being an infinitesimal minority they have contributed much to the development of India. They possess a sort of ability to laugh at the cruel complexities of life. The Parsi writers are also sensitive to the various anxieties felt by their community.

Rohinton Mistry has demonstrated this in responding to the existing threats to the Parsi family and community, and also to the country. He parents his community through the different narratives of his characters who invariably express their concern for their community and the changes that affect their community. Since their fate is bound up with the fate of their community, their stories tend to be the stories of their community. By centralizing their community in their narratives, they preserve and protect themselves and thus they throw light on the existing facts.

After the great Parsi exodus to the west coast of India, a few Zoroastrians continued to live in secrecy in the hills, caves and forests of Iran. The rest of the Persian population was forcibly converted to Islam.

The Parsi community is on a long journey to growing and knowing. Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* is written somewhat in the manner of fiction or non-fiction. *Such a Long Journey* is set in Bombay against the backdrop of war in the Indian subcontinent and the

birth of Bangladesh. The novel tells the story of Dr. Gustad Noble, an ordinary man, and the peculiar way in which the conflict impinges on the lives of his family.

Gustad Noble's dreams and aspirations are quite modest, and when circumstances conspire to deny him even these modest expectations, he finds it hard to accept that he cannot make things happen the way he wants them to do. As the novel unfolds, he discovers that there are other forces at play, larger than him and mostly inexplicable, so being the trials of Gustad Noble, loss of a dear friend, the son's betrayal of his father's dream, the illness of Gustad's daughter, his friend Dinshawji's death. As Gustad Noble slowly modifies his dreams and trims down his expectations of life, he comes to accept that he is not in control of events. His triumph consists in his manner of enduring these trials.

For Gustad there is no God who appears at the end of his tribulations to explain things or to dispense justice, no God to reassure him that he has passed the test and that all will be well. And yet Gustad survives without succumbing to any prolonged despair or bitterness, still in possession of his essential human dignity.

Such a Long Journey is the first brilliant novel by one of the most remarkable writers to have emerged from the Indian literary tradition in many years. In this novel Dinshawji remarks: "What days those were, Yaar. What fun we used to have. Parsees were the kings of banking in those days. Such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere has been spoiled over since that Indira nationalized the banks".

Gustad too adds: "Nowhere in the world has nationalization worked". What can you say to idiots? Like Gustad other members of the community are scared of politicians like Mrs. Gandhi whom they consider responsible for encouraging the demand for a separate Maharashtra: "How much bloodshed, how much rioting she caused". (39) As a minority community, the Parsis have their little fears and anxieties; Dinshawji voices his concern about rising communal forces: "No future for minorities, with all these Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America twice as good as the white men to get half as much. How could he make Sohrab understand this?" (55)

In *Such a Long Journey*, various characters belonging to the minority community express their anguish at the changing pattern of communal relationship in a society that breathes beneath the narrative structure of the novel.

Rohinton Mistry's sensitivity of impending dangers to his community is expressed by his character's consciousness of these changes. In a nutshell, Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* centralizes the Parsi community in many ways.

Questions:

1. Rohinton's Mistry's "Such a Long Journey" is the expression of his feelings about his community. – Substantial.
2. Bring out the critical acclaim of the novel.
3. Analyse the symbolic significance of the novel.
4. Justify the title of the novel.
5. Mistry emphasizes the role of chance – Discuss.
6. How does Mistry view and review the vast canvas of Indian life in the novel?
7. Sketch the central character of the novel Gustad Noble.
8. Write on the sub-plot woven around Kutpitia – Dilnavaz.

ANITHA DESAI

LIFE:

Anitha Desai was born in Mussorie on 24th June 1937. She had a Bengali father and a German mother. When she was a child, her parents, sisters and brother used German for conversation. At the age of seven, she began to write prose; mainly fiction and they were published in children's magazines. The family lived in Delhi and here she had her education – first at Queen Mary's school and at Mirauda House, Delhi University. She passed her Bachelor's degree in English Literature in 1957.

Anitha Desai worked for a year in Max Muller Bhawan, Calcutta. She was married to Ashwin Desai. She has four children. She takes proper care of them. She has lived in metropolitan cities – Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Poona and Chandigarh. She describes these cities in her novels.

Baumgartner's Bombay

-Anitha Desai

LIFE AND WORKS

Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, The Peacock* was published in 1963 and it can be considered a trend-setter. It deals with the psychical rather than with physical aspects of its characters. Her second novel *Voices in the City* (1965) depicts the miserable plight of Nirode, Monisha and Amla in the City of Calcutta.

Desai's third novel, *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, published in 1971, portrays the plight of Indian immigrants in London. Her next novel *Where shall we go this Summer?* (1975) describes the tension between a sensitive wife Sita and the rational Roman.

Anita Desai's fifth novel *Fire on the Mountain* was published in London in 1977. It won the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize and the 1978 National Academy of Letters award. In this novel Desai describes Nanda Kaul's motherly feelings of humiliation and desolation for life time alienation.

Her *Clear Light of Day* was published in 1980. This novel is four-dimensional as it is about time as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people.

Desai's *Village by the Sea* was published in London in 1982. It is the story of Lila (13) and her brother Hari (12). In her novel *In Custody* Anita Desai transcribes the madness of Deven and his search for the safety of his little world.

Baumgartner's Bombay is a portrait of loneliness, of alienation and immigrant's existential predicament. It is a touching account of the travails of a simple and submissive Jew, Hugo Baumgartner. The novelist narrates the life of Hugo from his childhood days in Germany to his death at the ripe age of seventy in India. He leaves Germany because his family cannot provide him even bare necessities of life. There he feels like an outsider. He does not belong. In India also his features and language impede his sense of belonging. His friends like Habibullah and Chamanlal's son betray him. In Calcutta he falls in love with a cabaret dancer, Cotte but refuses to marry her. Human company does not suit him. He prefers to live with cats in a dark-dingy flat behind the Taj Hotel in Bombay. A wretched boy named Kurt murders Hugo and runs away with his silver trophies. Thus an absurd and meaningless life comes to a similarly futile end.

Feasting Fasting (1999) is her latest novel, which was nominated for Booker Prize 1999. The novel presents two extremes: one is fasting and the other is feasting. The novel is in two parts. One dealing with Indian life and the other with the life in United States of America. The narrative structure makes it an interesting reading.

Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* is a portrait of loneliness and alienation of immigrant's existential predicament. It is a touching account of the travails of a simple and submissive Jew, Hugo Baumgartner. Desai narrates the life of Hugo from his childhood days in Germany to his death at the old age of seventy in India. The reason for his coming to India is two fold. Firstly, his father being a spend thrift; the family business dwindles and Baumgartner's become bankrupt. Secondly, there is no security within the family and life is also insecure due to Hitler's rule. In India also his features and language impede him to develop a sense of belongingness. His friends Habibullah and Chimanlal's sons betray him. In Kolkata he falls in love with a German Cabaret dancer, Cotte but refuses to marry her. The human company does not suit him. He likes to live with cats in a dark, dingy and shabby flat behind the Taj Hotel of Bombay. He feeds his cats with the left overs from Farrokht café. One day he meets a drug-addict and pities his plight. He

brings him home for rest and food. His boy kurf kills Hugo and runs away with his trophies. Thus an absurd life comes to nowhere.

Journey to Ithaca (1998) is the latest novel of Anita Desai. The title of the novel is highly symbolical and meaningful. Sophie embarks on a journey to India with her husband, Matteo in order to gain cultural and spiritual knowledge.

Anita Desai's first *Baumgartner's Bombay*

-Anita Desai

1. Story of Calcutta and Bombay

Anita Desai indeed is one of the brightest stars in the Indian literary firmament today and her latest novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* has added her image as a gifted writer of great skill. The novel marks a significant milestone in Anita Desai's career as a novelist. Haunting pathos and evocative images marks it. Baumgartner's sense of isolation in an alien land fits in well with the environment Anita Desai has painted in the novel. The novel is not only the story of bumbling Baumgartner; it is also the brilliant evocative travelogue of Berlin, Venice, Bombay and Calcutta. The major action of the novel takes places in these two cities.

The story of the novel unfolds against the backdrop of the Second World War, and at the time India is passing through a turbulent phase in her freedom movement. Anita Desai's great ability to dissect and analyze the interior drama of the mind is also in evidence in this novel. The detailed descriptions of Germany, Bombay and Calcutta are the high point of this deeply chilling book.

Baumgartner is pitch forked in India from Germany via Venice. It is in the fitness of things that "Venice was the East, and yet it was Europe too; it was that magic boundary where the two met and blended". Bombay is the base of Baumgartner on his arrival in India. Latter, he shifts to Calcutta. After a stint of internment camp and brief stay in Calcutta, he moves over to Bombay again and meets his nemesis there. Anita Desai has watched Bombay life from close quarters and finds it "a great and abrasive city, its unrelieved ugliness, squalor and noise". This was her perception of the city when she moved there a long time back. Today, the situation in Bombay is worse. It is the city of crime and violence.

As Desai's female protagonist Lotte flees "the blood-spattered scene" of Hugo's gruesome murder in the first chapter, the reader gets a preview of things to come. Lotte's mental landscape finds mirror image in the "blank sky, as always, with neither colour nor form. Empty, afternoon light. Daylight ... And blankness. Even the sounds were perpetual—radio that blared, the woman that screamed, the children that played the pots and pans that clanged. They made a wall themselves—of metal, always in commotion".

Desai is a keen watcher of the slum life. Nothing escapes her eyes. In Baumgartner's Bombay, she clinically describes a poor family that "had taken up the length of the pavement just outside Hira Niwas. Overnight their tins, rags, ropes, stings, papers and plastic bags had been set up to make a shelter and when the tenants woke next morning, they found a cooking fire burning, tin pots and pans being washed in the gutter and some were actually witnesses to the birth of a new baby on a piece of sacking in the street."(207)

Anita Desai makes a brilliant observation on the traffic of Bombay described as "an all-devouring monster on the move." Baumgartner tries to make an escape, but how did one escape, "caught in the traffic like a fish in a net teeming with a million other fish? So much naked skin, oiled and slithering with perspiration, the piscine bulge and stare of so many eyes—he made his way, thinking tiredly how familiar it all was, how he scarcely noticed any of it, merely glanced to see if everything was as it had always been." (18) The problem with Baumgartner is that he finds everything around him familiar; still he fails to gather courage to enter this world of Bombay life. He "had never actually entered it; damply odorously, caco-phonously palpable as it was, it had been elusive still." (214).

Desai in Baumgartner's Bombay brilliantly juxtaposes two facets of the Bombay life. The soothing sea offers one aspect and the busy traffic the other. "Baumgartner did not turn towards the sea. That was for the evening, when the breeze came up with the tide, and the sun fell headlong into the waves, livid and melodramatic in its orange and purple flames, and people strolled, for pleasure, buying themselves peanuts to eat or coconuts to drink from... But now every-one was out on business—cars and people had a purpose, everyone bustled, the vehicles became entangled in their hurry and horns hooted in furious impatience... the Bombay style was brisk . . . brisk and businesslike." (8-9)

Degradation of human life pains Desai. To highlight the hell-like living of the poor, she often picks up “a particular family on the street. Baumgartner’s Bombay, there are plenty of beggars, putrid pavements, sewage drains.

Calcutta is also portrayed prominently in her latest novel. Desai paints this controversial city, which is celebrating its tricentenary this year, with all its contours, dimensions and subtle moods. Calcutta has a special place in Desai’s life.

These vivid scenes of Calcutta life in *Voices in the City* make significant counterpoise to the vignettes created in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. Hugo’s experiences of Calcutta belong to two zones in his life. His young days in Calcutta are associated with “Lotte’s multicoloured history before her later incarnation as a memsahib”. It was the Calcutta ‘of Prince’s own youth, the days of cabaret and Scotch, of Tommies and G.I.s, profiteering and wealth, the guns of war at a safe distance.”(78) This pre-war period of “bars, dances, soliders, prostitutes, businessmen, future and fate” is in sharp contrast with the situation Hugo finds himself in after his release from internment camp. Now it was the city “of the black back streets, the steaming rubbish tips, the scarred tenements, its hunger, its squalor, its desolation.”(166) Baumgartner’s privacy is disturbed by the ceaseless cacophony of the Calcutta locality, “a hundred radios invaded it, either with the mournful songs so beloved of the Bengalis, full of regret, sorrow and sighs.... Always there was the nervous flutter of typewriters, the hum and whirr and clack of machinery. There were the inevitable sounds of quarrels and violence at night when the illicit toddy brewed in the closed sheds....was bought and consumed; then wives were beaten, children threatened or else the drunkards themselves abused and thrashed.”(175).

Hugo remained in Calcutta for about a year on his release from the camp. The atmosphere prevailing at that time is brilliantly captured by the penetrating observation of Desai.

Baumgartner’s Bombay is as much the story of a man who is not welcome anywhere and is jostled as in a time capsule from one place to another as the portrayal of two cities. The novel leaves one breathless with the powerful images Desai employs to create the right atmosphere. She is frank and forthright about the minus points of her latest novel; “I’m aware of too many shortcomings. It seems to me like a sketch, not really the

full history of a man, not a full portrait.” Her statement about Baumgartner, the “Billewallah Pagal,” may be true but the two cities portrayed in the novel have the features of a photograph with its mirror image and a painting with its depth, density, colour and images. The backdrop of Bombay offers a frightening picture. This deeply disturbing novel also signifies a counterpoint in Desai’s attitude. Her early novels, though dark and prophetic, had a certain ring of romance and gentleness around them. As Desai’s “comparatively tranquil, protective, supportive world of childhood” crumbles her angle of viewing India takes a U-turn. The oppressiveness and squalor of the city life in Baumgartner’s Bombay should be viewed through Hugo’s experience of the city “which was not the glittering side,” And Anita Desai may well be right. The mega-cities of India are fast turning into the centres of oppressiveness, cruelty, violence and related crimes with the passage of time and chaos and disaster loom large in the horizon. Viewed in this context, Baumgartner’s Bombay is not only the vivid tale of two cities with a series of flashlit scenes in the three-dimensional brightness; it is also the brilliant testament of our times.

2. Isolation & alienation met by outsiders in Baumgartner’s Bombay

Anita Desai’s Baumgartner’s Bombay has a host of such lost personages—pathetic in their loneliness, unable to find their cosmos. Besides Hugo Baumgartner, the protagonist, and his lover-friend Lotte, there are others, both Indians and foreigners, who remain outsider” for various reasons. These are individuals trapped by circumstances, the victims of forces beyond their control—social, political and above all psychological. The pre-war conditions in Germany, the after-math of the war, the partition of India and the post-independence degradation of values seem to have affected their psyche. We are aware that Anita Desai’s concern in this novel, as in her other works, is neither social nor political but since individuals are a part of the system, they cannot help being afflicted by the times they are living in. sensitive as Desai’s characters are, reality and life-experience are too much for them to face up to. They suffer, lose their foothold and become outsiders. Who fail to achieve an adjustment with the world, who are homeless and who have a sense of personal inadequacy.

The outsiders in Baumgartner’s Bombay can be grouped as insider-outsiders and outsider-outsiders. Among the former we have those characters that are Indians, a part of the land and its culture, like Habibullah, and Jagu, the pavement-dweller and his family. The outsider-outsiders are the five German characters who have made India their home,

but who, for some reason, always escape “the mainstream.” In this category we place Hugo, Lotte, Lily, Julius and the German boy Kurt. The insiders undergo a different set of social and political crises and are uprooted by calamities of a different nature than the ones suffered by the foreigner-outsiders. Whatever the nature of the problems, the loss of personal identity, the sense of homelessness and the fear of insecurity are alike for them all. They represent the condition of modern man who, according to Edmund Fuller, “suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problem. A conviction of isolation, randomness, meaninglessness in his way of existence”. The worst sufferer, however, is Hugo and since the novel focuses on him, we can trace his troubles all through his life.

Hugo Baumgartner is the victim of the holocaust that uproots him from his native soil and deprives him of his native sky. The rapidity with which his childhood world is shattered is shocking and the impact of the events that follow the rise of anti-Semitic feelings in Germany is nothing less than traumatic. His father, a respectable furniture dealer who walked the streets of Berlin with “his head held high, his hat gleaming like the wing of an airborne beetle” (23) suffers the humiliation of being taken to Dachau. He returns from there a disintegrated man, to shiver, to shut his mouth and then to wither away quietly. Their house and the business are taken over by the “Gentleman from Hamburg” whose polite concern of the days of yore changes into irritation and insolence, making it obvious that Hugo and his mother—the Jew—are a danger to his own existence. The security of a home, however precariously preserved, is lost and Hugo, disowned by his own people, rejected by his motherland, embarks on the shores of India. In the early days of his stay in India, the only thread binding him to Germany is his mother. When this link is snapped, he is left with no desire to return to Germany after the war. His anguished query, though not articulated, to Julius Roth’s “Oh, Hugo, why did we not go back? Is, “Go back where?” (211) It is an eloquent enough proof of his sense of rootlessness.

Hugo’s lonely journey through life is dramatized in the novel’s structure, which is built through parallels between different characters and various isolating situations. Hugo Baumgartner’s problem is that he has never belonged anywhere or to anyone, except perhaps to his childhood home and his parents. In school, being a Jew is an isolation in itself. It fills him with shame that “he did not belong to the picture-book world of the fir tree, the gifts and celebrations” of Christmas. But then, he does not belong to the school

for Jewish children either. Even after a life-long stay in India he does not assimilate with her or her problems. Somehow, her troubles do not become his troubles; her ups and downs do not touch him near enough to make him feel the pang. He remains a misfit, a “firanghi”, never quite related to the world around him. According to a reviewer, Anita Desai “installs her Hugo among the underground men, the Steppenwolfs, the misfits, the mutes, the ditherers, the accidental men, all who have a not quite certain relationship with civilization.” Consequently, he learns to withdraw, to keep things to himself, to be aloof, and not to share—a habit that stays with him all his life and exacerbates his loneliness.

Not that Baumgartner is particularly friendless in India. Lotte, Chimanlal, Habibullah and even Julius to some extent, are his good friends. They fill up his emptiness considerably, but the distance is never paved, not even with Lotte although she remains his close friend throughout. There is always a shell wherein he feels secure “like a mournful turtle” hiding his head from the outside world. In the internment camp, while other internees lighten their burden by sharing their sorrows or fears, Hugo prefers to keep his problems to himself.

He lacks the joy of sharing someone’s troubles and having someone to partake his. All his life he stands at the periphery, too aloof to plunge into a relationship, too wary to get involved. For example, during his days of prosperity he visits Chimanlal’s home often enough to develop a close bond, but somehow, the relationship remains distant. Likewise, he feels sorry for Habibullah. He sympathizes with him but the empathy is missing. It could be argued that cultural barriers do not let Hugo feel involved either with Chimanlal’s household or with Habibullah’s worries. This line of thought peters out once we realize how “nervous of any involvement in Lotte’s affairs” he feels when Lotte quarrels with Lity or with her neighbours. On one occasion he deserts her to be taken to police station and accused of “drunken brawling”. (209) His desire to withdraw and remain uninvolved is echoed in his thoughts when he feels relieved that he is not a part of the chaos he sees around him.

Habibullah, for example, born and brought up in Calcutta, suffers insecurity and fear in his own homeland due to communal tension. There is no safety whether one is a Hindu or a Muslim. Hugo is puzzled by the entire drama of communal frenzy that is beyond his comprehension. He cannot relate to it with enough sensitivity though he

himself has been a victim of more or less a similar madness. As a reviewer puts it, “Neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, neither an Indian nor a Pakistani, he is the classic outsider whose life is rocked by divisive forces he can neither comprehend nor identify with.” Baumgartner himself is a victim of an insider, Chimanlal’s son, who disposes him of unceremoniously after Chimanlal’s death; as if Hugo were his father’s servant and not his family are rendered homeless by natural calamities. Kanti’s sons deprive Lotte of her flat and other comforts, soon after his death. Both Kanti’s heirs and Chimanlal’s son represent the dominant “insider”. Also both epitomize the selfishness and degradation of values arising out of the insecurities faced by the post-war world. There is an inability to relate to other human beings on human grounds. For Chimanlal’s son, the values upheld by his elders have scant sanctity. Kurt also displays the corrupting effects of the post-war period. A drug-addict, with a weird imagination, this German boy suffers acute alienation—cultural as also psychological. He has no sense of piety of human life, as is obvious by the gruesome murder he commits for a few pieces of silver. On the whole, man seems to have lost his cosmic vision. Or else, how could one sufferer be unfeeling towards another sufferer? Why should Hugo and Habibullah be at a loss to relate each to the other, with Habibullah having “no more conception of Baumgartner’s war, of Europe’s war than Baumgartner had of affairs in Bengal, in India?”(169)

One common characteristic of these outsiders is their reluctance to face the realities of life. They sustain themselves by illusions and make-believe situations. In the beginning, Lotte and Lily forget themselves in a world of dances, drinks and other frivolities. When reality takes its wily course, Lotte is depressed, becomes querulous and intolerable. Her drink-sodden ways and filthy language make her a ridiculous figure. Lily closes her doors to all former acquaintances. If Kurt’s is a world of hallucination of drugs, Jagu’s is a world of alcohol. For Habibullah, safety lies in a predominantly Muslim land. Whether he is really safe is left for us to guess. Hugo blurs reality by reading and re-reading his mother’s letters till he arrives at an important conclusion that nothing matters, nothing makes sense: “Germany there, India here—India there, Germany here,” It is all “impossible to capture,” (216) He sees the reality of his lonely existence. He has remained a vagrant at everything in life.

In sum, Baumgartner’s thoughts that “nothing made sense” (216) and Lotte’s final efforts to find “a meaning to the meaninglessness,” (230) precipitate the sad predicament

of the outsiders and show the author's awareness of man's struggle and his inability to evolve a more accommodating and comprehensive attitude to reality. Anita Desai realizes that nothing can pave the gap when one is an outsider psychologically, sentenced as it were to a solitary confinement of his own making. When a person is ineffectual in coping with the internal defence mechanism, the external pressures become unbearable; consequently, his grip on himself becomes tenuous and precarious. Man, so alienated and isolated, entraps himself in life-denying attitudes and hinders his self-fulfilment.

Baumgartner's Bombay: plot overview

The novel, *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), consisting of seven chapters, alternatively focuses on the past and present of the two isolated Germans without family and country. Hugo Baumgartner, the protagonist, is the central character and the other is a female cabaret dancer, Lotte, whose presence gets a secondary importance. But the stories of these two characters run parallel.

The plot of the novel has a quest motif in which we find these two characters trying to establish their identity in an alien land. But their quest and journey through emptiness and isolation ends tragically—in failure, frustration and disgust. The tragic isolation leads Baumgartner to death that is murdered by a young German and the other remains to suffer in loneliness, with no one to accompany her, after the death of her oldest friend Baumgartner.

The novel opens with Baumgartner, a German Jew living out his final years in solitude in a shabby flat behind the Taj Hotel in Bombay. He has been in India for a period of fifty years and the happiness in expectation of which he comes to Bombay remains unfulfilled. He is living a solitary life with no one to look after him. His only company is, the cats that he nurses and loves. Both Baumgartner and Lotte are sailing in the same boat of isolation in an alien country, among their memories and dreams.

Looking back at the past life of Baumgartner, we find him as a young German who comes to India for starting a new life in business. He was forced to leave Germany fifty years ago when the violence had broken out during the Nazi Germany. Hugo's father Herr Baumgartner was a wealthy furniture-dealer and a man of authority, pride and status in Berlin. Mainly the Jews patronized the area where Hugo lived. During the time of the

Nazi Germany, the Jews migrated to other parts and the business of furniture came to a standstill as the Aryans took furniture from their own shops and dealers. One night, there was a violence in which Hugo's father was taken by force by some men and disappeared from Berlin. Returning after a fortnight from Dachau, he died leaving him and his mother all alone. After the death of his father, the furniture shop was sold to a gentleman from Hamburg who was the friend of Baumgartner's father. Hugo's school days came to an end. Because of financial crisis, Hugo had to work as an accountant in his father's shop. At the suggestion of the gentleman from Hamburg, Hugo was sent to India to do timber business and to start a new life. The first place he came to was Bombay. But in the new atmosphere, Baumgartner got nothing but loneliness and isolation. Having no company and being a foreigner with no link with the culture of India, he suffered in isolation. There he met Chimanlal who gave him a valuable introduction to an associate in Calcutta to start his business and so he left for Calcutta.

In Calcutta, Baumgartner stayed in a hotel on Middleton Row and got himself associated with timber business and made trips to Dacca, Assam and South. There, he met Lotte, a German cabaret dancer, in a hotel. His acquaintance with Lotte was not new. She had been Hugo's childhood-friend in Berlin and she was like a sister to him. Like him, Lotte was another alien in India who had started earning her livelihood by dancing since she was ten or twelve. After the meeting, Lotte came very often to his flat and they became friendly.

However, Baumgartner's life in Calcutta did not remain peaceful for a long time. The war had broken out and he was arrested and was taken to a detention camp in Ahmednagar where the aliens like him, from all over the country, were kept. Baumgartner was kept a captive there for six years. The expectation of happiness in the business got totally blurred as the lonely prison-life threw him in a state of isolation. There was no way to escape from the oppressions of prison-life and he spent his days in isolation facing a number of interviews and ordeals to prove that he was not an enemy and was only a refugee from the Nazi Germany to pursue his business.

The atmosphere in the camp was not healthy as the tension between the Jews and the Nazis persisted. The Nazis ran the camp in collaboration with the Britishers and the

Jews declined to work. This made Baumgartner more isolated. The weariness of time hung heavily on his heart and he waited for his release.

With the end of the War, Baumgartner's life in prison also came to an end and he met Habibullah, his old friend, to go back to his life of timber business. It was a time when the riots had started and it was not safe for Habibullah, a Muslim, to pursue his business. Besides, Calcutta was under the clutches of famine and the continuation of timber business was quite difficult for Baumgartner. The pre-partition violence had broken out in Calcutta and he again remained in isolation with his last savings. At the suggestion of Habibullah he decided to go to Bombay, as it was safer for him to do some business there.

There he met Chimanlal who let out a small flat to him at a reasonable rate behind Taj Hotel. At his instruction, Baumgartner started transport business. Striving to begin again when all he had worked for was lost, Baumgartner found a new work and prosperity in Bombay and an unexpected flair for success at the racetrack. There he met Lotte again after so many years. Lotte was settled in Bombay and had a false marriage with Kanti Sethia to avoid the prison-life of detention camp and to get Indian nationality. Both of them were overjoyed to see each other after a long time. The pre-war conditions that had separated them in an unexpected way had brought them closer, all of a sudden.

Lotte's story, like his, had been a tragic story of isolation. She is now an old lady who has lost her youth and charm. Among her many admirers in her young age, Kantilal Sethia, a Marwari businessman, was the oldest with whom she had a false marriage. Kanti's sons by his former marriage treated her with hatred. She was left all alone in Bombay waiting for Kanti to visit her once in a blue moon. Kanti, having a business in Calcutta, came to her for dance and music whenever he was tired of his business-life in Calcutta. At every step Lotte was also made to suffer and to live an isolated life in Bombay

Life went on as Kanti Sethia and Chimanlal died. After the death of Kanti Sethia, Lotte started drinking heavily. The sons of Kantilal had involved her in many cases and very often she would indulge in quarrels with them and neighbours. Both the isolated characters, who are now old, consoled each other. During such moments, Lotte would confess to Baumgartner that they should have gone back to their country long back instead

of living here as isolated foreigners. Even after staying here for such a long time, both of them felt isolated and cut off from the mainstream of Indian life.

But the story does not end here. The story of Baumgartner takes a tragic turn. One day, Farrokh, the waiter in Café de Paris, informed Baumgartner about a young German named Kurt who was sitting in the café with his face towards the wall, and was hostile to everyone. Baumgartner, who was isolated but contented with the mild pleasures of old age, tried to befriend the young man in order to overcome his loneliness. This became the cause of his tragic death as the same young German murdered him. After the death of Baumgartner, Lotte remained an isolated figure, totally broken after losing her oldest friend.

The story of Baumgartner and Lotte gives expression to the theme of isolation. Both of them are solitary foreigners in India and are uprooted from their own culture. Therefore, it is very difficult to discriminate clearly the degree and the extent of their isolation. But the point that established the likeness of their isolation is their bewilderment in an alien country, lack of companionship and lack of familiarity. Both of them bravely face their isolation and endure their situations, not as active “characters” but as passive “victims”.

Looking at the life of Baumgartner from the angle of isolation, one finds that he was haunted by isolation since his days in Berlin and whenever he tried to get over it, he found that his isolation was only being multiplied. His search for happiness ironically threw him in moments of isolation one after the other.

The first situation of his life when he felt isolated was after his father’s death when he was left alone with his mother, during the moments of persecution in Germany. This isolation made him leave his country and go to India in search of happiness and success in the form of timber business. But ironically he was thrown in a whirlpool of isolation. His choice to go to India, which was the only solution to his problems, proved very frustrating. It was a different culture to which he had come and the expectation was replaced by isolation. The gap between him and other Indians went on increasing. He could never fit in the mainstream and was simply a “sahib” who was sufficient to segregate him from others and this segregation from the mainstream remained forever.

On his first day in Bombay, Baumgartner was left to himself and the world of estrangement and unfamiliarity overpowered him gradually.

Baumgartner's isolation had been broken only for a short time in the company of Lotte in Calcutta with whom he had developed a kind of friendship. In Calcutta, where he had gone in connection with his business, Lotte's company was a source of consolation and was like an oasis in a desert.

The isolation in his life increased further due to Baumgartner's sitting idle in the camp, as the Jews had declined to work. Every moment came to him with emptiness and the heavy weight of time hung heavily upon his heart. Baumgartner eased his isolation by remembering either the days of his past or by keeping himself under the illusion by thinking about the background of the lives of other prisoners. The nostalgic feeling became prominent when Baumgartner reminisces of his past day in Germany:

Baumgartner's isolation in the prison-life is presented through his loss of hope and joy in everything. The whole world becomes purposeless and meaningless to him. The sense of disgust is indicated in these lines: "Baumgartner sighed, shuffled, smoked, slapped at mosquitoes and wondered when it would be cool enough to go inside and sleep.

With the end of the War, Baumgartner's isolation takes a different shape. After his release from prison he finds that the "nights were hideous with screams, gunfire, the sounds of rioting, the smell of burning. The days were strangely calm and empty."(178) There were times when he felt that he could not breathe the city air, and that he was being suffocated. He found himself searching the streets for someone with whom he might associate. This war, he felt, was a religious war based on the fanaticism of the Hindus and the Muslims. Insecure and terrified, he decided to leave Calcutta for Bombay. He reached Bombay, the stop-page in his journey through emptiness.

In Bombay, he is still an empty wanderer with the loss of identity, the feeling of estrangement and isolation, and persisting sense of alienation. In spite of his familiarity with each and everything externally, he finds himself a stranger, an outsider and a wandering loner, internally, even after his stay there for about fifty years.

This stamp of “Firanghi” or “sahib” on Baumgartner always kept him segregated and made him feel isolated. The Indians in Bombay would not accommodate him and he could not establish contact and understanding with them. The paradox of “accepting—but not accepted” hurled him in the deep abyss of isolation from which he could never come out.

The passage of time and old age intensified his feeling of loneliness. Lotte, no doubt, gave him company temporarily, but he remained a lonely figure, left all alone and isolated. The blows and buffets, agonies and frustrations, estrangement and loss of identity shatter all the hopes and aspirations of Baumgartner who is thrown into existentialist situation—alienation. The novelist writes, “he felt his life blur, turn grey, like a curtain wrapping him in its dusty felt”.

She pathetically confesses, “Mostly I am alone. All alone”. She has none except Hugo in her isolation just as Hugo has none except her.

Lotte tries to take recourse to live in illusion in order to escape and forget the crude realities of her isolated self. She would recall her past days of glamour when she was young and beautiful and danced as a popular cabaret dancer to earn a lot of money. This nostalgia resembles the nostalgia of Baumgartner. She talks of those past days to Hugo and thus seeks consolation in her moments of isolation.

After the death of Kanti, when she is penniless and has no shelter, she confesses to Baumgartner that she should have gone back to her country. This feeling of going back to their country of which both Baumgartner and Lotte are nostalgic puts them together in the intensity of isolation. Going back to their country or returning to their past may be taken as the realization of reality and state of disillusionment, on their part. But there is no return possible as is clear from the novel.

Their isolation is the outcome of their uprootedness from their own past, culture, tradition, society and milieu. Now there is no way out from isolation for them. Both of them have to be there. There is, however, some difference in the enduring human situation they face in their last years and at the end of the journey of their life. Baumgartner gets released from his existence when he is murdered and meets death. The existentialist view that death is the only release from the enduring human condition is fully realized in the

case of the protagonist. But Lotte is left alone, all alone and isolated, a tragic figure and a pathetic case.

Another important and notable point in the isolated existence of these two figures in the novel is that they have justified the principle of the dignity of man and never surrender themselves. Both of them remain heroic fighters and never think of violence, suicide or death despite the disgust, angst and isolation they experience in their lives.

Nostalgia, which has been an important factor in the case of these two characters, is beautifully expressed in an image where Baumgartner is compared with an ostrich and his memories with sand. The novel, in the final analysis, comes out as a purely psychological novel converging into existentialist emotions of frustration, alienation, isolation, estrangement and anguish.

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

-Arundhati Roy

LIFE AND WORKS:

Arundhati Roy was born on November 24, 1961 in Bengal. Her full name is Suzanna Arundhati Roy. Her mother Mary Roy, well known as social activist is from Kerala and her father a Bengali Hindu tea planter. The marriage was an unhappy one. About her father Arundhati Roy said in an interview with Sunday Plus, "I don't want to discuss my father, I don't know him at all. I've only seen him a couple of times, that's it". She spent her crucial childhood years in Ayamanam a small town near Kottayam. Here her mother runs an informal school named **Corpus Christi**. Most of the locational features in **The God of Small Things** are derived from this actual town and surroundings. Ms. Roy herself says, "I grew up in very similar circumstances to the children in the book. My mother was divorced. I lived on the edge of the community in a very vulnerable fashion". **Paradise Pickles** still exists, but the town, it is said, has changed a lot.

Arundhati Roy left home at the age of sixteen to live on her own, residing in "a Squatting Camp, in a small hut with a tin roof, within the walls of Delhi's Ferozshah Kotla". It is reported, "She made a living selling empty beer bottles". She joined later on the **Delhi School of Architecture** but soon got interested in script writing. "Ever since as a child knew that people had to do things when they grew up, I knew that I wanted to be writer"; says Ms. Roy; she wrote and starred in **In Which Annie Gives it Those Ones** and

wrote the script for Pradeep Krishen's **Electric Moon**. Her marriage with her **Delhi School of Architecture** friend Gerard Da Cunha lasted four years, after which they parted ways. Pradeep Krishen offered her a small role in **Massey Saab**. "I played the tribal bimbo", she says. It was a fruitful association for she soon got involved in preparing T.V.Serials for Doordarshan and got attention from ITV also.

What is yet remarkable is that this novel won Britain's premier book prize the Booker Mc Connell in 1997, which is the first Booker, awarded to a non-expatriate Indian author.

She is one of the few Indian English writers actively interested in contemporary social-political issues that are amply evidenced in a number of articles, interviews and books.

Roy is one of those Indian English writers who do not remain ensconced in the ivory tower and move in the glitter and glamour as so many other literary celebrities do. She seems to regard social problems as closely touching the writer's sensibility and believes that a genuine writer does not remain aloof. This perception of the writer's interaction with her environment has motivated her to get engaged in the contemporary social issues, and voice her opinion against the injustices coming from governmental or private agencies. In recent years it has been seen that women writers have been involved in protest movements in some form or the other on certain social question.

The Title

Velutha is a small insignificant creature, an untouchable who fights no heroic wars, undertakes no Herculean tasks. He is a small paravan whose activities are too trivial to be given heroic dimensions. Arundhati Roy's aim is to transform the humble men and women into heroic creatures who challenge the hypocritical yet zealous guardians of social taboos and codes of behaviour and smilingly sacrifice their lives in the end".

Arundhati Roy says about Velutha

The God of Loss

The God of Small Things

He left no footprints in sand, no

Ripples in water, no image in mirrors

The Theme

Arundhati Roy's novel deals not with one reality, but several realities. The opening page of the novel bears a line from John Berger: "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one".

The book has been widely hailed as a classic of the post-modernist ethos seeking to explore reality from various angles as seen and experienced by different characters. The reader is put on alert in the beginning when the novel unfolds with several points of view being presented.

The novel deals with small things, the consciousness of these things, the minute under-currents of a situation that surround the characters, the situation, one can say scarred with numerous hurts and humiliations that are heaped upon those living on the margin. Its theme, if we take all its strands together, is the oppressive system of a society that asserts its power by enlisting the help of many centers of social change. Even those who proclaim themselves to be the protectors of the innocent and defenceless (Police) and those who have made it their life-long mission to break the deep-rooted decadent practices of a conservative society (Marxists) connive with the barbarous traditions of such a society. In the end it is the weak who are victimized, the defenceless who are trampled upon and the down-trodden who are obliterated thus sanctifying the inhuman customs and mindset.

The novel is set in a small town Ayemenem in Kerala. The family living in Ayemenem House is Syrian Christian convert; with the old woman Mammachi, wife of the late Pappachi an ambitious entomologist presiding over it. Pappachi dies heart broken because a worthless scientist has stolen his discovery of a so-far-unknown species of tufted moth and named after him. Ammu runs away from her parent's home, goes to Calcutta, meets and marries an assistant manager in a Tea Estate. Soon disillusioned, she divorces him and returns to Ayemenem Household with her twin children Rahel and Estha. She faces neglect, sour reception, and depthless loneliness—sees Velutha and establishes sexual liaison with him. Her brother Chako is an undergraduate from Delhi University, who goes to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, meets a Café waitress Margaret Kochamma and marries her.

But Margaret finds him despicable, divorces and marries Joe, a biologist. Margaret Kochamma's marriage with Chako produces Sophie Mol, a daughter whom Chako loves

greatly. Dejected, he returns home to take over the Paradise Pickles and Preserves factory initially started by Mammachi. Chako is a Marxist and in touch with K.N.M. Pillai, the local Communist leader. Velutha is a young man, a Paravan that is an untouchable caste. He is very enterprising and intelligent, master of many trades, but chiefly a carpenter. Meanwhile Joe dies in an accident. Margaret comes to Kerala with Sophie Mol on a visit. Sophie dies in the river Meenachal while rowing on a night with Estha and Rahel. Velutha is implicated in the tragic incident. But before that Ammu's liaison with him horrifies the Ayemenem family whose fury breaks on the heads of both Ammu and Velutha. Velutha is hunted down in the History House by a posse of Kottayam policemen and tortured to death. Ammu is expelled from her home while Estha is sent away to Madras. The Paradise Pickles business collapses and is finished. Ammu dies a miserable and lonely death in a room in Bharat Lodge and cremated unconventionally in electric crematorium, at the age 31. "The narrative begins and ends as Rahel returns to her family home in India and Estha, where there is some hope that their love for each other and memories recollected from a distance will heal their deep wounds"

Summary of the Novel

The Locale

The novel is set in a Kerala village known as Ayemenem and the period is 1960s. It is to be noted that Ms. Roy herself spent childhood days in it, where her mother, Mary Roy, a social activist, ran a school named Corpus Christie, 'Where Arundhati Roy developed her literary and unintellectual abilities unconstrained by the set rules of formal education'. There are wonderful idyllic descriptions of the village greenery, natural paradise and the river Meenachal.

The description of a place where nature teems with its multitude of lives and activities, a hectic routine that moves and crawls all over. The novel opens with a brief portrayal of the surrounding of Ayemenem House in May, "a hot brooding month". The decade of 1960s saw the rise of the communists in Kerala to power, which lends a peculiar significance to the incidents described in it. Precisely, it is in 1969 that the story is set, describing' the visit to the family by the British cousin of Estha and Rahel, Sophie Mol who is the daughter of Chako, a 'self proclaimed' communist who runs the family pickle factory. Estha or Esthappen and his twin sister Rahel are at the center of the story providing the narrative angle to it.

The story jumps from one locale to another in typical fashion invested by the author. While the family is driven in the blue Plymouth the scene remains spread out at the railway level crossing. We also see in chapter 13 Chako's memories unfolding the time before his marriage in Oxford. In chapter 2 we are taken inside the Ayemenem House to show Pappachi's eccentricities pinning and thrashing his wife Mammachi simply because he is defeated in his ambition to acquire international reputation. The shadowy thick air of the interior of the House closely parallels the stuffy, stifling approach and a perverted single-minded malicious pursuance of his aim. This is significantly contrasted by the sunny, open-air surroundings of the hut where the brother of Velutha lies on a mat paralysed for life. Children play joyously in the cheerful courtyard to their heart's fill. The locale of Meenachal river at night adds a different dimension to the sad tale of Velutha—Ammu love, its dark depths, its turbulent flow of water, its rugged banks they all add symbolic connotation to their foredoomed relation. There is the classic satirical portrayal of Pillai's home a typical sketch of a southern family busy about its common day-to-day life.

Characters in the Novel: - Ammu:

Ammu emerges as a sad and much wronged character in the novel who wants to have her own way in life but is mercilessly suppressed. As a child she was much exposed to the family violence in the form of Pappachi exploding into fits of temper due to his frustration in his professional career. Ammu had been a mute witness to the senseless manner in which Pappachi wreaked his wrath upon objects of the house and the only person he could lay his hands on was Mammachi. Pappachi has been portrayed by Ms.Roy as a sadist who delighted in inflicting mental agonies on his wife.

Ammu was a small girl when Mammachi received those beatings: "Every night he beats her with a brass flower vase" (p.47). Ammu knew that her father was jealous of the attentions Mammachi received because she was seventeen years younger and quite talented in most of the activities that claimed her talents. Pappachi beat Ammu, the little girl with iron-topped riding crop and to add insult to injury cut with scissors her best gumboots into shreds cold-bloodedly before her eyes and scattered them all around.

Ammu had seen brutalizing masculine power from the early years of her life. This must have contributed to the hardening of her will and introducing an element of

stubbornness. We see an example of this when she grows eighteen and decides to leave her home against the wishes of the entire household. It is interesting to note that Ammu was deprived of the higher education also by some one who was a reputed scientist!

Ammu grows desperate, her woman's heart yearning for freedom. In an act of desperation Ammu goes to Calcutta on some pretext and marries an Assistant Manager of Tea Estate. This act shows Ammu's intrinsic trait of bold initiative and immense confidence in herself. It is only unfortunate that she runs into grave problems in her marriage. Her husband was an alcoholic and extremely self-centred. He was even willing to push Ammu into the arms of Mr. Hollick his boss, for that would ensure his promotion.

Appalled and angered by this revelation of her husband's character Ammu decides to break the marriage and come back to her parent's home. It is another instance of her strong character that she could stand up to her husband and voice her protest. She gave birth to twins—Rahel and Estha. When her husband's ugly tempers and bouts of violence reached the point of extremity, beyond which Ammu could not take it anymore. She "left her husband and returned unwelcomed to her parents" (p.42). A divorcee-woman has no place or respect in the traditional Indian family, she knew it, but hadn't experienced it. Her vacuous days, blank nights stifled her spirit more brutally than her husband's beatings did. She was neglected, ignored and humiliated. Dour at heart and tenacious of spirit, Ammu devises means to fill her time—wearing flowers in her hair, taking midnight swims, smoking cigarettes and listening to film songs on her radio.

Fate had another cruel turn to offer her. She meets Velutha after years. She had met him when she was a child. But now he had grown a strong, muscular man and a gifted worker. That he was a paravan, an untouchable hardly ever occurred to her. He was an attractive male and she an admiring woman. Velutha was fond of her children, playing by day with them. She felt drawn to him. Till their fates got linked fatally. Into her immense void rushed the warmth of his companionship, his love and revealed a new significance in her life. Neglected and discarded by the orthodox society, both reached out to one another. Ammu once again demonstrates her great quality of defying the inhuman forces that keep her pinned to her position. She rises above the drawn lines and rebels against social oppression. The price she has to pay is cruel and too great. It is unfortunate even her mother and other ladies of the family fail to understand her. She can establish a good

rapport only with her children, Rahel and Estha, with whom she is shown to spend tender moments.

Ammu is very much worried about Estha's future. When she is asked to leave Ayemenem House, she packs up his trunk and goes to see him off at the station and assure him of a good and peaceful life with her children. It is a touching scene on page 324-5. But this is their last meeting. The fluttering wounded spirit inside Ammu screamed out for freedom.

Ammu is exiled from home and she leaves it seeking jobs in anonymous places. She doesn't get any. Tired, exhausted, sick and finally defeated she is found dead in a grimy room in Bharat Lodge with a fan whirring above. It is ignoble death; she dies away from her family, and children with all her agonies and dreams. Chako visits the place with Rahel to receive her body. The Church refuses to give her a burial. She is therefore, like a pariah cremated in electric crematorium.

This is poignant moment for Rahel who recalls all the tender events associated with her mother. Significantly, this is also the ultimate humiliation of Ammu—a woman with courage and strong will who gives a commendable fight till the last moment. In her Arundhati Roy has epitomized her bitter criticism of the sham and spurious social codes.

Brother of Ammu and the only son of Pappachi and Mammachi. Chako is a self-seeking, coming character who is ready to go to any extent to fulfill his intentions. His mind is occupied with plans and thoughts related to his personal well-being and promotion. The novelist portrays him as an uncouth and careless person when Margaret Kochamma meets him and finds that he is as dirty and unconcerned about the state of his flat as he has been before marriage.

He completes his undergraduate degree of Delhi and dabbles with Marxist Party. He is quite enthusiastic about his association with Communist Party which Pappachi does not like.

Pappachi called his son 'Karl Marx'!

Chako goes to London for higher study on Rhodes scholarship, spending wayward life till he meets Margaret Kochamma, an English girl working at an Oxford Café. His simplicity and self-absorbed haggard appearance attracts Margaret to him. They decide to marry. Having married, they live frugally, because he doesnot get a job and lives on Margaret's small income. Their life is filled with strained relation till they divorce and Chako comes back to Ayemenem, without any plan, purpose or job. Their daughter Sophie Mol is born after Margaret marries again.

Back at home he gets a teaching job at Madras Christian College, which he resigns soon to look after Mammachi's Pickles and Preserves factory. She was running it like a big kitchen. Chako's cleverness and intelligence take the factory out of the doldrums and put it back on a strong and solid footing. But he develops a peculiar monopolizing instinct for it; he does not share the management with Ammu who has been working in it for a long time. He says, "What is yours is mine and what is mine is also mine" (p.57). To this Ammu reacts with these words, "Thanks to our wonderful male Chauvinist society".

It was Chako who gave it the name and printed its labels in Comrade K.N.M. Pillai's press. Chako is quite close with Pillai through their party affiliations. Arundhati Roy has portrayed the two characters in a highly satirical colour, bringing out their shrewd personality traits that often get into subtle diplomatic games. They try to weight out one another and are very cautious about it. They measure their moves very carefully when they face one another.

The climax of the outwitting game comes when Comrade Pillai organizes the workers of the **Paradise Pickles and Preserves** factory against Chako's management demanding higher wages. It was a time very carefully chosen, the factory was facing severe financial problems and Chako's personal life was in shambles, so that he could hardly pay the attention it required. The foxy communist leader K.N.M.Pillai worked secretly to shepherd the workers in his printing press and arouse their anger against Chako's management. Soon the factory collapsed at the same time as Sophie Mol drowned in the river.

Chako was deeply attached to his daughter. He also had a soft feeling for his ex-wife Margaret. Sophie Mol's sudden death deeply affected both of them, changing somewhat their inner lives. She was the one link that bound them together. It is quite illustrative that their daughter should bring them face to face once again in such a strange place as Ayemenem House and under such strange conditions.

Arundhati Roy foregrounds different character traits of Chako in different situations in her novel. He was incorrigibly lecherous person, who didn't try to make secret of his flirtatious escapades with women workers of the factory. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma knew this. A special way to his room was created because they did not want to interfere with his 'Men's Needs'. This euphemism Arundhati Roy often uses sarcastically to show how the family merrily ignores Chako's sexual escapades while Ammu's relation with Velutha is turned into a crisis point triggering all kinds of tragic catastrophes including two deaths. Chako's Marxism is simply a fashionable façade, which is attacked by the author mercilessly. His avarice for money is another prominent element in his character, which doesn't prevent him from depriving his sister Ammu of her share in it.

Chako's relation with Ammu is another revealing factor that is very formal and devoid of any human sympathy for her tragic circumstances. He, on the contrary, appears to connive with housemates in driving her out of home. He is glad to be rid of her. When he goes to collect her body and consigns it to the electric crematorium he does the job mechanically without compunction or sadness at the loss of his sister.

Arundhati Roy has painted Chako's character as a very pragmatic man. He is educated, clever and shrewd calculator; all his actions being directed to gaining his own selfish ends. He could be anyone of those hundreds of common men whose male chauvinism and callous attitude to women are common traits in their character.

The novel's development and significance depend upon this untouchable man, **VELUTHA**: He is a Paravan and suffers untold miseries at the hands of people whose attitudes are guided by age-old casteist prejudices. He always lives on the margin of society and is deliberately obstructed from getting into the central place. As Mammachi observes in one place he would have been a fine engineer had he not been a paravan. He was protected and assisted by the Ayemenem House family. They acknowledged that Velutha is a talented boy. Also they could never forget that he was a paravan. It is from this family that the painful and unjust discriminatory actions follow, reminding him that

his essential identity is his caste and they are with this dilapidated society in segregating him on the basis of this.

Velutha belongs to the new generation youth with greater courage and defiance than his father Vellya Paappen even dared to dream. Velutha inherited from those earlier times this agonized awareness of his social status. He inherited the deep sense of humiliation and hurt that rankled in his heart.

He wanted all this removed; he yearned to be treated as equal to all other men and women. That is why perhaps Velutha was drawn to the Communist Party (M) of E.M.S. Namboodiripad. He became a formal member of the Party and participated actively in its marches, meetings and demonstrations. His faith in Comrade K.N.M.Pillai is boundless. He sees Comrade Pillai as the messiah of the poor and the downtrodden, because he is the leader of a party that professes to champion the socially disadvantaged and fight for them. His faith in Pillai is extremely simple and unquestioning.

This shows that Velutha is at heart a very simple person. He fails to understand the duplicity of others. He does not read the cunning in Comrade Pillai's mind. And, therefore, when he sees that Mammachi of having illicit relation with Ammu has accused him, he knows all doors are closed for him. He goes to Comrade Pillai for help. For the first time Velutha feels disillusioned in the Communist Party, because Comrade Pillai instead of sympathizing with him gives him a solid lecture of the principles and morals of political parties.

Having been abandoned by the only person in whom he had lodged all hopes, Velutha seeks his own means to save his life. The police department has been given sufficient assistance and supportive material by both the Ayemenem House and Communist Party, especially Comrade K.N.M.Pillai to systematically manhunt Velutha. He hides in the History House where he is nabbed by six policemen who cold-bloodedly beat him up in the most brutal manner, breaking his skull, knee caps, ribs and reducing him to pulp. Velutha undergoes the most brutal treatment without getting a chance to defend himself. He is not given even the opportunity to explain himself. An untouchable, in other words, is not deserving of these basic human rights. It is the conservative society that will decide what his fate will be.

Velutha is a highly talented worker. He is intelligent and sensitive. He is a mechanic and a keen craftsman. Johann Klein, a carpenter from a carpenter's guild in Bavaria, came to Kottayam and "spent three years with the Christian Mission Society, conducting a workshop with local carpenters. Velutha worked enthusiastically with Klein, catching a bus to Kottayam.

Velutha also reassembled the bottle-sealing machine when Chako returned from Madras and put the factory back on its feet. Velutha maintained the canning machine and the automatic pineapple slicer. His talent was multifarious. He could do several other things, such as oiling the water-pump and the small generator and prepared special devices with lined aluminum sheets.

However, his exceptional talents and skills, his keen understanding and deep sensibility did not get the respect from any one of those who were far less talented. People were awed with him, could not get over the fact of his being a Paravan, an untouchable. The cruel irrational orthodoxy didn't respect even a talented person.

Velutha becomes deeply frustrated. He was a loner and lives a sad deserted life nourishing the hurt and vacuity day in and day out. Then he meets Ammu, the woman whom he had known as a girl years ago, but who was now the mother of twins. They feel drawn to each other because both could silently share each other's hurt and humiliation. They tried to momentarily fill the void that each found in the other. They knew it was a fatal affiliation, a foredoomed love, but since they knew their end, they were determined to make the best of it. They embraced their destinies courageously. Velutha was a transgressor of Love Laws; an untouchable cannot touch a touchable woman. In a highly sensitive description of the time Velutha spends with Ammu on the banks of Meenachal River. Arundhati Roy focuses on their hapless condition. He was aware of the Terror—the big history-shaped Hole in the Universe, as the author calls it. But since their Fates were sealed both Velutha and Ammu tried to fill each other's time with all the tranquility, assurance and love they could.

Velutha's love reaches out naturally to Ammu's children-Rahel and Estha. Ammu is highly amused to see him playing with them—tossing them in the air and catching them on his muscular arms. It is significant that it was Velutha's anxiety to mend the damaged boat and his instructions about how to use it upstream that finally led to the drowning and death of Sophie Mol. This incident is made much of as a piece of evidence against

Velutha. He is accused of causing Sophie Mol's death, and on that plea killed by the police. However, we can see that his concern to help the children comes out of his intrinsic love for them. Velutha loves children, because they are innocent, lovable and not conscious of the caste barriers that poison the minds of the grown ups.

Arundhati Roy created a powerful character in Velutha. He is a commentary on all the decadent values and deep-seated orthodox prejudices that perpetuate the unjust system denying the basic joys and comforts of life to the Paravans. By creating Velutha, Ms. Roy has enriched the brilliant gallery of immortal characters of Indian English fiction.

RAHEL

Daughter of Ammu and twin sister of Estha, Rahel occupies a special place in the novel. She is shown a quiet child through whom a great deal of human drama in *The God of Small Things* is shown. She is there as a frame giving the readers a neat vision of all that is being enacted out there. In this sense she is a significant character. In this manner we come to know the secrets of Pappachi's study in chapter 7. This is a journey through the shadowy vestibules and galleries of the mute past, with the sensitive Rahel always close by.

Like her mother she too experiences insults and hurts. She leads a life of isolation and feels Ammu's isolation too. She is disturbed by what happens to her mother. Arundhati Roy sensitively describes her attachment to her mother. At the undignified funeral of her mother in the electric crematorium the beautiful relation is succinctly presented.

Apart from this shocking occurrence Rahel was witness to all those things that create unhappiness in grown up people's world and to which a child should not be exposed. She saw her mother being humiliated and maltreated by Chako and others. Ammu had also seen her mother being beaten up by Pappachi. Women's oppression in different ways is what both mother and daughter had deeply shared. She knew that Ammu was wronged and that created a deep bond of sympathy between them. Rahel knew that her mother nourished great dreams but frail ones about a peaceful and happy life for herself and her children. It is sad for this reason that Ammu was uprooted from her parent's family and cast outside to fend for her. Her death leaves Rahel without moorings in life. She goes to different schools and is totally ignored by Chako and Mammachi. Perhaps her being

Ammu's child stigmatizes her, but also her being female deprives her of those basic conditions that are necessary for the healthy growth of any child.

Rahel is closely attached to Velutha. Both she and Estha are enamoured of him. Their happiest moments are spent with him in an atmosphere of emotional freedom.

This is a world of childhood innocence in which hearts, free from all man-made barriers and constraints, weave a fairy-tale pattern of fantasy. Nothing matters here, only emotional responsiveness.

Rahel is the twin sister of Estha. She has a natural bond with him that enables her to understand and feel what he thinks, feels and experiences. They share their mother's terrors and Rahel shares his sorrows and purple moods. Rahel and Estha develop a peculiar attraction for one another.

The two seek salvation in illicit relation.

Rahel takes a deviant path to seek answers to agonizing questions that rack her. As a child she was willful and rebellious. She was accused of 'hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors... to find out whether breasts hurt'. It was a shocking admission for as Arundhati Roy sarcastically comments.

Rahel was expelled. Earlier she was found decorating with flower a knob, of fresh cow dung outside her Housemistress's garden gate. The school was outraged and Rahel was blacklisted.

In another act of defiance she set fire to the false bun of her Housemistress.

Nobody cared about her or was anxious about her education. So she got into a mediocre College of Architecture in Delhi. It was a casual, unthought and unplanned move. Her carelessly drawn sketches were much appreciated at the exam and she was admitted. Rahel married Larry Mc Caslin "who was in Delhi collecting material for his doctoral thesis on **Energy Efficiency in Vernacular Architecture**".

She went to Boston with him. She couldn't quite fit in with the new pattern of her life, with Larry's emotional demands. So they divorced. Rahel worked "for a few months as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York. And then for several years as a night clerk in a bullet-proof cabin at a gas station outside Washington"(p.20).

When Baby Kochamma informed her that Estha had been re-Returned, Rahel came back to Ayemenem.

Rahel is adrift and in spite her having a strong personality, cannot find moorings anywhere. She carries with her the burden of old memories and the pain of her exposure to them all.

Small Remedies

-Shashi Deshpande

LIFE AND WORKS:

SD's most recent novel, works at different levels – the personal, the wordly, women's rights, communal violence, motherhood etc. It vacillates between the present and the past, delving into the lives of savitribai, leela, muni and the narrator Madhu herself. It is structured as a biography within s biography, with a writer, Madhu, often in a dilemma about how to tell her story. She wonders if a biography is an exercise in truth telling and if it is, whose version must it be?

In all her novels, SD seeks to faithfully reflect life as it almost is without restoring to any personal commentary and explanation. Her novels, dealing as they do with womens oppression, are highly susceptible to feminist harangue. She vehemently denies any attempt on her part to moralise to propagandist dilettante. I think good literature and propaganda do not go together. She takes pains to explain that her writing merely mirrors the world. She finds that a lot of men are unsympathetic to her writing while a lot of women are sympathetic. The reason for this, according to her, is not difficult to analyse because in her & writing, "Women see a mirror image and men see, perhaps, a deformed image of themselves". She candidly admits; "I know that all good writing in socially committed writing, it comes out of concern for the human predicament. I believe, as Camus say that the greatness of an artist is measured by the balance of the coritee maintains between the values of creation and the values of humanity".

It must be observed that SD makes a sparing use of irony, satire of even humour that are the ingredients of great works of art.

Themes & Techniques in Shadi Deshpande's "Small Remedies"

In *Themes & Techniques in Shadi Deshpande's Small Remedies* using the stories of two women Leela the trade union activist and Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing diva of the Gwalior Gharana – as the background, SD explores her favourite theme of a woman set on a journey of self-discovery, a journey which will bring past and present with a single pair of brackets, which heat the wounds even if it does not provide all the answers. Madhu who introduces these two women into our lives is not a mere passive story – teller. She is very much of a *mitgestaller* a creator with great potential. Though her intention is to write the biography of Savitribai Indorekar, Madhu in coming to Bhavanipur, is attempting to unravel the puzzle that is past, present and future, understand the vagaries of time's hands and find remedies to the blows life so nonchalantly hands over.

During the course of the journey we witness various stages of Madhu's life; as a motherless daughter of a successful doctor in Neemgaon, her friendship at that time with Munni, Savitribai's daughter, her eyed worship of Savitribai and Ghulan Ahmed, her moving to Bombay to Leela and Joe's place when her father dies, the beginning of her love for English literature due to Joe's influence, Tony's becoming her brother "with a determination that was much at variance with his usual lackadaisical attitude" (203) her job as the assistant editor of city News, her friendship with Tony's friends Chandru and Som, her marriage to Som (the birth of their only son Adit fills her life with such radiance that she feels like a devotee telling her god, "What can you give me, my Lord, I, who have everything?" (89), and finally the rift between the couple and the death of Adit.

Madhu is not alone on this journey. She has companions: Lata, a young and lively woman, Hari, her quiet husband (both strangers till now but they have offered Madhu their home during her stay in Bhavanipur), Tony, Tony's Rekha (both visit her in Bhavanipur under one pretext or the other because they are concerned about her), Hasina, who is Savitribai's companion and student, whose music takes Madhu a great way along the healing path, and Som, whose very absence underlines his place in her life, who leaves her in peace, allowing her time to come to terms with life, in her own way. And finally there are memories. Memories of all those incidences, words, gestures that have shaped her life. Memories that show her vulnerability, her capability. And memories she wants to get away from.

Small Remedies is a complex novel. It is a novel about myriad feelings – love, courage, honesty, truth, trust, death, the pain associated with death, about music, about the power exerted by time and by words. It is a novel in which past and present are intermingled, in which the word chronology has no meaning.

The novel opens with the sentence, “This is Som’s story” (1). It turns out soon that it is rather Madhu’s story. Madhu, who, enclosed in a fog of bereavement caused by the death of her only son, seventeen-year-old Adir, while mulling over past incidents, remembers her quoting once. T.S.Eliot’s words, “In the life of one man, never the same time returns” (3). The occasion was a small gathering after Joe’s Leela’s husband’s – death. Som was telling them about the party Joe’s students had thrown at the retirement of their beloved teacher. And how after a marathon party, Joe had remarked, “that was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Shall we do this again tomorrow?” (3). It was then, out of the blue, that Madhu had quoted Eliot’s famous sentence from *The Murder in the Cathedral*. Words which had silenced everyone assembled there, words which had shown them how ominously empty life can be. It was Tony who with a light remark had saved the situation, pulling them back from the abyss.

Thinking of this incident now, Madhu feels that you can neither undo nor repeat what has happened, that the past is irrevocable, that “Time moves on relentlessly and you have to go along with it” (5). There is no other alternative. Absolutely none. There is no cure to life’s ills, no prevention.

That the Ganeshas in niches, the decorated thresholds, the mango leaf torans, the Oms, the Swastikas, the charms and amulets – [are all designed] to keep disaster at bay, to stave off the nemesis of a jealous god (81).

Nothing like that will help. No mantra can ward off the evil eyes. Even thinking philosophically “to get happiness, you’ve got to accept the sorrow and the pain as well” (81) is futile; such thoughts do not make it any easier to bear the past, do not lessen the pain.

Having abandoned all such charms and mantras, Madhu has come to Bhavanipur to write the story of Savitiribai’s life. Is this an occupational therapy, a much needed medicine for a mother devastated by the death of her son killed in a bomb blast? Would this writing of the life of the ageing Savitiribai help her answer the one question that has

preoccupied her since Adit's death: "how does one live with the knowledge of a child's death?" (155). Because in writing about Bai, she would be dealing with the relationship between Savitribai and her daughter Munni, her childhood friend. Munni was the daughter "whose existence Bai has obliterated" (168) for the sake of her career. The girl rejected her famous mother and took the name Shailaja Joshi, "who died, by a strange coincidence", like Adit, "on the same day, victims both of them of the same madness" (154) that gripped the country in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid incident in Ayodhya.

When Madhu accepted Chandru's offer to write this biography, she certainly did not bargain for the silence Savitribai exercises with respect to Munni. It was as if Munni did not exist. Never existed. It was as if those years when Munni and Madhu were neighbours in Neemgaon where Madhu's father was a doctor did not happen. All those years ago in Neemgaon, Madhu could not comprehend why Munni so disliked her father, the *tablaji*, Ghulam Ahmed with whom Savitribai was living. Now in Bhavanipur she is taken aback at the business like reception she gets from Savitribai at their first encounter, at the manner in which she has wiped out her years in Neemgaon. Then it is too late to say, "I'm Munni's friend Madhu. Remember me?" (29)

Madhu realizes that Savitribai has mapped out the story that she wants her to write. But Madhu knows that there are three books here.

Firstly, there's Bai's book, the book Bai wants to be written, which she is the heroine, the spotlight shining on her and her alone. No dark corners anywhere in this book, all the shadows kept out of sight, backstage. Then there's Mays and Yogi's book. As publishers they are interested in a book that is controversial. Trendy. Politically correct, with a feminist slant. A book that will sell (125).

And then there is her own book, for which she is searching for the real Bai in the jungle of words she has collected. Which is the real Bai?

The pampered child? The young girl who discovered what her life was going to be? The young woman, who gave up her secure and respectable married life, abandoned her child and eloped with her lover? The woman who is in search of her genius, of her destiny? The great musician, the successful Savitribai Indorekar? (283)

To find the answer to this important question, Madhu has to travel a long way.

Meanwhile, Leela re-enters her life. Through Hari she discovers that Leela, her mother's eldest sister, was also the elder sister of Hari's grandmother. When Madhu's father died, it was Leela and Joe who had provided her a home. It was they who had pulled her out of the emptiness that life had become. Till Hari mentions Leela's social activities, Madhu had not thought much about those aspects of her beloved aunt. Leela the trade unionist, the activist, the rebel was too remote a person for Madhu who could only think of the love she got from Leela, of the true love that shone in the lives of Leela and Joe.

Now trying to establish the identities of the real Leela and Savitribai amidst all the facts she has collected, Madhu sees parallels between the lives of these two women.

She realizes "that both were courageous women, that both were women who worked for and got the measure of freedom they needed, that both were ready to accept wholly the consequences of their actions", (284) and that, more importantly, whatever happened, they still went on with their lives. Madhu has now accepted the simple truth that it is not necessary to know all the answers to the questions that life throws up.

With this understanding, the realization dawns upon Madhu that life has simply to be lived, no matter what happens, even when things look so very abysmal. That truth comes home to Madhu not abruptly but slowly as she witness the lives around her. One such instance is an upanayanam ceremony she witness in the Bahvani temple, a ceremony that is marked with muted pain and grief. The death of the father had not meant that the upanayanam could not take place. Life had to go on. Watching the mother of the boy whose upanayanam it was.

In this moment, Madhu is like Kisa Gotami whose search for someone who can bring life back to her dead child had taken her to the great teacher Gautama Buddha himself. On seeing the distraught mother fiercely holding the lifeless body of her child in her arms, Buddha had told her that he would be able to bring her child back to life if she would bring a fistful of mustard seeds from one such home where there has been no death. Gautama Buddha's Kisa Gotami had then gone – with a heart brimming with hope – in search of the mustard seeds that would revive her son. The people in all the homes on

whose doors she had knocked upon were ready to give her a handful of mustard seeds but from none could she accept the life giving seeds as there was no house that was not visited by death. Kisa Gotami, who goes from door to door, realizes, finally, that in a man's life death is as certain as birth, goes back to Buddha with a calm mind, joins his sangha, and finds peace. The search for tiny mustard seeds had acted like a soothing remedy to what had come across like an eternal pain.

Akka Mahadevi, a saint poet of Karnataka, stills Madhu's troubled heart when she listens to Hasina singing a Vachana. It is a night performance held in the Bhavani temple on Guruji's (Savitribai's guru, Kashinath Buwa) death anniversary. During what is her first major performance Hasina sings, "I saw a dream, I saw a dream" (319) as a repeated affirmation of the vision of not only the poet but of all kinds of people through the ages.

She knows that even if there are no dreams left for her because of Adit's death, life has to be lived. That nothing works against our mortality.

Mustard seeds to protect us from evil, blessings to confer long life – nothing works. Simple remedies? No, they're desperate remedies and we go on with them because, in truth, there is nothing else (315).

Does this mean that there are no remedies in life? Of course, there are remedies. But the remedies that are available are small remedies – an affectionate hug like the one Tony gives Madhu, a moment coloured with true understanding like the one she shares on the beach with Joe a short while after her father dies, the words of a song like the ones sung with feeling by Hasina, even the aroma of hot oil and of curry leaves roasting in it, the revelation is what makes Madhu ask herself at the very end of the novel.

Small Remedies clearly bears the stamp of Shashi Deshpande's writing. In the manner typical to her writing the story is revealed through the inner consciousness of one central character; life around is focused through the eyes of this character and understood through the mind of this one character. Not just in this aspect but also in her deliberately slow manner of unveiling the plot that is full of sudden twists and turns, in her ability to look into the depths of human heart and give expression to the feelings buried in there, and in the very honesty with which her central character confronts her own life; in the importance given to dreams to unravel events, this is a Deshpande book.

Like in her other novels, the house in *Small Remedies* reflect its inmates. “In spite of being a slapdash kind of household, there’s no chaos in it; only the disorder that comes from constant flux, the movement of life” (21). It is Lata, the effervescent Lata, who is the mistress of this house, who is constantly on the move, and who by moving seems to imbibe new bouts of energy. The description of the very first night and morning, which Madhu spends in this new house in Bhavanipur, is so rich with details that it comes across like a miniature painting. One feels more like a spectator than like a reader. It is a book where no image, no description is superfluous. Like the path Madhu chooses out of three available ways to approach Savitribai’s house.

It is like memories, like a slate from which the writing can never be wholly erased, where “the impressions remain, faint scorings that can be deciphered by those who know what was there earliest” (154). Another such graphically emotional, yet tautly restrained episode in the book is the one, which describes Adit’s death. The pages depicting the uncertainty of where her son is, Madhu’s waiting for him through the violence ridden days, her search for him on the crowded streets of the city even when Som tries to convince her that Adit is dead, and her final acceptance of the inevitable truth are some of the most poignant ones in contemporary Indian literature.

Small Remedies is also a novel clearly marks the development of the personal philosophy of the writer. No father than the epigraphs of the books need to be looked at, to understand the core of Deshpande’s philosophical thoughts, and to trace their development. If the epigraph “You are your own refuge; there is no other refuge. This refuge is hard to achieve” (from *The Dhammapada*) of her first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (Vikas Publishing House, 1980)/Penguin, 1990) indicated that the only support Saru can find is within herself, the epigraph “Father of the earth, protect us; Father of the sky, protect us; Father of the great and shining water, protect us, - To which God shall we offer our worship?” (from *Rig Veda*) *Of Small Remedies* points at the futility of searching for a god to whom we can offer our homage. It tells us that there is no such homage that can protect us, that there is really no protection from life’s disasters. All that we can hope for are remedies, and for these we do not have to look beyond the little acts of kindness that people around us extend to us.

In what has become her hallmark Deshpande offers in this novel an India that is unsimplified. It calls for the undivided attention of the reader. For a serious reader, the

reading – and rereading – *Of Small Remedies* promises to be an enriching, a satisfying experience. True to Deshpande's other works, *Small Remedies* is also a treasure of ideas and sentences every reader would want to usurp and make his own. It is a book in which Shashi Deshpande surpasses herself as a writer, and underscores her place in the scene of international literature in English as a writer to be read, to be respected.

THE MOOR'S LAST SIGH

- Salman Rushdie

LIFE AND WORKS

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay in June 1947 and brought up bilingually in English and Urdu. He was educated at Pugby School and at King's college, Cambridge where he attained a degree in history. After a brief career with a multi-media theatre group, he worked as an advertising copywriter for about four years. He has lived in India and Pakistan and has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the USA, Canada and Iran. He now lives in London.

Salman Rushdie authored eight novels-‘Grimus’, ‘Midnight's children’, ‘The Satanic Verses’, ‘Haroun’ and the sea of stories, ‘The Moor's Last Sigh’, ‘The Ground Beneath Her Feet and Fury-and one collection of short stories, entitled ‘East, West’. He has also published four works of non-fiction, ‘The Jaguar Smile’, ‘Imaginary Homelands’, ‘Step Across’. This line and as co-editor, ‘The Vintage Book of Indian writing’.

He has received many awards for his writing including the European Union's Aristeion Prize For Literature. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and commandeur des Arts at des Lettres. In 1993 “Midnight's children was adjudged the Booker of Bookers”, the best novel to have won the Book Prize in its first twenty-five years.

EVOLUTION OF THOUGHT AND CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE NOVEL

Indian society, in its globalization, seeds of which were sown in the 1950s themselves, has witnessed far-reaching changes being effected not only in its social and economic spheres, but in the psychological, cultural, ethical makeup of the individuals, too. The changes are more daringly and glaringly adopted among the Indian women in

their outlook, behavior and attitude. Rushdie is not wide off the mark in his portrayal of a metropolitan and provocative Mother India in Aurora Zogoiby. As his protagonist puts it rather bluntly, it is “[...] an image of an aggressive, treacherous, annihilating mother who haunts the fantasy life of Indian males”.

Reverting to the traits mentioned earlier, of a traditional Mother India, one could find that Rushdie’s story systematically breaks that image when it provides the characteristics of this radical, urban Mother India. Aurora Da Gama, Laughter from her girlhood, proves herself to be a ruthless, exploitative, calculative and even cruel female. Aurora’s mother Isabella mother had run a cold war with her mother-in-law, Epifania, from the mother-in-law moment Cameons chose to marry, in the old lady’s opinion, a “hussy from somewhere” (23). Isabella’s only child Aurora also harbours a deep hatred and ill will towards her grandmother. Her reactions to Epifania’s last, dying moments on the chapel floor on the Christmas eve of 1938 are so cold and calculated that they would have horrified any other family member present there. Epifania is struck by a fatal paralysis as she is praying alone in the chapel into which Aurora, the sixteen-years-old girl looking for a diversion from her monthly pains, accidentally peeps. Quickly grasping the situation, the young one sits down on the floor, cross-legged, and watches on, not even lifting a single finger to help the suffering old lady. It is cold-blooded murder, if one admits that murder can be committed by inaction. A Chilling scene (62-64) that shows Aurora to be some kind of demoness, equaled in horror only by Sufia Zinobia in her tearing moments.

Nargis’s Mother India is a coy mistress, an ideal bride, subdued and subjected, a true ‘Bharat Nari’ on her nuptial night. Aurora Da Gama’s “marriage” with Abraham Zogoiby, in contrast, is a public scandal, since the girl is just fifteen, fresh and innocent, and Abraham is her father’s age-thirty-five. Add to that the fact that Aurora is the rich Christian heiress, and Abraham is a poor, inconsequential Jewish employee of her father’s spices’ company. Accidentally meeting him in a pepper godown, Aurora instantly falls in love with the handsome Jew, draws him “by the chin” literally and fornicates with him then and there high up on pepper sacks stacked up to the godown roof (88-90). She even defies her Uncle Aires and Abraham deserts his old mother Flory, to the chagrin of the elders, all for the sake of their mad, “pepper love”. In true Shylock fashion she demands that he become a Christian in order to marry her. Aurora is thus “a shameless bussy”, as

her grandmother would put it, in going through her stormy marriage with a scandal to boot at every stage-in marries a man even without looking at his face.

One aspect of the conventional bride/wife, celebrated in literature and movies, is her steadfast love, devotion and fidelity to her husband. The heroine of *Mother India* demonstrates these qualities in an admirably slushy manner. Aurora's score on these counts is not only dismal, but scandalous, too. Her love for Abraham evaporates after a few year's of conjugal life, especially when she learns that Abraham has started fooling around with girls during her absences. She pays him back in his own coin-by launching her own extra-martial affairs: one of them, the Moor audaciously reports, is with the first Prime Minister of India-Jawaharlal Nehru. In fact, the boy Moreas strongly suspects that Nehru might have sired him (176-77). Uma, the Moor's mistress, accuses that Aurora had three affairs, which every Bombayite knew, with "that retard Kekoo Mody", "Vaco Miranda, the fat fraud," and "Mainduck Raman Fielding" (256). Quite strangely, Abraham, perhaps out of a guilty conscience, never acts the role of a righteously angry husband, allowing and suffering her indiscretions silently, all because of his love for her: "The greater, the more public her betrayals, the more overwhelming, and secret grew his love" (170). This "bitchy, cosmopolitan, Westoxicated" Aurora Zogoiby is the Moor's concept of a metropolitan *Mother India*!

If *Mother India* projected an ideal mother as "producer of sons" (139), the Moor's *Mother India* begets three daughters-Christina, Inamorata, and Philomena-and one son, Moreas; of these four children, only one survives. Aurora outlives her children and, in a sense, contributing to, at least two deaths. In a prophetic statement much earlier in the story, she proclaims: "We all eat children [...] . If not other people's, then our own" (125). Reputed for her "legendary stubbornness [and] determination" (125), she refuses to breast feed her daughters and agrees to do it for the Moor, as he is an abnormal child.

In her remarks here, the daring Aurora seems to express a hidden longing for her own handsome, hefty son Moreas. (Owing to a freakish genetic factor, the Moor grows faster than normal children. By age ten, he had grown into a full-fledged adult of great proportions. His big sister Ina comments: "You have become Mr. Gulliver-Travel and we are your Lilliputs" [188]). This Oedipal element has been dormant in her probably from the day she suckled her only son. One way of sublimating her original sexual impulse is

seen in her artistic endeavors, which result in the famous ‘Moor paintings’. In two of her sketches, the Oedipal element is revealed, though in a reversed manner. In the first picture, Aurora paints “herself as the young Eleanor Marx and me as her father Karl. Moor and Tussy were a rather shocking idea-my mother girlish, adoring, and I in patriarchal, lapel-gripping poe [...]. ‘If you were twice as old as you look, and I was half as old as I am, I could be your daughter,’ my forty-plus mother explained [...]” (224). The second painting “To Die upon a Kiss” is more revealing of the hidden impulses: she portrayed herself as murdered Desdemona and son Moreas as Othello! (224-25) Shocking though these Freudian explications is, Rushdie seems to be more amused.

Not only is Rushdie’s Mother India figure the anti-thesis of the popular image in her roles as bride, wife and mother, Aurora is never “redemptive” nor “conservatively wedded to the maintenance of the social status-quo”: on the other hand, she is a sharply-retaliating, vindictive woman in many of her reactions. Once again Rushdie is particular in portraying the modern Indian woman as not tolerant anymore (of her husband’s sins, for example), retaliatory and furious. Gone is the tendency to treat the husband with reverential acceptance even if he were to be metaphorically “a stone or a blade of grass”. When Aurora learns that her husband had agreed to give up their first born to his angry and demanding mother Flory, she simply shuts him out of her bedroom and vows not to indulge in conjugal love as long as her mother-in-law is alive (114-15). To spit her mother-in-law’s effort to snatch her first born, Aurora launches herself on the national scene.

Rushdie has often resorted to a device in his earlier novels; too, of linking the personal life of his protagonist with the historically famous events, for it is one technique that he employs to burlesque history. Aurora Zogoiby grew into the gaint public figure we all know, the great beauty at the heart of the nationalist movement, the loose-haired bohemian marching boldly alongside Vallabhai Patel and Abdul Kalam Azad when they took out processions, the confidante-and according to persistent rumours, mistress-of Pandit Nehru, his ‘friend of friends’, who would later vie with Edwina Mount batten for his heart. Distrusted by Gandhiji, loathed by Indira Gandhi, her arrest after the Quit India resolution of 1942 made her a national heroine [...]. People began saying that Aurora Zogoiby was the new Chand Bibi, standing up against a different and even more powerful Empire [...] (116).

A brilliant instance of Rushdie's 'chutnification' of history, this parodic exercise of turning gossip into history serves a vital function for the creator. It is a stroke of genius to refashion "Mother India as a bitch-goddess".

The Bharat Nari portrait Rushdie presents in *The Moor's Last Sigh* has yet another dimension in the character of Uma Sarasvati, his love, who is supposed to look like his mother, Aurora. Rushdie's penchant for stealing contemporary personalities for making them figures of his fiction reaches its most controversial point in his turning Bal Thackeray, the maverick Siva Sena leader of Bombay, and Uma Bharati, another irrepressible leader of a political party wedded to Hindu fundamentalism. In Uma Sarasvati, the enigmatic Mata Hari, for whom the Moor develops a grand and tragic passion which leads to his fall, Rushdie paints a radical whose commitment to her cause matches her histrionic and chameleon talents to maintain an incredibly deceptive façade. Convinced that the Muslims, the Christians and other minority communities are harming the interests of the majority community of Hindus, Uma Sarasvati plots to destroy the Moor, the only male heir of the fabulously rich Jew. But, a ludicrous, last minute farce, a slapstick clash of heads reverses their roles, and consequently, their fates whereby she ends up as the dead. The predator that Uma is, she makes terrible, unimaginable use of Moor's passion for her to poison his parents' mind against him.

The advent of persons like Uma Sarasvati on the Indian political scene forebodes a disastrous phase, not only for the Indian polity, but for its society too, which had practiced pluralism in an exemplary manner all along. "Turbulence, disruption, catastrophe, grief" are the outcome of the actions/reactions of Uma Sarasvati/Raman Fielding group's activities and attitudes, as well as the underground workings of the mafia men like Scar (a Muslim fanatic) or even Abraham Zogoiby. One evil does not justify another evil-the thesis of *The Moor's Last Sigh* emphasizes this age-old maxim. What is quite intriguing, according to Rushdie's portrayal of the tragic events of Ayodhya and its aftermath, is that the traditionally marginalized, oppressed women of India might have a key role to play in the new Indian society that is emerging at the end of the millennium.

The emergence of a fiery substitute for the traditional image of Mother India in the character of Aurora Zogoiby is accomplished in a truly post-modern mingling of Roman,

Zudaic-Christian and Hindu myths of goddess icons. The pastiche begins at the earliest point in the novel (5) when Aurora, the Roman goddess of dawn/gardens, is hinted at-“Paradise of Aurora.” This classical Paradise is turned into Biblical Heaven; the seat of God Almighty, when Vasco Miranda compares the Moor to Lucifer “hurled from that fabulous garden and plunged towards pandaemonium” (5). The point, however, is stressed that this Edenic paradise contains in itself an “infernal private universe” (5). Aurora, in another context, is “a godless madona” in her own painting (220). The madoma being a metropolitan dame, unhesitating in passing a severe sentence on her own offspring for his evil deed, metamorphoses into a “monster”: “O, an age of monsters is come upon us. Kalyug, when cross-eyed red-tongued Kali, our mad dame, moves among us wreaking havoc” (288). The mythic references, however, have a contradictory portent in typical post-modernist spirit.

Rushdie’s iconoclastic exercise, its satiric and cynical tone and tenor notwithstanding, reveals his deep concern about the catastrophic path chosen by his country of his origin in recent times. In Rushdie’s reckoning, the image of Mother India as a “bitch goddess” projected through the two female protagonists of this novel calls for a deep and sustained introspection. Following the footsteps of his literary ancestors, Jonathan swift and Alexander Pope, he has drawn a bitter and scorching painting of the country which he has left, but cannot forget, and which has deserted him under various compulsions.

One of the characters in Benengeli village in Spain (where Vasco Miranda had fled to with Aurora’s ‘Moor’ painting) utters the following words to Vasco: “Men and women who leave their natural places are less than human. Either something is lacking in their souls or else something surplus has gotten inside-some manner of devil seed” (327). One may view this comment as the tragic, self-deprecatory words of Rushdie himself, who has been under the double fate of expatriation and a fatwa. It seems to indicate the “twice-doomed” (in contrast to the “twice-born” status that he should enjoy) condition of Rushdie. Whatever factors drove a person out of his native land, his love for his mother country will surface quite often, despite the hostile poses he may adopt. Rushdie’s art is allegorical in its most sophisticated garb, very effectively hiding his motives. *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is yet another demonstration of his love for India under the guise of a parodic allegory.

Questions:

1. “Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is a post modern, provocative, Metropolitan Mother – India – Elucidate.
2. How far is Rushdie’s novel an action – packed story, with excitement from beginning to end? – Discuss.
3. In the novel *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, the Moor is handcuffed to History – Substantiate.
4. Consider the novel as a parodic allegory.
5. Describe how a largely negative assessment and the problems of Salman Rushdie’s novels appear to derive from the author’s.
6. Bring out the evolution of thought and critically appreciate the novel.
7. Explain the kinship between Bombay and the Moor.
8. Narrate the life-story of the Moor.
9. What messages would be there for the reader of the Moor’s tale?
10. “The tragedy of multiplicity destroyed by singularity, the defeat of Many by One” – Analyse.

UNIT IV

Indian English Drama

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

Biographical Introduction:

Girish Karnad is one of India's foremost modern playwrights and a most renowned media personality. He was born in 1938 in Maharashtra and his initial schooling was in Marathi. He did his B.A. at Karnataka University, and his M.A. in philosophy, politics and economics at Magdalen College, Oxford. He was a Rhodes scholar there and on return to India he worked with the Oxford University Press in Chennai for seven years. He quit the job in 1970 and became a full-time writer.

Besides being an internationally recognized "pre-eminent contemporary playwright", he has also acted in a number of Indian films.

His contribution to Modern Indian English drama is highly commendable and India recognizing his valuable contributions to it crowned his literary genius with the prestigious Jnanpith award.

Karnad, the multifaceted playwright's works include *Yayati(1961)*, *Tughlaq(1964)*, *Hayavadana(1970)*, *Naga-Mandala(1988)*, *Taledanda(1990)*, *The Fire and the Rain* and so on.

His first play *Yayati* (1961) reinterprets an ancient myth. Although this play is not translated into English, it is significant since it is Karnad's very first attempt at play writing. This play also won the Mysore State Award in 1962. It is a drama on an episode in the Mahabharata.

Karnad's second and perhaps his best known play is *Tughlaq*, written in 1964. This play shows the transformation of a medieval character Mohammad bin Tughlaq.

Hayavadana written in 1970 is one of Karnad's most-performed plays. The play won him the Kamaladevi Award of Bharatiya Natya Sangh in 1972. Although the play was originally written in Kannada, it does not have any specific Kannada theme. Karnad moves

away from the regionalist tradition and explores the universal questions “of identity and nature of reality”. (Arundhati Roy)

As had been the practices of many contemporary writers to interpret or reconstruct the old myths, Karnad too based his *Hayavadana* on the “Story of the Transposed Heads” in the Sanskrit Vetala Panchavimsati. He has heavily drawn his material from the reworking of the stories by Thomas Mann in “The Transposed Heads”. Although Karnad borrows from the earlier versions, he maintains his originality in the creation of the story of the eponymous character, Hayavadana – ‘the horse man’.

The play has two plots interwoven with one another. It incept with the sub-plot wherein the Bhagavata invokes Lord Ganesha by singing him verses in praise accompanied by his musicians.

He projects Lord Ganesha, an “embodiment of imperfection, of incompleteness” as “the destroyer of incompleteness”. This opening is highly significant since the play is about “the totality of being to be achieved through the integration of the self and the wholeness of personality” (M.K.Naik).

The image of Ganesha best brings out the main theme of incompleteness of the play. Moreover Ganesha also “symbolizes the transportation of heads” which forms the main texture of the plot (Kumar, Nand).

The story within the play, narrated by Bhagavata contains three principal characters namely Kapila, Devadatta and Padmini. Kapila and Devadatta are two close friends who are seen by the world as ‘Lava and Kusha, Rama and Lakshmana, Krishna and Balarama’ (2). Bhagavata describes them as ‘one mind, one heart’. Devadatta is a man of intellect and is the only son of the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara. He possesses a comely appearance and is fair in colour, whereas his friend Kapila, born to an ironsmith, Lohita is dark and unpleasant. Unlike Devadatta he has an elegant and muscular body with great bodily strength.

Devadatta falls in love with an exceptionally beautiful girl Padmini and sends Kapila to woo her in his favour. Kapila meets Padmini; talks to his family and finally the

marriage of Devadatta and Padmini take place. Devadatta feels greatly indebted to Kapila and their friendship flourishes as before. The citizens of Dharmapura admire the trio as ‘Rama – Sita – Lakshmana’ (16)

Devadatta however is uncomfortable with the frequent visits of Kapila to his house and feels being encroached upon his privacy with his wife. He obliquely objects to Kapila’s encroachment, but fails in his endeavour to stop Kapila from his visits.

Padmini becomes pregnant and Kapila plans with Padmini and Devadatta for a trip to Ujjain. Devadatta wants to avoid this trip but Padmini stubbornly makes them go ahead with it. During the trip, Padmini admires and appreciates the manliness and liveliness of Kapila. Devadatta senses an attraction between his wife and Kapila and feels jealous of it. When they neared the temple of Rudra, Devadatta suggests that they go to the temple of Goddess Kali first. Padmini and Kapila ignore his suggestion and make their move to the Rudra temple. Feeling betrayed Devadatta now remembers his promise made to Lord Rudra and Goddess Kali. He, in his enthusiastic admiration towards Padmini, before marriage, promises his head to Lord Rudra and arms to Goddess Kali.

“I can’t help wanting her – I can’t help it. I swear, Kapila, with you as my witness I swear, if I ever get her as my wife, I’ll sacrifice my two arms to the goddess Kali, I’ll sacrifice my head to Lord Rudra...”(14).

Feeling dejected, Devadatta wishes happiness and bids good-bye to Kapila and Padmini, and move to the temple of Kali. He prostrates himself before the Goddess with the words:

“Bhavani, Bhairavi, kali, Durga, Mahamaya, Mother of all Nature – I had forgotten my promise to you. Forgive me Mother. You fulfilled the deepest craving of my life – you gave me Padmini – and I forgot my word. Forgive me, for I’m here now to carry out my promise” (P.28).

He picks up the sword lying nearby and offers his head to Mother Kali by cutting it off.

Padmini and Kapila return to the cart and not finding Devadatta there get worried about him. Kapila follows his footsteps and goes to the Kali temple. Seeing the body of Devadatta and his truncated head, he moans thus:

“You’ve cut off your head! You’ve cut off your head! Oh my dear friend, my brother, what have you done? Were you so angry with me? Did you feel such contempt for me – such abhorrence? ... No, Devadatta, I can’t live without you. I can’t live without you. Devadatta, my brother, my father, my friend ... (p.30).

He picks up the sword and beheads himself uttering, “Here friend, here I come, as always, I follow in your path”. (p.30).

Padmini now worries about the non-return of both Devadatta and Kapila. She is annoyed and calls them ‘shameless men’ for having left her alone there. She goes to the temple of the Goddess in search of them and finds them dead. She cries out aloud to the Goddess about her lamentable fate and feels terrified about going back home. Feeling helpless she decides to behead herself and when she is about to do it, Goddess Kali stops her and justifies herself for not having saved the other two men. She appears before Padmini since she speaks the truth. Padmini implores the Goddess to bring the men alive and the Goddess orders Padmini to put the parts together. In a moment of excitement and confusion, Padmini interchanges the heads so that Devadatta’s head goes to Kapila’s body and vice versa. The Goddess grants life to them Padmini keeps as and the two men come back to life.

When the reality of this exchange dawns upon them Padmini is ‘nonplussed’. Devadatta finds it ‘fantastic’ and Kapila regards it “a gift” (p.36). Now Devadatta is the person with Devadatta’s head and Kapila’s body and Kapila is the person with Kapila’s head and Devadatta’s body. Padmini feels happy at this since she has always yearned for Devadatta’s intelligence and Kapila’s masculinistic body. But the problem arises when both of them claim to be Padmini’s husband. Devadatta indicates that “According to the *Shastras*” the head is the sign of a man ... (P.36). Kapila claims her on the ground that “this is the body she lived with all these months. And the child she’s carrying is the seed of this body”. Each of their Claim lead to controversy and conflict and Kapila even openly accuses Padmini and her selfish nature. Devadatta justifies and supports her and the solution to this problem is reserved in this first act of the play.

Act II opens with the Bhagavata's disclosure of the three unfortunate beings approaching a great rishi who remembering King Vikrama's solution offers the verdict that the "rightful husband of Padmini"(p.40), is Devadatta. He bases his verdict in the belief in the supremacy of the heads of the human beings.

With this solution comes the separation of the two best friends. While Devadatta and Padmini return to Dharmapura and live a happy life, Kapila renounces the material life and disappears into the forest. He does not even attend his parents' death ceremony. In the beginning Devadatta hesitates to face the people in Dharmapura because of the change in his figure, but with the passage of time, he is completely changed to his original self. This might be "the point behind the rishi's decision that it is the head that commands and moulds the body according to its choice, needs and temperament" (Nand, Kumar).

The two talking dolls of the play significantly note the change of Devadatta's body to its original self. Karnad introduces these two dolls in the story in order to bring out certain important aspects of the play. When Devadatta suggests that the worn out dolls, which were bought before the child's birth should be thrown away and be replaced by new ones, the dolls curse Devadatta and say "You wretch - before you throw us out Watch out for yourself". They also say "cover your wife before you start worrying about our rags". This contemptuous speech comes out from them because they 're able to see the image of Kapila in Padmini's mind and are able to guess about her eagerness to have an illicit relationship with Kapila.

Padmini's forcibly sends Devadatta to the Ujjain fair to purchase new dolls saying, "It's unlucky to keep torn dolls at home". After Devadatta's departure to the fair, she, with the child in her arms goes to the forest to meet Kapila. Kapila, like Devadatta has returned to the original tough masculine body. Padmini is now attracted towards him and says that:

"If Devadatta had changed overnight and had gone to his original form, I would have forgotten you completely. But that's not what happened. He changed day by day. Inch by inch. Hair by hair. Like the trickling sand. Like the water filling the pot. And as I saw him change-I couldn't get rid of you. That's what Padmini must tell Kapila. She should say more, without concealing anything: Kapila, if that Rishi

had given me to you, would I have gone to Devadatta some day exactly like this? But she doesn't say anything. She remains quiet.”(P.56).

Kapila who is now proud of having “succeeded in uprooting” old memories is irritated at Padmini's arrival and begs her to go to her husband. But Padmini does not leave the place. She somehow persuades him to accept her and lives with him for “about four or five days”. Devadatta returns from the fair with the dolls and is shocked to know of Padmini's meeting Kapila. He is angry and approaches Kapila's place with a sword in one hand and dolls in the other. After talking about their transformation they acknowledge their love for Padmini. Kapila then suggests that all the three live together like the Pandavas and Draupadi. Devadatta refuses and thinking that the death of the two to be the only solution they fight with each other and meet a tragic end.

Padmini now left alone wishes to die along with them and seeks the help of Bhagavata for the safe upbringing of her child. She requests the Bhagavata to give her son “to the hunters who live in the forest and “tell them that he is Kapila's son. She also asks him to take her son at the age of five to “the Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara of Dharmapura and convey to him that the child is Devadatta's son.”(62).

A large funeral pyre is then made for Padmini and she performs Sati with the bodies of Devadatta and Kapila. She expresses her grief and helplessness to Mother Kali and dies in a very dejected state.

Thus ends the main plot of the play, which deals with the transposition of heads. The sub-plot reveals the problem of the eponymous character Hayavadana. Hayavadana is a man with a horse's head and a man's body and here again the theme is that of ‘incompleteness’. In the beginning of the play, the horse-man comes to the Bhagavata for help imploring him to make him a complete man. He tells him that his mother, the Princess of Karnataka, married a white stallion, which was actually a Gandharva with a curse. After the period of curse, he became his original self again. Since his mother refused to go with him to his Heavenly abode, he changed her to a horse and both left the place to the abode of their choice, leaving behind the child of their marriage – Hayavadana.

Bhagavata asks Hayavadana to go the Kali temple at the top of Mount Chitrakoot to attain his completeness. Hayavadana leaves the place at once accompanied by an actor

and returns to Bhagavata in Act II. He narrates to the Bhagavata of how he turned to a 'complete horse' with a human voice. He tells him that Goddess Kali obliging to his appeal to make him complete, in haste transformed him into a complete horse. Thus the Horse-man's search for 'completeness' ends comically with his becoming a complete horse. The playwright shows the animal body triumphing over "what is considered the best in man, the head" (Arundhati Roy).

The child born to Padmini, "exhibits qualities of Kapila in its violence and unintelligible activities" (Arundhati Roy), although it biologically belongs to Devadatta's head and Kapila's body". This orphaned child is "hopelessly incomplete" and is portrayed as an "alienated creature, dumb and morose" (196) (M.K.Naik). It has lost the child's natural privilege to laugh and to wonder at things and it is passionately attached to his dolls. The sight of the laughing horse only restores him to his normalcy and Hayavadana too loses his human voice and becomes a complete horse with its neighing noise. Being given the responsibility of taking Padmini's son to his grandfather, Revered Brahmin Vidyasagara, Hayavadana moved away from the place. Then the Bhagavata reminds the audience of the "unfathomable mercy of the Elephant-headed Ganesha" (71), who "fulfils the desires of all – a grandson to a grandfather, a smile to a child, a neigh to a horse"(71). The play thus ends with a prayer.

The Role of Bhagavata:

The Bhagavata's role is crucial in the play, since he performs a great variety of functions. The very play begins with him offering worship to Lord Ganesha. He is the narrator-figure of the play and unites the two plots present in it. He cleverly introduces the theme of the play in his invocation itself:

"An elephant's head on a human body, a broken tusk and a cracked belly-whichever way you look at him he seems to be the embodiment of imperfection, incompleteness. How indeed can we fathom the mystery that this Vakratunda-Mahakaya, with his crooked face and distorted body, is the Lord and Master of Success and Perfection? Could it be that this Image of Purity and Holiness, this Mangala Moorthy, intends to signify by his very appearance that the completeness of God is something no poor mortal can comprehend?"(H: 1).

Bhagavata is the one who introduces the major characters of the story and keeps the audience informed of the major developments of the play. It is he who informs the audience of the marriage of Devadatta and Padmini in Act I and the rishi's verdict on the problem of the transposed heads in Act II. He also has his own songs, which reveal him as a choric commentator on the action. He appears both in the main-plot as well as in the sub-plot. At times he reveals the minds of the major characters and at times those that of the minor characters. He is also found assisting the stagehands as and when necessary. At the end of the play he leads the benedictory final prayer. In short it could be said that this narrator-figure, Bhagavata is "an avatar of the *Sutradhara* in ancient Sanskrit drama.

Indianness in Karnad's *Hayavadana*:

Hayavadana is originally written in Kannada, a regional language of India. The play is rooted in Indian mythology and the playwright has used many Indian myths, symbols, techniques and traditional practices that help in emphasizing the many different themes of the play. It consists of many interesting elements such as incomplete individuals, "indifferent gods, talking dolls and amazingly silent children" (Sinha, 278).

Dr. Manoj Kumar Sinha in his essay "Indianness in Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*" makes an interesting analysis of the Indian elements present in *Hayavadana*. *Hayavadana*'s very beginning consists of an invocation to the 'Elephant-headed' Ganesha. India, a virtually Hindu dominated country holds Ganesh as a God to be worshipped at the very outset of starting of a thing. Thus the Bhagavata, an important character in the play starts the play with his verses of praise of Lord Ganesha:

O Elephant-headed Herambha
Whose flag is victory,
And who shines like a thousand suns,
O husband of Ridhi and Sidhi,
Seated on a mouse and decorated with a snake,
O single-tusked destroyer of incompleteness
We pay homage to you and start our play (H: 1).

The portrayal of this practice is essentially Indian, since in English dramas we rarely come across such practice.

The very depiction of the Bhagavata who plays a multirole in the play brings the image of the Sanskrit *Sutradhara* in our minds. Bhagavata “manages the stage, introduces the characters, explains the furthering of the plot, comments critically on the within going on in the protagonists and when the need be, he directly enters the play as an actor” (Sinha). His introduction in the play gives it a native technique and could be categorized as an Indian play.

Considering the marriages that take place in the play, it could be noted that the marriages are performed in typical Indian manner. As is usual of Indian middle class families, Kapila goes and arranges for Devadatta’s and Padmini’s wedding. Although Devadatta falls madly in love with Padmini, he does not directly propose to her. Instead kapila makes his way to the bride’s place, to negotiate for their marriage. This is typical of Indian custom wherein the persons to be married do not negotiate for themselves. Rather on either side someone approaches the guardian of the other concerned. When Kapila reaches Padmini’s house on behalf of Devadatta, Padmini has a witty and bold conversation with him. Kapila does not tell anything about Devadatta or the reason of his arrival to Padmini and kept on seeking for her father, mother, brother or even the servant of the house. Padmini’s witty speech turns into shyness and blushes and she runs away from the place, when Kapila revealed the reason for his visit. When knew about her marriage proposal her wits go away and the typical Indian female shyness and modesty overtakes her.

The tale of Hayavadana’s parents’ wedding also proves this. Hayavadana’s mother was a Princess of Karnataka at the time of her marriage. Her father had arranged for a ‘Swayamvara’ to find a husband for her. Suitors from different Kingdoms like China, Persia and Africa arrived to try their luck. Hayavadana’s mother was then attracted to a white Stallion who was actually a cursed Ghandharva. This stallion was her choice in the ‘Swayamvara’ and hence she was married off to it.

Leaving apart the strange choice of the Princess, this incident reminds one of the typical Indian royal way of finding a match for the daughters according to their choice. It also reminds one of the similar weddings of Draupadi and Sita in the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* respectively.

The Indian custom of sacrificing at the Gods' and Goddesses' altar and the Indian scene of Gods and Goddesses awaking at the climax point of sacrifices is present in *Hayavadana*.

Devadatta offers his head to Goddess Kali, although he promises it to Lord Rudra. He promises his two arms for Mother Kali. But in a frenzy of jealousy against the relationship between Kapila and Padmini, he mistakably offers his head to Goddess Kali. Kapila seeing his friend dead chooses to sacrifice himself in the name of friendship and hacks off his own head. Padmini, terrified at the two deaths helplessly tries to behead herself. When she is about to cut off her head, she is stopped by Goddess Kali's voice. Kali prevents her from hacking off her head and also gives life to the two dead men. This is typical of many Indian mythological stories that deal with Gods and Goddesses.

Again while on their way to Ujjain, Padmini sees a glorious tree covered with flowers and wants to know about it. Kapila introduces the same as the fortunate lady's flower and clarifies the meaning of the name of the flower as a married woman. This Indian concept need not be explained since a lady with her husband is called in Hindi as Sowbhagyawati, i.e., fortunate lady. Kapila justifies his comparison by saying:

“Because it has all the marks of marriage
A woman puts on the yellow on the petals
-then that red round patch at the bottom
Of the petals-like on your foreheads-then
-here-that thin saffron line-like in
The parting of your hair-Ten-uhm....
.... oh yes-here near the stem a row
Of block dots-like a necklace of black
Beads”(H:2).

The above lines resemble the verses of that of a Hindi poet.

Besides, Padmini performs Sati, an age-old practice by which married Indian women who lose their husbands, meet death by burning themselves. Although Sati has almost become an extinct practice now a day, this episode of Padmini performing Sati bears an Indian imprint.

Thus *Hayavadana*, being an Indian play has inevitably exhibited much of Indianness in it.

Questions:

1. Bring out the Indianness in the play *Hayavadana*.
2. Comment on the role that the Bhagavata plays in *Hayavadana*.
3. Make a critical appreciation of the play *Hayavadana*.

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Nissim Ezekiel's *Don't Call it Suicide*

Biographical Introduction:

Nissim Ezekiel is a well-known Indian poet and dramatist. Out of the few Indian dramatists who have given a new direction to Indian English drama in the postmodern period, is Ezekiel, who writes plays based on real experiences. Unlike, any Indian dramatists who are creators as well as transcreators, Ezekiel writes only in English. He is a painstaking craftsman, who, born in the year 1924 in Bombay, was educated at Antonio D'Souza High School and Wilson College, Bombay and Birkbeck College, London. He is married and has three children. He has worked in several colleges and unlike many of his contemporaries; he decided to stay in India forever.

Ezekiel has held many posts in India and abroad. In 1983, he was a visiting professor at Leeds University. He was an invitee of the U.S. government under its international visitors program in 1974 and in 1975 he was a cultural award visitor to Australia. He was the Director of the Theatre Unit, Bombay for sometimes. It is at this time that the interest in writing drama increased in him. He has been the Editor for several Journals including *Quest*, *Imprint* and *Poetry India*. He is the Associate Editor of the Indian P.E.N., a monthly Journal. He has organized several poetry reading sessions, at

various universities, at home and abroad – Washington, New York, Boston, Cambridge, Chicago, Urbana, Gowa, Burekeleo and Oakland (Michigan).

Ezekiel has many works to his credit and he is a distinguished figure in the cultural, literary and intellectual circle of India. Apart from his five volumes of poetry Anthologies namely, *A Time to Change (1972)*, *Sixty Poems (1953)*, *The Third (1959)*, *The Unfinished Mae (1960)* and *The Exact Name (1965)*, Ezekiel has also written some plays. This includes *Three Plays (1969)*, (which consist of *Nalini*, *Marriage Poem* and *The Sleep walkers*), *Don't Call it Suicide (1993)* and so on. *Don't Call it Suicide* is written quite recently and raises many issues in it that are relevant to the contemporary society.

Although Ezekiel is a practicing poet, his drama exhibits an excellent prose. He does not use the poetic form in his plays and also does not reveal any development in them. His attitude is basically satiric and individual and may be simply seen as mere extensions of the poet's self.

Don't Call it Suicide:

Don't Call it Suicide is a play written in 1993 and is highly tragic. As the very name of the play suggests, the play has two characters who commit suicide in it. This play, which consists of two acts, is based on a real life incident that is mentioned by Ezekiel himself. Ezekiel gives a clue to the background of the play in the following words:

I was told about the event by an acquaintance of mine in an Indian city (not Bombay). It was about his son and family... but I did not confine myself to his experience, relatives, etc. (*Don't Call it Suicide: VIII*)

Don't Call it Suicide, with its 'unusual' (Bijay Kumar Das) and 'suspense-filled' title, has for its plot, a situation based on a dilemma. The dilemma is about the naming of the play's protagonist's death. The characters in the play, especially, the deceased protagonist's father, Mr.Nanda is confused about calling his son's death as a suicide. Mr.Nanda's eldest son, a sentimentalist, hanged himself to death due to his inability to cope up with the demands of society. He was a person with an extraordinary sensitivity and it is this that made him unable to adjust with his surroundings. He had always felt helpless and hopeless, and was miserable all the time. He used to complain about the

teachers at school, his friends and the others, and was always emotionally upset. He was not happy even after marriage and after two years of his marriage he commits suicide. He was 25 years old when he hanged himself, leaving his wife Meeta, as a young widow.

Mr.Nanda is unable to forget his eldest son's unnatural demise even after fourteen years. He simply could not reconcile himself to the fact of his son's death. He refuses to call his death as suicide, but at the same time knows well that it was neither an accident nor homicide.

The play opens with the discussion between Nanda and Sathe on some business matters. Later it takes on a personal tone and reveals to us the inward feelings of Mr.Nanda. Nanda tells Sathe of the tragedy that has befallen on his family. He chooses to tell him about the bewilderment that he has about his son's suicide. He wants to absolve himself and release to someone the agony of his heart. Hence he tells Sathe of his son's unnatural death. Bijay Kumar Das tells in his essay "*Postmodern Indian English Drama*" that the characters in the play can be divided into two groups: the sentimentalists and the pragmatists. Mr.Nanda belongs to the group of the sentimentalists and the others in the play to the pragmatists. Mrs.Nanda serves as a contrast to Mr.Nanda. While Mr.Nanda is conscientious and is unable to forget the tragic incident that took place in their household, Mrs.Nanda seems to have gotten over it. She seems to accept life as it comes to her and has a pragmatic attitude towards life.

Mr.Nanda, unlike his wife, constantly broods over his son's death and breaks down when he recalls the sad incident to his mind. In the first scene of the play, during the course of his conversation with Sathe, Nanda says:

"My eldest son--- at the age of 25 --- committed suicide" (*Don't Call it Suicide:* Act I, Scene, I: 4)

He tells him emotionally that it is difficult to forget that tragedy. He talks of the sad incident in a nostalgic manner:

It was about 14 years ago. My eldest son never did well in his exams. He never failed but he did not do well either. He was intelligent and very sensitive, yet somehow; he did not care at all about his school and college. We did not know why. He just wasn't happy there. He complained bitterly all the time. He did not

like most of the teachers, and he didn't like most of the students, though he had two or three good friends (Act I, Scene I: 14).

The above lines suggest the unhappy life led by Mr.Nanda's eldest son. He was dissatisfied with the ways of the world. Marriage did not change him an ounce and he led the same calm and silent life. Although his wife who lived with him for two years was not unhappy with him, he still was feeling bitter. People around him were unsympathetic towards him and regarded him as a sentimental fool. He was a loner and nobody knew about his intentions. One day when he was alone at home he hanged himself to death. The other characters simply brush aside his death as an act of a sentimental fool who did not know the survival tactics.

Meeta, Mr.Nanda's daughter-in-law is silent and passive about her husband's death. Her In-laws give her shelter. Mr.Nanda is sympathetic towards her and sees his son in her. He treats her kindly and always has a soft corner for her. This is mainly because he never gets over the incident of his son's death.

Mrs.Nanda, on the other hand, exhibits no such kindness towards her widowed daughter-in-law. She only treats Meeta as a menial who should work hard in the house. She is not sentimentalistic towards her son's tragic death, and has a pragmatic approach to life. She tells her husband to forget the past and accept life as it comes. She urges upon him to come to terms with life:

Come on, we have to live a normal life, after all whatever may have happened in the past. We have to think of our children and grand children. Life includes suffering but it is not all suffering.... Whatever happens, I will always do my duty, I am satisfied with my life as it is. Thank God for it. (Act I, Scene 1:7).

But Mr.Nanda tells her that he is not satisfied with his life. He retorts to her saying:

"I am not satisfied to be what I am. I am not satisfied with my life as it is.

(Act I, Scene 1:7).

Mr. and Mrs.Nanda exhibit a contrast between them in the kind of treatment that they mete out to Meeta. Ezekiel who is always interested in portraying contemporary Indian situation shows Mrs.Nanda to be the usual stereotypical mother-in-law who is

unkind to the daughter-in-law. Mr.Nanda always tries to keep Meeta happy but his wife ill-treats and abuses her. He wants Meeta to always toil hard in the kitchen and expects her not to come out of it. She does not allow Meeta to mingle with the other members of the house and literally tortures her.

She does not worry about the present plight of Meeta and blissfully forgets her son's death. She in fact regards her daughter-in-law as a burden to the household and tries to extract from her whatever she can – and at present she could only extract physical help from her.

Once, when Mr.Nanda wants Meeta to meet the other members of the family over dinner, Mrs.Nanda tyrannically orders her not to come out of the kitchen. She also restricts Meeta from meeting her younger son and daughter in a family gathering. Mr.Nanda's support for Meeta goes unheard of and Mrs.Nanda frowns upon him saying that there would be no time for her to come out of the kitchen. She orders Meeta to cook the food, clean the utensils and above all to eat in the kitchen. She completely marginalizes Meeta and treats her as an outsider.

When Mr.Nanda insists on saying:

“Why can't she eat with us and talk with us?” she retorts: “Alright babu, have your way. I will do the cooking and I will do the serving and I will do the washing up. Let Meeta eat with you and talk with you”.

This shows how cruel and unkind is Mrs.Nanda to Meeta. She also reveals her innermost intention of having allowed Meeta to live with them, in the later part of the play. She says “I allowed my eldest son's widow Meeta to live with us, but that is only because she is helpful to me in the house”. Not for a moment does Mrs.Nanda exhibit her motherly love for the widowed Meeta. She only dominates her and suppresses her. She enjoys Meeta's servile nature.

Like Mrs.Nanda, is Hari, her second son. Hari is equally pragmatic and dominating like his mother. He does not have any kind of sentimentalistic affection even towards his wife, Malati. He rather ill-treats her and beats her. He always tries to boss over his wife and others. He does not sympathize or feel pity for Meeta's condition, nor has he felt pity

for his dead brother. He enjoys his mother's domination over his sister-in-law and does nothing to eliminate the nullity she suffers from her husband's death.

Hari has always disliked his brother's sentimentalism and took him to be a sentimental fool. He tells us about his opinion on his deceased brother in what seems to be a soliloquy. He reflects:

Why should any student be miserable because some teachers are bad or some students don't care about education? So what? Let them be what they are. Why should we be so sad about it that we actually want to die? Yes, you won't believe it, but my elder brother was like that, 'I feel like killing myself', he would say, as if someone had personally done him great wrong. That's foolish, isn't it? I mean, after all, we have got to survive, haven't we?.... I guess he just wasn't emotionally equipped to cope with life. He was a sensitive idealist. He wasn't- what's the word – pragmatic' (Act I, Sc. III: 13).

Hari's wife Malati, although succumbs and bears herself to her husband's tortures, does not awaken to the pitiful condition of her co-sister, Meeta. In fact she too like the other members of the family (except Mr.Nanda) is rude to Meeta and ignores her. Mr.Nanda alone is humanistic towards Meeta. The others, in the name of pragmatism are self-centered and controlling. The fact that all are selfish and without any concern for the suffering Meeta is shocking.

Ezekiel, through this play, seems to be criticizing the contemporary society for its callousness and selfish nature. He "makes a dig at certain conventions" of the society (Bijay Kumar Das: 123), through some of the characters. He shows how the present society still has the practice of dominating and beating wives. Innocent wives like Malati suffer at the hands of husbands like Hari. Malati states the condition of millions of women in a matter of fact tone:

The choice for all of those millions of women in our country whom you mentioned, is between being a happy slave or an unhappy slave. There is no other choice (Act I: IV: 19).

Ezekiel fond of exploring gender-related issues brings out the power relationships that exist in the family, in this play. He also gives a cynical view of marriage and supports

the view that marriage is of no use to women. He is very much sensitive to the problems of women and exposes the unfair treatment given to women in the society.

Ezekiel is also conscious of the power politics that exist outside the family. He presents a wide range of ill practices that takes place in society. He not only talks of gender discrimination, but also of class distinction, oppression and suppression of the people belonging to the lower strata of society. He brings out consciously, the inhumane behaviour of the higher ups in the society. He criticizes the male domination and discrimination of the 'well-placed' people through the conversation between Mr.Nanda and Gopal. Gopal is Mr.Nanda's son-in-law who, when asked by Mr.Nanda what he means by "the inhumanity we see in ordinary, everyday life", replies:

Like humiliating people, bossing over them, treating them badly because we are in a position to (Act. I: III: 15)

Gopal later on in the play, very explicitly says that in our country officers misbehave and look down upon the subordinates. He explains:

A branch manager will always treat another branch manager politely, but he will not be polite to his executive assistants those who work under him, and of course, never to his head clerk or other subordinates (Act I: V: 22).

The play moves to its end by explaining the doubts raised by Mr.Nanda in the beginning of the play regarding the cause of his son's suicide. It is Mr.Sathe, who convinces Mr.Nanda with his explanation regarding the death. While talking of Mr.Nanda's son's suicide, Sathe seems to possess the authorial voice. He says:

It seems to me that some people are entirely different from the rest of us. I'm not thinking of exceptional people, like philosophers, poets and artists. I mean ordinary people. That sounds odd, I know. We treat them in the same way. We take it for granted that they accept all those unpleasant and puzzling things in life, which others accept, whether they are ordinary or extraordinary. The particular type I'm talking about is in a class itself. They have the same good qualities and bad qualities as others have, but there is something else at the source, some essential power that causes non-adjustment to things as they are. It makes many persons in this group feel hopeless, and also sensitive to their hopelessness. Now, surprisingly, I've come to the conclusion that we, the rest of us, have something to learn from them (Act II: II: 29-30).

Mr.Nanda's eldest son felt diffident about his success in life. He was not happy about society's attitude towards people who failed in life. He, with an extraordinary sensitivity was unable to accept society's treatment of failures. Sathe says that the poets, philosophers and artists with such extraordinary sensitivity would release their anger and frustration about society in their creative works. But Nanda's deceased son not having found an outlet had decided to kill himself. He was too touchy and sentimental to ignore society's attitude towards him or people like him. He simply could not be without caring. His inability to come to terms with life as it is, and people's lack of sympathy push him to commit suicide.

Mr.Sathe's explanation for his son's death convinces Mr.Nanda that he cannot absolve the blame for his son's death. Hence he decides to kill himself and takes pills. The play thus begins with the backdrop of the son's suicide and ends with the father's suicide. Ezekiel has created and recreated tragedy in the play. The tragedy of the son's death is heightened by the tragic death of the father. Ezekiel through this shows that "the individual way of life, independent, wholly unconventional, has no place among the fixed traditional options" (Ezekiel).

Mr.Nanda's death brings a change in the pragmatism of Mrs.Nanda. Her pragmatism gives way to fatalism. She breaks down at her husband's death and bursts out:

"I lost a son. Now I've lost my husband. What have I done to deserve this?"(Act II: III: 33)

At that moment, Meeta comes to her and consoles her. She could not help saying, 'Oh! my daughter'. Mrs.Nanda turns to Meeta for support and hence, she addresses this hated daughter-in-law as her daughter.

Don't Call it Suicide is a harsh critique on the contemporary society and its ways. It severely criticizes the unfair treatment meted out to the poor and the weak. It also indicts the society that looks down upon the failed persons and discriminates against the weak. Ezekiel wonderfully shows how only successful persons are sought after in this highly competitive world. The persons who fail are made to feel diffident and ashamed of themselves. They are constantly criticized instead of being understood. They are made to feel themselves helpless and hopeless.

Ezekiel also exposes through this play, the biased treatment given to women in general, and widows in particular. He criticizes the male domination and oppression and suppression of women. Although Ezekiel is conscious of gender discrimination and injustices caused to women, it could also be said that he has portrayed them as stereotypes. They are portrayed as drab creatures that are not really fit for anything potential.

Questions:

1. Make a critical summary of Ezekiel's *Don't Call it Suicide*.
2. Justify the title *Don't Call it Suicide*.
3. Comment on Ezekiel's sensitivity to the problems faced by women.

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Dina Mehta's *Brides Are Not for Burning*

Biographical Introduction:

Dina Mehta is one of India's most versatile and accomplished writers in English. She has distinguished herself as a playwright for the stage, radio and television. She published a novel entitled *And Some Take a Lover* in 1997 and has two books of short stories. She has written several prize winning plays and has worked as a Fiction Editor of the Illustrated weekly of India from 1976 to 1982.

Her play *Brides Are Not for Burning*, written in 1979 won the first prize in the BBC International play writing competition. Her other plays like the *Myth Makers*, *Tiger*, *Tiger*, *Getting Away With Murder* and *A Sister Like You* too have been awarded several prizes.

She has also many stories and articles to her credit. Her works show her to be a quality researcher, with 15 years experience, based in Mumbai and India. Her articles have appeared in *The Independent*, *The Deccan Herald*, *Kaiser E-Hind*, and *London Magazine*.

A master's degree holder in sociology, she spent the first ten years of her career with IMRB, India's largest market research agency. She set up her own consultancy firm Explore Research and Consultancy, in 1998, offering clients a comprehensive qualitative research & consultancy on brands, products and services.

Brides Are Not for Burning

Brides Are Not for Burning is Dina Mehta's well known play written in 1993. The play is a severe indictment on the injustices and tortures caused to women. It portrays an incident of domestic violence that happens in a Gujarati family. Although the story is about a particular family, its theme and treatment of domestic violence universalizes it and hence it moves away from the closed spaces of the family.

Dina Mehta aware of and totally alive to the sufferings of women has taken for her theme in ***Brides Are Not for Burning***, the victimization of women. She criticizes the very institution of marriage in India, which is highly patriarchal. She explores the dowry system that prevails in India despite the legal sanctions against it. She shows dowry system to be an evil practice and perceives how this system which is in the garb of traditional custom and convention lead to many poor women's death. The play is her attempt to take her protagonist towards "gender equality in the context of changing realities" (Raisinghani, Neelam: P.261).

Brides Are Not for Burning consists of two acts and eight scenes and is embedded in a network of complex relations. Malini, the dead Lakshmi's sister refuses to believe that Lakshmi died of an accident. Lakshmi, belonging to the Desai family is wedded off to Vinod with a normal dowry that her father manages to give her. Not very educated and trying to be a good wife, Lakshmi is silent in her in-law's place. She exhibits a 'proper behavior' that is demanded of her. She is treated like an unpaid servant in her husband's house and is often ill-treated for being a sterile woman. Apart from being made to go through all the medical tests, she is also being constantly harassed by the members of the family. Although the doctors find fault with Vinod, her husband, it is she who is being held responsible for being childless. Even her own father believes her to be the cause and says:

She has no children. After five years! (P.14).

Vinod, despite knowing that it is he who is responsible for their childlessness and in spite of trying all "the doctors and the tests and all the medicines, allopathic, ayurvedic,

homeopathic” (P.81), endlessly plays the farce of “dragging Lakshmi from one holy man to another” (p.81). Vinod’s family is dissatisfied at her meagre dowry as well as her sterility. They turn her into a “cook”, a menial, who would cater to all their work. She is tormented and humiliated by her husband and the in-laws. They try to extort money from her in order to enhance their social status. When Lakshmi refuses to cater to their greed, she is insulted and tortured. The torture and harassment is unbearable to her that she is forced to commit suicide. This suicide is finally coloured by Vinod’s family as an accident.

This tragic end of Lakshmi awakens the spirit of Malini who believes her sister’s death to be a murder. She convinces herself that Lakshmi is murdered and waits eagerly for the coroner’s verdict. Great suspense is built in the play from the beginning, and Dina Mehta impedes the play’s progress, “by including several diversions, detours and digressions” (Raisinghani, Neelam: P.263).

Malini is highly critical of the workings of patriarchy and wants to avenge her sister’s death. Even her father, Old Mr. Desai and her brother Anil is silent on this issue. It is only Malini who fights against this injustice caused to Lakshmi. She firmly believes that Lakshmi was not cowardice enough to burn herself. She argues:

Lakshmi was never clumsy ... There were people in the house when it happened. Couldn’t anyone have prevented it (P.15).

She also blames her father who always considered girls to be a liability to the house. She blames him for regarding marriage as mere “12 tolas of gold, Rs.2000 for a hall, utensils of steel, sarees of silk” (p.13). She hates him for his silence and above all, she hated his undesirability of daughters. Mr. Desai believed that “to be born a female... is to be born into servitude” (p.90).

She harshly abuses him for having made her mother always pregnant. Because of the poor ailing mother, Lakshmi had to give up her schooling and had to baby-sit for her siblings. She was denied education although she was the brightest of them all. Malini sarcastically tells her father:

A pity, you had not heard of contraceptives father!(P.14).

Her bitterness about gender discrimination and oppression shows itself when she says:

What right had father to hold her back? (P: 17).

Dina Mehta, through Malini's bitterness and sarcasm highlights at the continuing gender discrimination and oppression. She shows how the undesirability of daughters still remains deeply entrenched in the Indian Psyche due to the demands of dowry before and after marriage. It is these dowry systems that make the in-laws, torture and extort money from the brides.

It is this that leads to their death, either through suicide or murder by burning, camouflaged as an accident while cooking. Dina Mehta shows this kind of macabre practice to be existing even now, in a period where things are less patriarchal than before.

Malini does not even believe and have faith in her own father and brother. She does not succumb to silence like them in this matter. She anxiously waits for justice that she thinks would be gotten from the coroner's verdict. The coroner's verdict that Lakshmi's death is an accident comes as a shock to her and she becomes disillusioned with law. She questions the unjust verdict of the coroner. The prosecution fails to establish beyond reasonable doubt that Lakshmi committed suicide because of ill treatment or cruelty by Vinod or his family members. She denounces the court and its proceedings angrily:

I spit on laws courts! Playthings in the hands of exploiters and reactionaries, they deal out one kind of justice to the rich, another to the poor (P.18).

Here it can be seen that Mehta, through Malini's anger expresses her own anger against law that rarely arrest or convict the culprits or murderers. It can be seen that Malini is highly disappointed with the lacunae that exists in the law itself.

In her growing frustration about her sister's death, and the men in the house's silence, she feels distanced from any kind of relationship. A sense of betrayal gets developed in her when she realizes about the absolute indifference exhibited by her father and her brother towards Lakshmi's death. She perceives that their mentality remains untouched or unchanged even after Lakshmi is burnt to death. Old Mr. Desai feels exhausted and thinks it the routine plight of girls. Anil tries to silence Malini because he is not financially strong to pursue the matter legally. He has also got a new job that demands all his time leaving him helpless to help Malini in exploring the case. Moreover he is

indifferent because “She is gone now”. He says “Let her go, She is beyond pain, beyond redress - What can we do? (p.18). They are also fed up with the legal procedures and are emotionally and physically exhausted with their connection between Vinod’s family, lawyers and the police.

Malini’s sense of betrayal and frustration make her seek comforting outlets. Hence she feels attracted towards an extremist Roy, who leads an aggrieved and politicized group of unemployed ex-students, who are wedded to a radical ideology. These extremists cause trouble and violence in the campuses and outside. The shock of Lakshmi’s violent death and the cruelty of the social and judicial system force Malini to embrace their extremist ideology. These extremist ideologists resort to guns to find a solution to their problems:

But for centuries we have taken up battle positions on either side of the great divide – the haves, a mere handful, arrayed in all their strength and splendour against great numberless ragged masses of have – nots and I know where my place is!(P.87).

Joining them, Malini too thinks of “bringing an improbable utopian revolution”. (Raisinghani, Neelam 265) “Which will unite the whole human race” (P.89).

Malini’s brother Anil comes to know of Malini’s revolutionary associations through his professor, Professor Palkar in Act II. Professor Palkar warns him of his sister’s associations with men who wander with guns. He tells him that the number of this discontented violent group of students was increasing and that Malini’s relationship with them might destroy her. He says that they are a dissatisfied lot who are not happy with the growing crowded educational institutions that are “ballooned far beyond their capacity to educate and at the end of it all, where are the jobs?”(P.37). He also warns him of Malini’s attraction for Roy, whose flat is frequently being raided by police, to find lots of pistols, shot guns and hand grenade. He advises him to dissuade Malini to stay away from Roy. Anil is shocked by this revelation and to his utter dismay he finds firearms in a locked trunk. He immediately takes them away and throws them into the sea. He also advises Malini to keep away from Roy.

In the next scene of the play, Malini’s affair with Sanjay, a rich industrialist is shown. While Malini is quite serious about this affair, Sanjay only flirts with her. He is more bothered about Malini’s body and ignores her feelings. Infact he intends to marry a

girl of his own class and wants Malini to be his secretary only. (This shows that he prefers her to be no more than his concubine). He tells Malini “As my secretary, we can travel everywhere together” (P.51). But Malini, wishing to maintain her self-respect and dignity retorts back angrily:

You couldn't hold me back with a mule's harness (P.51).

She also understands that Sanjay mocks at her genuine feelings and anger, for her sister's death, and that he has no concern for her. Sanjay moreover defends Vinod, Lakshmi's husband for his humanitarian concern towards his neighbour Tarla's husband. Vinod reinstates Tarla's husband having been sacked off from Sanjay's factory there. Malini, during the process of her investigation comes to know how Vinod had obliged Tarla in order to make her silent in matters concerning Lakshmi's murder. Vinod had bought Tarla and made her silent by reinstating her husband in Sanjay's factory.

Malini also knows that Vinod had insured Lakshmi for 80,000 rupees and she reveals this secret to Anil. In Act II, Scene ii, Anil goes to meet Professor Palkar in the hospital. Roy and his men admit him there for his illness, which is caused. They had beaten him up and had also been a cause for his heart attack.

There Anil comes to know from Dr. Ram Lodha that Lakshmi's in-laws invited him for Lakshmi's medication only after three-and-a-half hours of her death. This disturbs Anil and he investigates the matter further. He meets Vinod and blames him for not procuring proper medical attention to his sister. He also threatens him with serious consequences.

Vinod scared of facing punishment bribes Anil into silence with an offer of 10% of the Insurance Policy. But Anil remains silent and his silence frightens him so much that he calls his mother to be vigilant.

The next scene shows Malini out of her tenement room. She is in the process of investigating her sister's murder case. She goes to Tarla and gets her doubts confirmed. In scene IV, She is seen in Lakshmi's in-law's house, where her suspicions about Lakshmi's murder are confirmed. She blames Lakshmi's mother-in-law for having committed a cold-blooded murder. She tells her:

Yes! You destroyed my sister, you she devil!” And it’s better for you that we never met again. Because if we do I shall be tempted to kill you ---- you murdered my sister as surely as if your hand had sent her up in flames. You are a murderess! (Pg. 82-83).

Malini, having reached a conclusion about Lakshmi’s murder, resolves to fight back. She escapes from her “grisly end” (Raisinghani P. 267) due to Anil’s tenacity as well as her own evolution. She escaped from exchanging one servitude for another, by realizing that Roy stands for another, “hegemonic structure” (Raisinghani P. 267) which would not allow her to grow up.

Malini decides to fight against the patriarchal structures by questioning them. She also finds strength to move away from them. She decides to take up the study of law in order to work for justice. She understands the necessity of education for her self-preservation and personal dreams.

Dina Mehta thus makes her protagonist Malini travel towards gender equality in the context of changing realities. This journey of the protagonist “places her audience in space and time” (Raisinghani P. 261). The play poses the problem of violence against women. These women are victimized either by people in power to show their power or by the powerless people who wish to deny their powerlessness.

The play questions the hierarchy that shows man as powerful. Men either to exhibit their power or to deny their powerlessness, victimize women. Gender discrimination and oppression of women pose a serious threat to the happy existence of women.

Thus the play, beginning from a domestic accident, moves outwards, moves away from the Desai tenement room, Sanjay’s living room, Vinod’s office, Tarla’s kitchen and the in-law’s living room, dining room to question the very social system that does not value women and treat them as mere possessions. The play also interrogates the institution of marriage, the family structure, man-woman relationship and so on. It emphasizes at the need for education and a career, which would help the women towards economic independence. This economic independence, through proper education and career would

help women to construct an identity for themselves and would help them in crossing the boundaries that hedge them in.

By taking the cases of the two sisters, Lakshmi and Malini as two parallel case studies of gender discrimination and oppression, Dina Mehta shows that Lakshmi's destruction is mainly caused due to her internalization of the patriarchal values that are a part of the socialization process. She had been a passive victim of the injustices and tortures caused to her.

...in five years her in-laws reduced her to – what? A cook? A menial – with all the heavy work they got out of her? A nullity, her nerves and pride shot to pieces? A stunt woman, her hurts and bruises a daily routine till finally they succeeded in... (P.17).

Not only in the in-laws' place, but also at her own house, she was silent. She discontinued her studies in order to take care of her mother and her siblings. She never for a moment opened her mouth to voice out her protest. It is this silence that led her to a tragic end.

Malini on the other hand, is active in her fight against gender oppression. She questions the very hierarchical system of social organization "where there are categories of dominant groups and subordinate groups" (Suma chitnis-P.262), which lead to the victimization of women. She struggles against all sorts of oppression and finally evolves from all her servitudes. She realizes the awaiting pitfalls and protects herself from meeting a grisly end.

Questions:

1. Justify the title ***Brides Are Not For Burning***.
2. How does Dina Mehta bring out the problem of victimizations of women?
3. Make a character sketch of Malini.

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Biographical Introduction:

Manjula Padmanabhan is a versatile writer who has left her marks as a playwright and novelist. She was born in Delhi, grew up in Sweden, Pakistan and Thailand, and now lives in Delhi. Apart from writing, she is also interested in various other activities. She is an artist, illustrator, and cartoonist and has illustrated around 21 children's books. She had a long running cartoon strip Suki in the Sunday Observer and later the Pioneers. Her play, *Harvest*, won the Onassis Award in Athens when it was first performed in the late nineties and was an instant success in academic circles.

Manjula Padmanabhan has shown her artistry in writing short stories too and her stories are marked by a wry sense of humour. Her short story collection *Kleptomania* (2003) contains a wide range of themes ranging from murder mystery to science fiction. Her vision of the post-apocalypse future is dark, but rendered with a rich vein of irony and humour that allows us to roller-coast with her into a world where air and water and the earth itself take on a new shades of meaning. Then there are the here and now stories of bodies turning up in backyards, of love betrayed and sexuality discovered, of bitter awakenings and upbeat endings.

The stories in this collection are intelligent, opinionated and playful and they defy the limitations of time, space and imagination to conjure up new morality tales of our times.

Manjula Padmanabhan's latest book, *Getting There* is a semi-autobiographical novel about a young woman illustrator in Bombay. She describes it as being "based loosely on events in the author's life between 1977 and 1978. Almost none of it is entirely factual, but as a whole it is more true than false."

Manjula Padmanabhan's award winning play *Harvest* is a sci-fi (formally called as Science fiction) parable. It is a dark fantasy about a high-tech racket in body organs. It posits a not-too-distant future in which a Big Brother like multinational company, Interplanta, headhunts for organ donors in Third world countries.

In return for modest modern conveniences, from running water to video equipments, Interplanta's donors sign away their body parts to rich Westerners, with whom their only communication is a "contact module" that projects a nagging video image of the recipient as well as slick corporate advertorials touting the sardonic mantra "We make Lives worth Living"

Review of *Harvest*

Harvest (1997) focusses on a small family in India, which lives in a crowded Bombay apartment. Om Prakash, the bread-winning son of the family is desperate for an income after losing his position as a clerk. Frantically searching for a money-giving job, he finally lands at Interplanta Services which offers him the job of a professional organ donor. Interplanta serves as an essential health repository for wealthy Westerners. The company does not recruit married people for this donating and hence Om Prakash calls his wife Jaya as his sister in his reports to Interplanta. This disrupts his already distorted married life, and causes a rift between the husband and wife. The other significant characters of the play include Om's brother Jeetu, who manages his living by doing the profession of a prostitute. He is also Jaya's lover. Om's mother who is called as Ma in the play is only too happy to enjoy the new comfortable life begotten through Om's job.

Om's client is the predictably blond-haired, blue-eyed American woman Ginni. Ginni pays Om Prakash and his family a huge amount of money that would keep them comfortable and luxurious for many generations. Her money would help them to stay fit and possibly make them be ready for the feasible day, the day when she will need something from him, say, a kidney, or his skin, or his eyes.

Om's wife Jaya is not very happy about this new job of her husband, since it's an all time job controlled 100% by Interplanta. Jaya is quite distressed at her feeble relationship with her husband and feels that this job that has perfect control over him and the family would strain her. It disturbs their already dysfunctional relationship. Jaya is also in love with and has an on-again or off-again affair with Om Prakash's Younger brother, Jeetu. Om's mother Ma is not bothered about the critical position of her son in Interplanta and only proves to be a meddling lady. She has perfect faith over her son and believes that her elder boy Om can do no wrong and that the others can do no right. She very often disapproves of Jaya whom she repeatedly calls as a "slut".

Interplanta, from the time of Om's recruitment to their company, takes great care of Om and his family and treats him as a lamb before the slaughter.

Om's client Ginni communicates with Om only through the special and important character of the play, "the contact module". Ginni essentially owns the right to Om's body and through Interplanta delivers boxes of food and other necessities to him. She even dictates and intervenes in the not-so-important matters like installing, for example, a working toilet and shower in Om's one-room, fourth floor apartment. She does this since she does not want her employee mixing with the "disgusting" others who dwell in that building. Om and his family initially do get to enjoy the spoils of his new high-paying position. Om is highly enchanted with the benefits he gains out of his nefarious bargain and is not worried about its consequences.

Om's mother Ma enjoys the new gadgets that soon arrive, delivered by three perky, robot like Interplanta employees. Om's family soon dines on space-age food pellets doled out from the stainless steel trolley that has replaced their old stove, and their shabby flat has been transformed into something more contemporary.

Om's family's rise to consumerist luxury is depicted wittily in one of the play's most effective scenes, in a series of sight gags. But in return to all their comforts and luxuries, they have to submit to the daily interrogations of their employer. Ginni, possessing the right to Om's body interrogates and examines him through the contact module. Their freedom is also frequently intervened by the unannounced visits of the Interplanta lackeys. They yearn for freedom and the lack of it gnaws away at them. Om is especially gripped with the fear of the nearing days when his faraway benefactress quite possibly a part that he cannot do without will need some part of his body.

As Om keeps anticipating about the doomsday, that day eventually comes with the arrival of the Interplanta lackeys to take the donor for harvest. These lackeys are not too perceptive about which body they ultimately take. They take Jeetu instead of Om, since Jeetu had come there at that moment.

Om's wife Jaya too, who is sceptical from the beginning about Om's job is thrown to such a situation. Another American like Ginni, called Virgil approaches her through the contact module asking for her organ services. Unlike Om, Jaya resists the temptation to accept such an alluring offer. She is not ready to sell her parts, but is forced by the dominating rich man. In order to escape his control over her, she decides to commit suicide and threatens him with it. She wins over Virgil by her resolution to reclaim her body through suicide. She refuses to submit herself to the bullying of Virgil and upholds her dignity by opposing to her being treated as a commodity.

Manjula Padbhanabhan thus portrays a crucial 'utopian' situation in this play, wherein the body itself is used as a site for representation and resistance. *Harvest* casts an ironic light on the potential for globalization to bring not only prosperity but also new forms of colonialism to the third world.

Harvest as a satire on post-satellite society:

Harvest (1997), an award winning science fiction by Manjula Padbhanabhan deals with a macabre situation of the human beings, especially that of the Third World countries. It is a dark comedy, which talks of the unsettling tale of globalization and organ harvesting in India. It stuns or shocks people with the bitter reality that is not far off. The play is futuristic in nature and portrays the Bombay of 2010, a period when the sale of human organs has become institutionalized. It shows the smooth running of organ sales of a transnational corporation called Interplanta Services. Interplanta services harvest organs from the poor third world sellers for their rich first world clients.

The play deals with many problems in India. It primarily deals with the problem of unemployment and is a harsh satire on the post-satellite society. It also shows people to be highly materialistic and unfair. It shows the meaningless existence of modern man who is unaffected by spiritual pleasure. It shows modern man's move towards losing himself in order to lead a comfortable, luxurious life. Aristocratic life allures him and he pays his own life for acquiring materialistic pleasures. The play is a harsh satire on the new kind of colonialism that pervades at the time of globalization. It cynically and sarcastically shows that globalization has led to organ harvesting which is yet another kind of exploitation of the rich towards the poor.

Manjula Padmanabhan takes the story of a young man Om Prakash, who struggles hard to win his bread for himself and his family. Om and his family live in a cramped Bombay tenement and find it difficult to cope up with life. Life becomes highly strenuous when Om loses his clerical job and searches for another. Unable to find something better, he decides to sell his body parts for money. He decides to sell his organs to a shadowy company called Interplanta in hopes of reversing his financial plight.

The play opens with Om's wife Jaya, who is anxiously waiting for her husband's return from his job interview. Om's mother Ma too waits for him eagerly. She fervently hopes that her son will get the job. But Jaya, who is aware of the nature of the job, is quite uncomfortable. She, knowing what the job at Interplanta demands, hopes that he will not be selected. But to her despair and to Ma's joy, Om returns home and announces that he has been selected for the 'job'. He is happy to announce that he passed the medical test at Interplanta and has been decreed as an eligible, healthy candidate for selling his parts as and when it is required of him to. He happily announces about his nefarious act of signing off the rights to his entire body to an anonymous buyer in the United States. Although he expresses his happiness in having got a high-paying job which would considerably raise his materialistic status, he is also confused about signing such a contract. Manjula Padmanabhan brilliantly portrays his perturbed feelings with both hope and despair.

At first Om is highly excited at his having been selected. He proudly states to Ma:
"We'll have more money than you and I have names for!"

He says:

"Who'd believe there's much money in the world?"(1997, p.219).

When Jaya, his wife expresses her reservations for what he has done, he defends himself by saying:

"You think I did it lightly. But (...) we'll be rich! Very rich! Instantly rich! But you'd rather live in this one small room, I suppose! Think it's such a fine thing – living day in, day out like monkeys in a hot – case- lulled to sleep by our neighbours' rhythmic farting! (...) And starving" (1997 p. 223).

Jaya, not convinced with his explanations accuses him of making the wrong choice. But Om is firm in his stance and is obstinate that his decision was not made of his own freewill and choice. He declares that his role in the selection procedure was passive:

“Om: I went because I lost my job at the company. And why did I lose it? Because I am a clerk and nobody needs clerks any more! There are no new jobs now – there’s nothing left for people like us! Don’t you know that?”

Jaya: You’re wrong, there are choices – there must be choices –

Om: Huh! I didn’t choose. I stood in queue and was chosen!

And if not this queue, there would have been other queues – (...)” (1997 p.238).

Om decides to take over the organ-selling job, since he is fed up of his poverty and mainly because of his attraction towards unlimited wealth. But he is highly terrified at his choiceless option when reality strikes at him. He regretfully thinks:

“How could I have done this to myself? What sort of a fool am I?”(1997, P.234).

Om’s mother Ma, however expresses no such regret, and is extremely excited and happy on hearing her son’s promises of unimaginable riches. She tells Om “What kind of job pays a man to sit at home?”(1997, p.220). She’s mystified at Om’s new job and slowly begins to understand what Om’s ‘job’ entails. She is happy at her newly begotten fortune but at the same time could not believe her own ears. She asks Om:

“Tell me again”? All you have to do is sit at home and stay healthy? (...) And they’ll pay you? (...). Even if you do nothing but pick your nose all day? (1997, p.222).

Ma’s continued amazement and her thrill at the expected aristocratic way of life creates a platform for Padmanabhan to depict modern man’s meaningless and absurd way of life. Man, crazy after money is ready to adopt any means to live a luxurious life, however short lived it might be.

Act II of the play shows characters like Ma to be completely addicted to their new luxurious life. Ma spends most of her time compulsively watching television on the interactive set that Om’s organ recipient has sent them. Om’s organ recipient Ginni is an American who sees to it that her donor takes proper care of himself.

She has littered Om's family household with an array of gadgets and help them to lead a healthy, comfortable and luxurious life. Ma perfectly enjoys the luxuries provided by Ginni and escapes the reality of her life in Bombay through technological devices. At the end of the play, We find Ma locking herself away into a Videocoach, a capsule into which Ma can plug herself, and keep on watching more than 150 television channels. She need not worry about food or digestion because the unit is entirely self – sufficient and highly satisfactory to her.

Ma is not the least bothered about her son's life being at a stake; rather she surrenders herself to the joys of technologically induced contentment at their sudden reversal of fortunes. Manjula Padmanabhan here shows the misuse and the disrespect caused to the advancement of science and also gives a bleak view of human beings' lives. This portrayal of the comforts that modern man enjoys because of technological advancement and the doom that is nearing him because of it, reminds one of H.G.Wells' *The Time Machine*. *The Time Machine* gives an apocalyptic vision of modern man and portrays the future society to be utterly hopeless.

Manjula Padmanabhan too shows the crooked nature of modern man who grabs up the opportunities he comes across to obtain a luxurious life without any toil. Modern man is shown to be passive and unresponsive. The basic characteristic feature of human beings such as affection, love, hard work, kindness and so on, seems to be missing in Modern man's life. In the machine age the machine seems to be controlling him.

Ma exhibiting the above features is highly thrilled that “they will be rich for ever and ever” without performing any labour at all.

Ginni apart from wishing to pamper Om's body also wishes to make them happy. This is the reason that she sends to them even the high-tech devices that are not designed for Om's health. In the very first scene of the play, shortly after Om returns home with his new job, Interplanta Services' representatives who are also Om's new employers barge into Om's home to install a series of gadgets. They dismantle the family's old kitchen and replace it with their own cooking device and jars containing multi-coloured pellets. Om, Jaya and Ma watch their actions, each with different emotions.

The representatives also fix a contact module device that hangs from the ceiling and which looks like a “white, faceted globe” (1997, p.22).

The contact module serves the family to make contacts with Ginni who purchased Om’s body. More than the family, it is Ginni who would need it, since she has to have an eye on her expensive and useful commodity, Om. In order to have surveillance over Om’s body that would one day be useful to her in prolonging her life, she gets it fixed at Om’s house. She intervenes at Om’s affairs only through this contact module and thereby improves his way of life better. For instance, after her first visit, she realizes that Om’s family shares a toilet with forty other families. She finds it disgusting and exclaims:

“And I will, I’m going to change that. I can’t accept that, I mean, it’s unsanitary”!
(1997, p. 225).

Hence she commissions Interplanta to install a toilet in their home that very same day. She regularly monitors her donor’s way of living by appearing on and off the contact module. Her unexpected visit makes Om and his family lose their freedom and this loss of freedom troubles them. Om is conscious of her intrusion and even panics when his lunch of multicolored nutritional pellets gets delayed. He worriedly says “You know how Ginni hates it when we’re late to eat”.

Om is afraid of Ginni’s anger and is scared of her revoking his contract. He directs his family to be well disciplined and follow the directions given by Ginni and Interplanta with immense care.

Ginni too, for all the freedom that Om has lost, compensates him with good pampering. She feels obliged to him since he gives her life itself. She says in Act II of the play “I get to give you things you’d never get in lifetime, and you get to give me, well, may be my life. (1997, P.230)”.

Shital Pravinchandra in her essay, “The Third Third World Body Commodified: Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Harvest*” calls Ginni’s continual gifts to Om and his family as more than mere investment! Ginni says to Om’s family “The most important thing is to keep Auum smiling. Coz if Auum’s smiling it means his body is smiling and if his body

is smiling it means his organs are smiling. And that's the kind of organs that'll survive a transplant best, smiling organs...(1997, p.229)

Ginni thus takes huge care to maintain Om and his organs and in turn expects quality-oriented organs from Om. In other words she expects a healthy harvest.

Om's wife Jaya, who from the beginning is against such unnatural activities, is virulently opposed to Om's decision. She resists attractive offers including one from another rich American receiver Virgil. Virgil plans to prey upon Jaya's body and comes with alluring offers. Jaya however resists and refuses to negotiate with Virgil. Unlike Ma, who blissfully escapes reality by the seductive technologies and becomes oblivious to her surroundings, Jaya awakes to an unfamiliar, disembodied voice coming from the contact module. She is determined to lay down her own conditions to the receivers. Her first and foremost condition to Virgil is that he should meet her in person:

"I know you are stronger than me. You're richer than me. But if you want me, she insists, you must risk your skin for me". (1997, P.248).

Virgil, the first world consumer wants the product (Jaya's organs) at any cost and bragging that she cannot win against him, sends his Interplanta employees to break down Jaya's door. But Jaya firm in her decision to win decides to lose her life for winning. She discovers "a new definition for winning - *Winning by losing*". (1997, P. 248). She tells Virgil that she plans to reclaim the "only thing (she) has which is still (her) own: (her) death" (1997, P.248). Thus, Jaya resists the third world man's offer and advances and retains her own dignity in one swift stroke.

Harvest, thus talking of exploitation and resistance of the third world beings is also a wonderful study of post colonialism. Jaya resists the first world people, especially, Virgil by embracing the very mortality that he and his fellow receivers seek to escape from. She irritates and makes Virgil be frustrated by her resolution to reclaim her own body through suicide. She warns and threatens him by saying "I'm holding a piece of glass against my throat". (1997, P.248). The play thus concludes on this unresolved note.

Padmanabhan has thus created a thought provoking play, which makes us ponder over the condition of modern man. It shows clear cut distinctions between the poor and the

rich, black and white, Third world and First world. It is a critique of the exploitation of the 'have-nots' by the 'haves'. The plight of modern man's body being commodified is absolutely shocking and makes us seriously contemplate on the dark aspect, which is of course not very far off. Padmanabhan's notion of winning – "winning by losing" – is too disturbing and aptly brings out the poor people's predicament, which is lose your own body to win the cash or lose your body to win over the dominating rich people.

Although the play is set in the future, it reflects contemporary conditions as well. *Harvest* is not about the harvest of crops, but of the harvest of the organs of human beings.

Questions:

1. Discuss *Harvest* as a dark comedy.
2. Make a critical summary of the play *Harvest*.
3. Consider *Harvest* as a postcolonial play.
4. Discuss *Harvest* as a play that brings out the deteriorating condition of human beings.
5. How are the poor exploited by the rich in the play *Harvest*

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UNIT V

Indian English Non – fictional Prose

Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery Of India*

Introduction:

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, is not only a great statesman and politician but also a visionary and an artist. His artistic and literary talent finds expression in *The Glimpses of World History (1934)*, *The Discovery of India (1946)*, *An Autobiography* and his numerous articles, speeches and letters.

Nehru is unquestionably one of the greatest prose writers in Indian English prose. Like Gandhi he wrote voluminously and his writing abound in rich allusion to many great writers belonging to the different parts of the world. His writings reflect his versatile personality and artistic sensibility. As a writer and artist Nehru felt at ease with his thought and expression. His prose is characterized by strength and directness, simplicity and force and there is always in them, the union of art and imagination. Even ordinary and commonplace objects of life are given a charm of novelty. Nehru's descriptions of nature are conspicuous for their delicate poetic sensibility and flawless artistic beauty. Even his hectic political activities could not suppress the artist in him. It influences his humanism and makes feel the sorrows and sufferings of the World as if they were his own.

Nehru enriched Indian English prose by writing historical prose in *The Glimpses of the world history* and *The Discovery of India*, autobiographical prose in *An Autobiography* and epistolary prose in his letters.

His prose is a superb specimen of chiselled and flawless style and it has an abiding aesthetic appeal. His emotional nature wedded to an innate independence of thought has enabled him to develop a style of expression, which is direct and captivating.

Nehru's place as a Writer is secure and he enjoys an enviable position in Indian English prose.

The Discovery of India:

The Discovery of India (1946) was written in 1944 during Nehru's last internment at Ahmadnagar Fort. In it he does not attempt at a scholarly history but a vision of the past seen through the eyes of one imbued with a historical sense. It is mainly a story of the Indian people and not a dull and monotonous narrative of local wars and struggles.

In fact it is "an intellectual, dispassionate, unbiased and balanced recordation of India's long journey through the ages". (Satish Kumar: 1987). It consists of ten chapters, and each chapter contains further sub-titled passages that talk of varied subjects.

Chapter – III : "The Quest"

In this chapter Nehru forms a comprehensive idea of India's glorious past and talks about the variety and unity available in it. His opinion on the General Elections and the culture of the masses are also given in this chapter.

The first sub-title of "The Quest" called "The Panorama of India's Past" analyses Nehru's understanding of India's past. During long years of hectic activity, Nehru tried to understand India and to analyse his own reactions towards her. He thought of his childhood days and felt in him a sensation of pride as well as that of shame. He was ashamed of superstitious practices, of out-worn ideas, and of "our subject and poverty stricken state". He was proud of our glorious national heritage. The idea to oppose English rule in India fascinated him. The present, which grew out of the past, was dark, the future uncertain and so Nehru thought of discovering the past of India.

Nehru had looked at India as a friendly westerner and wanted to give her the garb of modernity. He felt that India continued to have a cultured existence for thousands of years because she possessed "something very vital and enduring, something that was worthwhile". The Indus Valley Civilization, the oldest civilization in India, is five thousand years old. It is specifically Indian and forms the basis of the modern Indian culture.

Nehru formed a comprehensive idea of India's glorious past by reading her history and literature, by wandering over the Himalayas and her mountains, by observing

her rivers, by visiting old monuments and ruins. His journeys and visits, with the background of his reading, gave him an insight into the past.

In the second sub division “Nationalism and Internationalism”, Nehru states his reaction to India. His reaction to India was emotional and it took the form of nationalism. Nationalism was dominant even in advanced countries and it could not be completely done away with. It was essential for India especially when she was groaning under the Yoke of British slavery. India, however, was liberal in her nationalism and accepted real internationalism and even to some extent the subordination of the independent nation state to a world organization.

In “India’s Strength and Weakness”, Nehru opines that it is difficult to trace the causes of India’s strength and weakness. He says that India did not lack in mental alertness and technical skill in ancient days but there had been a gradual decline in this respect. The scientific and technical progress in the West made European countries militarily powerful.

India suffered a progressive deterioration through the ages, the springs of her vitality and strength fired up, the urge to life and endeavour ebbed away, and the creative spirit faded away and gave place to the imitative. Narrow orthodoxy and superstitions took the place of novelty, vigour and rational spirit and inquiries. “Indian life became a sluggish stream, living in the past, moving slowly through the accumulations of dead centuries”. But there had been no complete break from the past. Indians had vast stores of suppressed energy and ability. They needed someone to realize this and to make them feel young and vital again. India would come to herself only when “some generations of shameful subservience and timid submission to an arrogant alien authority” would be wiped out.

“The Search for India” shows that Nehru could not form a full and comprehensive view of India through books, old monuments and past cultural achievements. The present of India was vague and problem ridden. Nehru and his companions started on a voyage of the discovery of India. Nehru was fascinated by Indian masses who retained in a small measure the old Indian cultural tradition. The people of India were real to him in their great variety and, inspite of their vast numbers. He travelled extensively and intensively through the town and villages of the united provinces of Agra and Oudh and acquired a

first hand knowledge of people belonging to various caste and cultures. During the election campaign of 1936 -37, he travelled more extensively throughout India. He was deeply impressed by India's unity, "which had held all of us together for ages past, whatever political fate or misfortune had befallen us. The unity of India was no longer merrily an intellectual conception for me: "It was an emotional experience which overpowered me. That essential unity had been so powerful that no political division, no disaster or war catastrophe, had been able to overcome it".

In "Bharat Mata" Nehru tells about his journeys and meetings with the people of India especially the peasants. Nehru told his audience about Bharat, for whose freedom they were struggling, about the common problems of peasants all over the country. He also told him about international problems. He told them that Bharat Mata, Mother India was essentially these millions of people, and the "victory to her meant victory to these people".

The sub-topic "The variety and Unity of India" shows that there is tremendous impress of oneness in the diversity of India. In spite of cultural, lingual, geographical, racial, climatic differences and diversity there is powerful undercurrent of unity and an awareness of common cultural heritage. Ancient India was a world in itself, a culture and a civilization that give shape to all things. An Indian, belonging to any religion, caste or racial group, is called an Indian in foreign countries. It is an indication of India's innate unity and oneness.

"Travelling through India" talks of Nehru's thorough travel of India from the end of 1936 to the early months of 1937. During this travel, he addressed huge gathering of men and women. He enjoyed boundless respect and affection of his Countrymen wherever he went.

The sub-title "General Elections" deals with Nehru's touring all over India, especially during the General Elections. He did not approve of the usual methods and devices that accompany electioneering. He agreed to adult franchise. The general elections in 1937 for provincial assemblies were based on a restricted franchise affecting about twelve percent of the population. His approach to this election was different from the usual one. He did not trouble himself about the individual candidates, but wanted rather to create

a country-wide atmosphere in favour of the national movement for freedom as represented by the congress, and for the programme contained in Congress, and for the programme contained in Congress election manifesto. His appeal was an ideological one and he hardly referred to the candidates, except as standard bearers of national cause. He and other congress leaders “wanted no change of masters from white to brown, but a real people’s rule by the people and for the people and an ending of our poverty and misery”.

During these tours he came in close contact with the masses and understood their psychology.

“The Culture of the Masses” shows Nehru’s feeling that a common cultural background had exerted a powerful influence on the minds of Indians. This background was a mixture of popular philosophy, tradition, history, myth, and legend. Even the entirely uneducated and illiterate shared this background. The old epics of India, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* and other books were widely known among the masses.

Nehru was deeply shocked by ramp and poverty and misery of Indian masses. This was the basic reality that he came across in India. However, there was far too much of the spirit of resignation and acceptance of things as they were. He was very much impressed by “a mellowness and a gentleness, the cultural heritage of thousands of years, which no amount of misfortune has been able to rub off”.

The chapter ends with the sub-title called “Two Lives”. It shows how Nehru, in his way to discover India, made his mood receptive to impressions and to waves of thought and feelings that came to him from living beings as well as those who had long ceased to be. He also separated himself from the masses and dispassionately observed them with a feeling of detachment.

The Discovery of India is remarkable for its poetic and artistic quality. Precision and economy of expression, clarity and simplicity, subtle poetic touches and musical flow of language characterizes its style. Thus Nehru, in *The Discovery of India* recaptures with a sure but unlaboured artistry “the variegated kaleidoscopic succession of comedies and tragedies of unpredictable circumstance played on this vast theatre that is India over a space of 3000 years”. He tries to explore ancient India’s spiritual foundation and ends up

by emphasizing the need for social reform. He intends to remove all those blemishes of Hinduism, which have made Indian society the vehicle of torment and suppression. He condemns the perniciousness of the caste system and advocates the need for the abolition of untouchability in all its manifestations. He pleads for political freedom and protests against the denial of elementary human rights to the millions.

Select Questions:

1. Discuss Nehru's Prose Style with special reference to *The Discovery of India*.
2. Make a critical appreciation of Chapter III of *The Discovery of India*.
3. Make a general estimate of Nehru as a writer with special reference to *The Discovery of India*.
4. Write a note on Nehru's contribution to Indian English Prose.

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Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*

Biographical Introduction:

Nirad C. Chaudhuri is a controversial figure in the literary world and “has been the subject of adverse criticism in India and qualified appreciation in Britain” (R.K.Kaul: 25). He is an Englishman not by birth but by being a great writer of English. He is a good writer of prose and has always focussed on polemical or journalistic writings.

Chaudhuri, born in India grew to respect and admire English culture and European ways of life. He had a love, hate relationship with India and became “*enfant terrible* of Indian letters” (Patil, Mallikarjun: 12) He published his first book, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* in 1951 and became very famous in the west. This book shows Chaudhuri’s “repository of a bewildering range of facts and figures and his practice of intellectual narcissism” (Patil, Mallikarjun: 12). It is a great work of oriental vision, which surveys the Hindu civilization very critically. It studies the British Imperialism as a critical problem. Chaudhuri himself says it is more than a personal history.

As a great Anarch, Nirad C. Chaudhuri practiced a form of Socratic wisdom which looks ironical and comical. He lived a life devoid of compromises, “the ultimate sign of an eccentric and a supreme individualist”.

Chaudhuri’s works include *An Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), *A Passage to India* (1959), *The Continent of Circe* (1965), *The Intellectual in India* (1967), *Scholar Extraordinary* (1974), *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By, Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* and *The Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997).

Chaudhuri’s *A Passage to India* is a travelogue which shows his love of Europe. *The Continent of Circe* is his severe attack on Indian civilization. *To Live or Not to Live* sub-titled as *An Essay on living Happily With Others* displays his radical effort to shake the Hindu society from its old lethargy. The book *The Intellectual in India* is a manual for the intellectual class of people. *Scholar Extraordinary* is his biography of the famous German Scholar Max Muller.

Thy Hand, Great Anarch!:

Thy Hand, Great Anarch! is the continuation of his *Autobiography*. Both these books won him honours of a very high order. The title, ***Thy Hand, Great Anarch!***(India:1921-1952) is taken from Alexander Pope's following Quotation:

Lo! Thy dread Empire, Chaos! Is restor'd;
Light dies before thy uncreating word;
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
And Universal Darkness buries all.

In his introduction to the book, Chaudhuri makes his intention as well as the scope of his autobiography clear when he asserts that, "this book continues the story of my life and thoughts from the point of time at which it was left in ***The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*** published in 1951". This book is not complete in the sense that it has not covered the last part of the author's life. Chaudhuri is aware of this limitation of the book and admits it too:

However, even now I have not been able to give the book the end one would expect it to have. Of course, autobiographies cannot have the same logical end as biographies always have. But they are generally brought down to the time when they are written. This book falls short of even that by thirty two years, for it only covers my 'working life', which began in 1921 and came to a close at the end of 1952.

Thy Hand, Great Anarch! runs into nine hundred sixty-four pages(Introduction and Index excluded) and is divided into ten books covering the period between 1921 and 1952. It is an amalgam of Chaudhuri's life and Indian history during that period. The "Epilogue" is the climax of the book which shows the metamorphosis of Chaudhuri, the non-believer into a believer. This is a very significant development in the book. Chaudhuri writes:

'I believe in order to understand.' In the light of my early mental development, this would appear to be the strangest confession for me to make at the end of my life.'

The decadence of the modern period, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, springs from intellectual failure to contain it. And what pains Chaudhuri

most is the lack of faith among the people. Thus he regrets to say that, “the problem of sustaining faith would not have been so difficult had there been a frank recognition by the thinkers of our age of the reality of the decadence in social life and mores.” However, Chaudhuri does not lose faith in human possibility and ends the book with a fervent plea to take note of duality in human condition. Thus he writes:

“...the human situation in its fundamental character is not worse than what it always has been, only the scale of the conflict between progress and decadence is infinitely larger. Men of faith, believing in a higher dispensation in the universe than man’s will have always been bewildered by the duality in their existence”.

Chaudhuri’s Prose Style:

Nirad C. Chaudhuri started his writing career rather late in his life but has achieved international reputation. He expressed his views boldly and incurred the wrath of many and earned the admiration of a few. He is perhaps one of the best Indo-English non-fiction prose writers. He is often appreciated for his robust thinking and clarity of style. His popularity world-wide is achieved not only for his controversial views but also by his uninhibited and fearless style.

Chaudhuri’s language is marked by his concreteness of diction. He always employs concrete and precise words – words that are never vague or ambivalent. His style is as realistic as elaborate. Since he is a solid and comprehensive thinker he cannot help thinking about larger issues of life in an elaborate fashion. He uses large paragraphs to express his continuous thinking.

Another notable feature of Chaudhuri’s prose is his scholarly style. The use of non-English words, phrases and sentences is a conspicuous aspect of his writing. He uses these in order to achieve brevity, exactitude and sometimes a local colour. He is also fond of using quotations at relevant spots. Chaudhuri’s vision is panoramic and is supported by his encyclopaedic range of knowledge.

Another important method of Chaudhuri’s writing is the analysis and not mere description of his personal experience. Because of this his prose could be labeled as analytical or expository prose. Although Chaudhuri is a vigorous intellectual and an incisive analyst, he cannot help using similes and metaphors. Chaudhuri is also free from fear and inhibition of any sort and he can admire or criticize anything and everything without being afraid.

Taking the various criticisms of Chaudhuri's prose style, one can see that certain critics accuse him of using the pedantic style and certain others dub his style as merely journalistic. But whatever may be the views the critics or whatever style is used by Chaudhuri, "it is the natural style of an Indian who has learnt his English through dictionaries and Indian teachers and who has not de-Indianised and Anglicised himself to use the snobbish style" (Naikar, Basavaraj.S : 1985).

Questions:

1. Discuss Chaudhuri's Prose Style with special reference to *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*
2. Make a general estimate of Chaudhuri as a prose writer with special reference to *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*
3. Write a note on Chaudhuri's contribution to Indian English Prose.

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Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands*

Biographical Introduction:

Salman Rushdie, the most predominant novelist of the 20th Century, was born in Bombay on 19th June, 1947. He went to school in Bombay and at Rugby in England, and read History at King's College, Cambridge, where he joined the Cambridge Footlights theatre company. After graduating, he lived with his family who had moved to Pakistan in 1964, and worked briefly in television before returning to England, beginning work as a copywriter for an advertising agency. His first novel, *Grimus*, was published in 1975.

His second novel, the much-admired *Midnight's Children*, was published in 1981. It won the Booker Prize for Fiction, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction), an Arts Council Writers' Award and the English-Speaking Union Award, and in 1993 was judged to have been the 'Booker of Bookers', the best novel to have won the Booker Prize for Fiction in the award's 25-year history. The novel narrates key events in the history of India through the story of pickle-factory worker Saleem Sinai, one of 1001 children born, as India won independence from Britain in 1947. The critic Malcolm Bradbury acclaimed the novel's achievement in *The Modern British Novel* as 'a new start for the late-twentieth-century novel.'

Rushdie's third novel, *Shame* (1983), was seen by many critics as an allegory of the political situation in Pakistan. It was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction. His fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses* was published in the year 1988. It led to accusations of blasphemy against Islam and demonstrations by Islamist groups in India and Pakistan. The orthodox Iranian leadership issued a fatwa against Rushdie on 14th February 1989 - effectively a sentence of death - and he was forced into hiding under the protection of the British government and police. The book itself centers on the adventures of two Indian actors, Gibreel and Saladin, who fall to earth in Britain when their Air India jet explodes. It won the Whitbread Novel Award in 1988.

Salman Rushdie continued to write and publish books, including a children's book, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), a warning about the dangers of story-telling that won the Writers' Guild Award (Best Children's Book), and which he adapted for the stage (with Tim Supple and David Tushingham. It was first staged at the Royal National

Theatre, London.) There followed a book of essays entitled *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (1991); *East, West* (1994), a book of short stories; and a novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), the history of the wealthy Zogoiby family told through the story of Moraes Zogoiby, a young man from Bombay descended from Sultan Muhammad XI, the last Muslim ruler of Andalucía.

In *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, published in 1999, Rushdie re-works the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in the context of modern popular music. His most recent novel, *Fury*, set in New York at the beginning of the third millennium, was published in 2001. He is also the author of a travel narrative, *The Jaguar Smile* (1987), an account of a visit to Nicaragua in 1986.

Salman Rushdie is Honorary Professor in the Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He was made Distinguished Fellow in Literature at the University of East Anglia in 1995. He was awarded the Austrian State Prize for European Literature in 1993 and the Aristeion Literary Prize in 1996, and has received eight honorary doctorates. He was elected to the Board of American PEN in 2002. The subjects in his new book *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-fiction 1992-2002* (2002), range from popular culture and football to twentieth-century literature and politics. Salman Rushdie is also co-author (with Tim Supple and Simon Reade) of the stage adaptation of *Midnight's Children*, premiered by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2002. His latest novel is *Shalimar, The Clown* (2005), the story of Max Ophuls, his killer and daughter, and a fourth character who links them all. It was shortlisted for the 2005 Whitbread Novel Award.

Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991:

Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism (1991) is a collection of Salman Rushdie's writings from 1981 to 1991. They include essays, book reviews, interviews and random musings dating from the beginning of his popularity after his novel *Midnight's Children* until the third anniversary of the death fatwa pronounced on him by the Ayatollah Khomeini for his book, *The Satanic Verses*. It contains 74 essays written over the last ten years and covers a range of subjects including the literature of the perceived masters and of Rushdie's contemporaries, the politics of colonialism and the ironies of

culture, film, politicians, the Labour Party, religious fundamentalism in America, racial prejudice and the preciousness of the imagination and of free expression.

As with any collection of essays, *Imaginary Homelands* is inconsistent and it brings to one's memory, the literary legacy of the 1980's. The book contains reviews ranging from one of Graham Greene's last novels to physics superstar Stephan Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. It refreshes one's knowledge of the 1980s from a literary standpoint. It also shows Rushdie as a man deeply troubled by oppression. He often mentions Pakistan's ruthless US – supported General Zia and in "A Conversation with Edward Said" deals with the issue of Palestinian identity. His review of V.S.Naipaul's "Among the Believers", a journal of travels through the new Islamic states that sprung up in the 80s, and in his two essays on the reaction of Muslims to *The Satanic Verses* are helpful works to read in this time when dealing with Islamic extremism is such a driving force in international relations. Underlying much of his work--and lending it some unity--is Rushdie's concern with migration and nationality, with celebrating difference and freedom of expression over orthodoxy and conformity. Two essays in the concluding section, "In Good Faith" and "Why I Have Embraced Islam," speak directly to the author's plight as a result of his publication of *The Satanic Verses*.

Salman Rushdie lost his religious faith at the age of fifteen. The event took place in a Latin class at Rugby and he later celebrated it by eating a stale ham sandwich. He has himself spoken of how he attempted to fill the 'god-shaped hole' left by his loss of faith with the art of the novel. But to read this collection of seventy-five essays and reviews, culled from Rushdie's writing over the past ten years, is to be reminded that there is another spiritual home in which he has always seemed comfortable – the broad church of British socialism. He is certainly not afraid to measure himself up against some of the truly prophetic figures on the British left and, in the case of Orwell at least, to find them wanting. He in fact trashes George Orwell and Jane Austen for their detachment from contemporary events. One of the things he shares with Orwell, with E. P. Thompson and with his friend and admirer Michael Foot, is a fine moral rage, a rage which expresses genuine idealism and a resolute refusal to countenance the extinction of social hope or to submit to the politics of money or materialism.

Constructive moral rage such as this is so rare that it may well call forth admiration even from those who do not share Rushdie's political ideals, and there is a non-conformist strength in many of his more polemical pieces which is both attractive and vital. This is especially true when he combines his political arguments with attempts to rekindle the old flame of his love for India and to express his anger at the false suitors who are always seeking to woo her away.

The terms of his attack on what he calls 'the Raj revisionism' of M. M. Kaye and Paul Scott in his essay 'Outside the Whale' are as interesting as the reservations about Orwell he expresses in the same piece. His judgments on Richard Attenborough's *Ghandi* and on V. S. Naipaul seem both severe and just. His review of *Foucault's Pendulum*, in which he splendidly declines to worship at the modish shrine of Umberto Eco, is a small gem and many other pieces in this book merit both reading and re-reading.

The moral rage, then, is genuine. So too is the idealism. They are both in their own way impressive and on a number of occasions they hit their targets. The problem is that moral rage and idealism are a highly destructive combination, and unless they are guided by real insight and by a great deal of ordinary human sensitivity they can often end by hitting the wrong targets – with disastrous consequences.

One indication that there is something wrong with Rushdie's aim is provided by the text of his celebrated – or notorious – Channel 4 broadcast on racism. A particular section of his talk is disturbing:

In Germany, after the fall of Hitler, heroic attempts were made by many people to purify German thought and the German language of the pollution of Nazism ... But British thought, British society has never been cleansed of the filth of imperialism. It's still there, breeding lice and vermin, waiting for unscrupulous people to exploit it for their own ends.

Rushdie seems not to have recognized that the rhetoric of pollution and the images of lice and vermin, which he uses here, were part of the very substance of National Socialist propaganda. What such language perfectly expresses is the extreme racist's assumption that he is himself an island of purity and that all corruption, cruelty and uncleanness reside outside him in an alien people, which must be cleansed from the face of the earth. Instead

of seeking to analyze this self-righteous and repressive frame of mind, Rushdie comes perilously close to adopting it himself. The result is a kind of racialism-in-reverse in which he speaks out as the member of a class of wronged and all-virtuous victims against the enemy – the corrupt, all-sinful whites.

British racism, of course, is not our problem. It's yours. We simply suffer from the effects of your problem. And until you, the whites see that the issue is not integration, or harmony, or multi-culturalism, but simply facing up to and eradicating the prejudices within almost all of you, the citizens of your new and last Empire will be obliged to struggle against you.

What we encounter in Rushdie's broadcast is not the rhetoric of liberation. It is the rhetoric of mastery being pressed into service on behalf of the oppressed. So long as Rushdie spoke on behalf of the powerless against the powerful, this rhetoric *seemed* just and humane to many. Tragically, however, when his own sophisticated insensitivity to the language of faith brought him into conflict with Muslims who, at their most extreme, were themselves rigid and even racist in their response, he reacted by using similar rhetoric. Instead of recognising that Muslim extremism, like white racialism, is the reaction of people who themselves feel oppressed, vulnerable and wounded, and that moderate Muslims were deeply offended too, he made the mistake of treating all those who opposed the novel as though they were part of a demonic host. As a result a tragedy that might have been defused in its early stages was inexorably deepened.

The article in which Rushdie came closest to demonising Muslim opponents of his novel appeared in the *Observer* on 22 January 1989 just after the book burning in Bradford. In it Rushdie described Muslim campaigners as 'the forces of inhumanity' and characterised them as agents of darkness. Interestingly, the article has been silently omitted from this collection.

Rushdie's Prose Style:

Salman Rushdie plays an important role as a trendsetter in Indian Writing in English. He is a prolific writer who has not only excelled himself in fictional writings, but also in non-fictional prose. Some of his prose works includes *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981 – 1991*(1991), *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-fiction*

1992 – 2002(2002) and so on. He has achieved the singular distinction of being recognized as an artist in his own lifetime and also as one of the most predominant writers of the late 20th century. His popularity rests mainly on his literary achievements and the controversy that surrounds them. Like Marquez in Spanish, Rushdie has taken history as his subject and fictionalized it. He thus instituted a new genre in the field of literature.

Rushdie has received almost every award in the course of a near 30 – year career and has become the living image of the romantic writer. His knowledge, erudition and worldliness kept him comfortable with any kind of writing. He “felt equally at ease with the purveyors of pop culture and the intellectual arbiters of literary taste, scabrous critic of colonialism, be it political, social or culture, and, despite his deep connection to the events of his time” he remains somehow abstract, aloof and distant.

Rushdie is famous for taking symbols and figures from different religions and myth systems and interweaving them with different juxtapositions. Themes from Islam and Hinduism are interwoven with figures from English literature and English literary references. His work advocates that the cultural exchange brought about by Empire has enriched rather than cheapened contemporary literature; in his fiction Rushdie has demanded the right, in a fractured and confused post-colonial climate, to be a part of the telling of one’s own history. Rushdie has challenged official historical truth, launched vituperative attacks on petty nationalism and the censorship of the state, all the while wrapping his readers in the magic realist swirl of dreamscape and fairytale in which the conventional is challenged with astonishing wit and intellectual daring.

Rushdie’s Prose is lyrical and majestic and has the clutter and colour of Bombay, whereas his conversation has more the wit of King’s college and London. His early life as the only son of a professional, middle-class Muslim family in Bombay must be seen as a crucial factor in any assessment of his subsequent literary output. An important incident in Rushdie’s youth, which irrevocably altered the pattern of his own life, was his loss of faith in the family and religion of Islam. Rushdie’s responses to religion in general and Islam in particular are most complex than they might first appear. His loss of faith in Islam is the source of the religious debate in his works. The use of magic realism and intertextual elements, and his reliance on Hindu mythology is visible in his works. His fiction involves the interweaving of contemporary and mythical realities despite his open hostility towards religion.

Imaginary Homelands provides biting humour, insightful thoughts, and elegant prose as Rushdie shares with us his thoughts on everything from censorship to Stephen Hawking. Among the topics covered in the book, apart from racism in Great Britain, the existence of a commonwealth literature, and the assassination of Indira Gandhi, a fair amount of time and space is spent on criticisms of various novels and writers. Some of the books reviewed by Rushdie include works by Saul Bellow, V.S.Naipaul, Nadine Gordimer, Italo Calvino, Heinrich Boll, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Underlying much of his work – and lending it some unity – is Rushdie’s concern with migration and nationality, with celebrating difference and freedom of expression over orthodoxy and conformity.

As in his other works, Rushdie’s language is beautiful and forthrightness admirable. Rushdie is well informed and opinionated about varied subjects ranging from politics to religion to literature. The essays and reviews have a freshness and stylistic beauty that is enviable. The work expresses a wonderful sense of humour and adds richness to readers’ understanding of Rushdie’s writing. In short it could be said of *Imaginary Homelands* that it is a rewarding companion to Rushdie’s novels. It effectively brings out the power, eloquence and poignancy of Rushdie’s writings.

Questions:

1. Comment on the prose style of Rushdie, with special reference to *Imaginary Homelands*.

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Dom Moraes' *Never At Home*

Biographical Introduction:

Dominic Francis Moraes (1938 – 2004), popularly known as Dom Moraes is an Indian writer, poet and columnist, who has published more than 30 books. He was born in Bombay to his parents Beryl and Frank Moraes. Frank Moraes was well known for his journalistic writing and was the editor of *The Times of India*. Dom Moraes spent eight years in Britain, living in London and Oxford, but spent most of his life in Bombay, a city he detested. He married the Indian actress Leela Naidu and separated from her.

Dom Moraes had a Jesuit education and worked in several countries as war correspondent and a travel writer. His first book of poems, *A Beginning* was published in 1957 and in 1958; it won the Hawthornden Prize for “the best work of imagination”. Dom Moraes was the youngest and the first non-English person to win the prize.

In 1960, he published *Poems*, and the autobiographical memoir, *Gone Away: An Indian Journey. The Brass Serpent – Translations from Hebrew Poetry* – followed in 1964, and in 1965 *John Nobody* was published.

All these works were well received by the public and Dom Moraes became popular in England. In 1966, he published *Poems 1955-65* and two years later, in 1967, he settled in Islington and published his autobiography, *My Son's Father*. He also published *Bedlam and others*, a pamphlet in verse during this period.

In 1968, Dom settled back in India for good, only resuming the writing of verse in the late 1970's. In 1983 came out his another book of poems *Absences*. Later in 1987 appeared *collected poems* and two years after appeared more of his poems in *Serendip*. *Serendip* won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1994.

Dom Moraes took up to journalism and travelled worldwide. He wrote several journalistic accounts, travel books and a biography of Mrs. Gandhi called *Heiress to Destiny* (1980). A compelling study of several states of India including Himachal Pradesh, and Karnataka forms his travelogues.

He has edited magazines in London, Hong Kong and New York and has scripted over 20 television documentaries for the *BBC* and *ITV*. In 1994 he brought out his third volume of autobiography, *Never at Home* and that was followed by another poetry collection, *In Cinnamon Shade* (2001).

Dom Moraes also contributed to *Voices of the Crossing* (2000), edited by Naseem Khan and Ferdinand Dennis, on the impact of England on writers from the subcontinent and the Caribbean. He co-edited *The Penguin Book of Indian Journeys* (2001) and published *The Long Spider* in the year 2003.

Moraes' first marriage with Henrietta Moraes and his third marriage were dissolved. His second wife, Judy predeceased him. In the last stage of his affliction with cancer Sarayu Srivastava was his companion and muse. This significant Indian poet who made his mark in the Western world and who enjoyed remarkable name and fame passed away in 2004.

Never at Home:

Dom Moraes shall be remembered more as a poet than prose writer. But it could be said that he "wrote more prose than most poets did" and has acquired name in the field of prose writing too. His elegant prose has captured many and he is especially known for his autobiographies. His collection of memoirs *A variety of Absences* brings together, his three classic autobiographical books, *Gone Away, My Son's Father and Never at Home*. Each of these books contain fascinating stories of a "young man's passage from a traumatic childhood and adolescence to manhood". They talk of Moraes' surviving early fame, alcohol, strange exiles and difficult loves.

My son's Father (1968), with its inverted and unusual title is about his complicated childhood that caused him great agony. Moraes' mother, a pathologist was unable to bear her husband's frequent separation and hence suffered from a nervous break down that made her be admitted in a mental asylum. This led to Moraes' accompanying his father, and thereby to his travels far and wide. *My son's father* is also about his recollections of romance with older men such as the maverick Gandhian Scholar D.G. Tendulkar and the anthropologist Verrier Elwin.

The sequel *Never at home* deals with Moraes' travels in the central Indian forests and in South-East Asia. *Gone Away*, published before the two, describes a visit he made back to India with his Oxford friend Ved Mehta. This book also gives an affecting description of a meeting with Jawaharlal Nehru. When Nehru asked him when he was returning home from England, Moraes answered that he intended to stay on in England and make his name as a writer.

Such was Moraes' interest in writing. He excelled in his autobiographies and his elegant style of prose is revealed in them. As is generally said, "autobiography is the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image" (Bijay Kumar Das: 133). So has Moraes spoken about himself, his travels, and his childhood to adulthood experiences in *Never at Home* (1992). *Never at home*, Moraes third volume of autobiography "picks up from where *My Son's Father* left off". (*Critical Practice* 4:2, 1997:34). Moraes chose its title from a phone call that he received from his friend. He gives an interesting account of it in the text. He says that when his friend called him over the phone, he was busy with writing the second part of his autobiography. Hence he asked his people in the household not to receive any phone calls while he was writing. As he completed writing the autobiography he had the following phone call from a friend:

"Where in hell have been? He asked. "I have been phoning you all day for a week. I've even phoned you at night, and they say you're somewhere else, they don't know where. Are you never at home?"(Moraes 1992:341).

Never at home deals with less than two decades of Moraes' life. It deals with his life from the period 1974 to 1990. It is a period of anguish for him when he was in search of his identity. It is a period when he was alienated from his mad mother, his first wife and his motherland. Dom had a troubled childhood since his mother suffered from a nervous disorder. His father, one of the most eminent Journalists of India, was sent to cover the World War II in Burma. His father's long absence affected his mother's mental equilibrium and she grew very possessive of her son. She could not bear to let him go anywhere. Dom witnessed many hysterical scenes of his mother's growing madness and he started avoiding her, even as she started using violence to ensure his presence.

One day while she was behaving in a wild manner with the servants, with a knife in her hand, Dom caught hold of the knife and struck her. This aggravated her mental

illness and expedited her move to the mental asylum. Moraes felt guilty of this incident and carried it all through his life like an “albatross round my neck” (Moraes). He never forgave himself for exhibiting such a behavior towards his mother.

Meena Sodhi in her book, *Critical Practice*, makes an interesting comment on *Never At Home*, in the following words:

Never At Home picks up from where *My Son's Father* left off. It moves at a fervent speed and as we accompany Moraes on his journey across the globe we see the world through his eyes; we meet dozens of leaders and statesmen. As a writer he covered events like the Eichmann trial in Israel; travelled in Asia, Africa, the America; made television documentaries for the BBC, wrote for a number of foreign newspapers and worked for the U.N. As an investigative journalist, he rushed around the world in pursuit of stories, like perhaps no other Indian journalist has ever done. Therefore, it is not merely a case of name-dropping, which is seen in the book, Moraes has done serious reporting too. “A poet, a restless pilgrim, and a keen observer of the world around, Dom Moraes is remarkable as a writer and a commentator on man's struggle for survival. His life-story is both fascinating and poignant. This account is filled up with numerous incidents and anecdotes, which are described distinctly. The book has good prose by an Indian writer, even though Moraes frequently stresses that he does not want to be merely a prose writer” (*Critical Practice* 4:2, 1997:34).

Moraes was always obsessed with the search of his identity. The poet in him all the time helped him to assume a kind of identity in spite of his personal difficulties in life. Thus, Moraes writes:

Everyone wears some kind of mask, which is expressed in the face he or she presents to the world. A mask of this kind is not difficult to invent. For example, my mask was that of a rather casual person, unperturbed by what was happening around me, known as a poet, experienced in the world, a veteran war correspondent. I could not respond to the demands of my mask, and offer its smile, with some confidence, to others. Behind this mask, I thought, lay my identity, which was not to be exposed. It was by keeping the identity, not the mask, that I remained alive. The identity contained all the experiences the mask had, but

experienced them differently. A great part of my identity lay in my ability to write poetry, and also in knowing exactly what world I belonged to (Moraes 1992:310).

As the search for 'belongingness' continues, Moraes could not help saying, "I am waiting to be at home, where, I don't know yet". The book ends with an interesting account of his meeting with the great Kannad, a writer, Karanth.

Sometime in 1976(it must have been June or July, since it was raining heavily in the southern state of Karnataka), I went to meet a famous local writer called Karanth. He was small, with a white moustache, and very old, but exceptionally lively for his years. In the front room of his house, he awaited me with tea, sweetmeats of many sorts, including Mars bars, and a chalkboard on which various numbers and mathematical equations had been scrawled. "It is surprising for you that I wanted to meet you", he said, "Is it not? But apart from being a great writer, I am a student of numerology". He pointed to the board, and intoned four words once familiar on British television, "This is your life".

I expected everyone I had ever known to emerge one by one from the wings: that is, from the kitchen that opened off the room we were in. Nobody did. "Look at the board", said Dr.Karanth. "You were born on the 19th of July 1938. Do you understand what that means? Nineteen, think hard of that number. It is the number with which your whole life is involved. Think of the year 1938. That is a number divisible by nineteen, is it not?" Outside, a small rain was falling, scented by the flowers on which it fell.

This deflected my attention from him for a moment. But, schoolmaster like, he produced a cane, with the tip of which he rapped the chalkboard. "In 1957", he said, "You won the Hawthornden prize in Britain. Now tell me, what is 1957 divisible by? By nineteen. And, at that time, you were nineteen years old. Is that not proof enough of your affinity with this number? It is. My good boy, I tell you, it is proof!"

I had made some mathematical calculations, and said, 'Dr.Karanth, this is 1976, which is also divisible by nineteen. Nothing very remarkable has happened to me this year'. He replied, "Oh, my dear, my darling boy, but it has. You have met me".

Outside, amidst the many pleasant smells of his garden I reflected that for the next piece of luck in my life I would have to wait until 1995. “I am waiting” (*Ibidem* 341-2).

Dr.Karanth proved to be right. In 1995, Moraes was conferred with Sahitya Akademi Award for his book of verse, *Serendip* for the year 1994. At last, Moraes must have felt ‘at home’ in his motherland.

Thus, *Never At Home* could mean that Dom Moraes was literally staying away from his homeland and never felt at home while staying abroad, and it could also mean that he was physically absent from his homeland.

Questions:

1. Comment on the prose style of Dom Moraes, with special reference to *Never At Home*.

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Arundhati Roy's *The End of Imagination*

Biographical Introduction:

Susanna Arundhati Roy was born on 24th November 1961, in Bengal and grew up in Aymenem village, Kottayam, Kerala. She is the first Indian woman to have won Britain's prestigious Booker Prize. Apart from being a writer she is also a Social Activist. Like Arundhati Roy, her mother too was a well-known social activist who won a landmark Supreme Court verdict that granted Christian women in Kerala the right to their parent's property. Arundhati Roy's father was a Bengali Hindu tea planter. Arundhati's parents separated when she was small and she did her formal education in Corpus Christi school run by her mother in Kottayam District, Kerala. When she was just 16, she left her home and settled in Delhi. There she did her degree in Architecture at the Delhi School of Architecture. During this period she met Gerard Da Cunha a fellow architecture student and married him but their marriage lasted only four years. After a brief stint in the field of Architecture, she found that it was not for her. She went to Goa for making a life out at the beach, got tired of it after a few months and came back to Delhi. She took a job at the National Institute of Urban Affairs, met Pradeep Krishen, a film director, now her husband who offered her a small role in 'Massey Saab'. She went to Italy on a scholarship for eight months to study the restoration of monuments. She realized she was a writer during those months in Italy.

After she returned from Italy she worked with Pradeep Krishen and they planned an episode television for Doordarshan called 'Banyan Tree' which didn't materialize and was shelved by the producers after shooting 2-3 episodes. She wrote and starred in 'In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones', a film on college life in India, based on her experiences in the university of Delhi, and wrote the screenplay for Pradeep Krishen's film 'Electric Moon' (1992). She quickly became known for her work as screenwriter. Then she wrote a series of essays called '*The Great Indian Rape Trick*' which attracted media attention, in defense of former dacoit Phoolan Devi, who she felt had been exploited by Shekar Kapur's film 'Bandit Queen'. Then came her debut novel *The God of Small Things* that shot her into prominence in 1997, by winning the prestigious British Booker prize in London and becoming an international bestseller. The book, which took almost five years to complete, gives an insight to the social and political life in a village in South India through the eyes of seven year old twins and how it effects or disrupts their small

lives. The book won \$20,000 as prize and sold nearly 400,000 copies globally by October that year.

In the years following her success, she has turned to activism, writing '*The Cost of Living*', a book comprising two essays '*The Greater Common Good*' (1999) and '*The End of Imagination*' (1998); the former against Indian government's massive dam projects which displaced millions of poor people and the latter its testing of nuclear weapons. She has been an active participant in public demonstrations against the construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada river in Western India and has donated a substantial amount around 1.5 million rupees, equivalent to her Booker prize money for the cause. She was even arrested along with other protesters for campaigning for the cause. '*Power politics*', her latest book published, takes on Enron the power corporation based in Houston trying to make over Maharashtra's energy sector. She has also spoken on and published several articles such as '*Promotion of Equal Rights*' supporting equal rights for lower caste in India and '*War on Terrorism*' (2001) against the Iraq war.

With her latest publications, Arundhati Roy is carving a niche for herself as a political journalist. This unusual woman who has been on several lists of 'the 50 most beautiful women in the world' is not intimidated by her success and fame but is an inspiration to all those who seek to speak up against the powers in support of the poor and the oppressed. She now lives in Delhi with her husband Pradeep Krishen and his two daughters Pia and Mithva from a previous marriage.

The colossal success of Arundhati Roy's debut novel *The God of Small Things* (1996) was followed by a short but revolutionary book *The End of Imagination* (1998). Arundhati Roy wrote this essay in response to India's testing of nuclear weapons in Pokhran, Rajasthan. It first appeared in her collection *The Cost of Living* in which she began her crusade against India's massive hydroelectric dam project.

The End of Imagination:

The End of Imagination is a critique against the Indian government's nuclear policies. She satirizes and strongly revolts against nuclearisation in India and abroad. Amar Nath Prasad in his essay, "*Arundhati Roy's The End of Imagination: An*

Apocalyptic Vision of Nuclearisation, calls it a mild satire on the arrogance and dominance of politics. Above all, Arundhati Roy highlights the drawbacks of nuclear arms and ammunitions, which are gaining all over the world.

She passionately argues against the dangers of nuclear weapons and feels it “humiliating” to write about an issue that has “over the years, already been made by other people in other parts of the world”. But since she feels that “silence would be indefensible” in the circumstances, she sincerely voices out her anguish.

Arundhati Roy opens the book with the apocalyptic vision of the nuclear explosion tested at the Pokhran site on 11th May 1998. She seems to satirize the great outpourings of joy on the part of the BJP members and sympathizers who organized festivities and celebrated on the streets after the successful nuclear tests. But on the other hand the people living around the nuclear test site were not happy and jocund, rather they were sad and gloom. Roy’s powerful words throw us to serious contemplation:

“If there is a nuclear war, our foes will not be China or America or even each other. Our foe will be the earth herself. The very elements - the sky, the air, the land, the wind, and water- will all turn against us. Their wrath will be terrible. Our cities and forests, our fields and villages will burn for days. Rivers will turn to poison. The air will become fire. The wind will spread the flames. When everything there is to burn has burned and the fires die, smoke will rise and shut on the sun. The earth will be enveloped in darkness. There will be no day. Only interminable night. Temperatures will drop to fall below freezing and nuclear winter will set in. Water will turn into toxic ice. Radioactive fall out will seep through the earth and contaminate ground water. Most living things, animal and vegetable, fish and fowl, will die. Only rats and cockroaches will breed and multiply and compete with foraging, relict humans for what little food there is” (pp.12-13).

This thought provoking observation of Arundhati Roy clearly shows that she believes in the theory of non-violence and that she is not in favour of war and killing. She is sceptical about nuclear weapons’ use for peace. She is worried that the indescribable horror and disgust, death and devastation of the atomic warfare would engulf people in total disaster. The savage atomic war would only prove to be the most immoral and the effects of the bombs are manifold and far-reaching. Apart from demolishing all objects

animate or inanimate within a radius of hundreds of miles where the bomb falls, it produces a wave of radioactivity, which spreads almost from one continent to another and brings in its train all manner of hither to unknown diseases and ailments.

Thus, according to Roy, man has become insensitive to the beauty of nature. She formerly believes that nothing is suicidal and fallacious than to believe that the atom bomb will terrorize the world into peace. The production of atomic bombs is a colossal waste of human energy and national wealth. It is the greatest stumbling block in the way of international harmony and peace. War is the symbol of aggrandizement and savagery and it can not be killed by indulging in warfare. It can be destroyed only through love, harmony and peace.

Here Arundhati Roy does not address the geo-political compulsion that led India to build nuclear arsenal. The threat of Pakistan and China does not bother her. She is only bothered about the reality of war. Arundhati Roy thus advocates peace and prosperity, harmony and integration in this essay. She says:

“All I can say to every man, woman and sentient child here in India, and over these, just a little away in Pakistan, is: Take it personally. Whoever you are – Hindu, Muslim urban, agrarian — it doesn’t matter. The only good thing about nuclear war is that is the single most egalitarian idea that man has ever had. On the day of reckoning, you will not be asked to present your credentials. The devastation will be indiscriminate. The bomb is not in your backyard. It’s in your body. And mine. No body, no nation, no government, no man, no God, has the right to put it there. We are radioactive already, and the War has not even begun. So stand up and say something. Never mind if it’s been and said before. Speak up on your own behalf. Take it very personally.”(pp. 20-21).

Thus, this havoc wrought by the nuclear armaments has been unprecedented in the annals of mankind. During war even the Civilian population of every Belligerent country suffers as much as the fighting soldiers. War annihilates buildings, properties and means of communication on an immeasurable scale. The entire structure of economic, industrial and social life is sure to be shattered.

Arundhati Roy thus deals with the realistic portrayal of the problems arising out of nuclearisation of India and Abroad. The author plainly states that mankind and civilization are sure to be wiped off in case of another war with nuclear weapons. She is of the opinion that the nuclear matter is a serious matter to any country. So, it should be well thought upon before taking it in force. But unfortunately the nuclear test on 11th May 1998 was a hasty step and was conducted without consulting the army experts, without even a debate in the Parliament.

Arundhati Roy also gives us a glimpse of her real self, the person behind the activist in this essay. The essay shows her to be bold, free and frank writer. She opines that writers must be the voice of the nation. She says that they should not hesitate to expose the corruptions and aberrations of the society in which they live. She daringly protests against nuclearisation:

“If protesting against having a nuclear bomb implanted in my brain is anti-Hindu and anti-national, then I recede. I hereby declare myself an independent, mobile republic. I am a citizen of the earth. I own no territory. I have no flag. I’m female, but have nothing against eunuchs. My policies are simple. I’m willing to sign any Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty or Nuclear Test Ban Treaty that is going. Immigrants are welcome. You can help me design our flag” (p.30).

She welcomes the quality of boldness in every writer. She says that after winning the prestigious award she would have written some more bestsellers or worstsellers as she honestly admits and could have easily settled into the usual routine. But instead she chose to stand up for her beliefs aggressively even at the cost of constant ridicule from the society. “There are other worlds. Other kinds of dreams. Dreams in which failure is feasible. Honourable. Sometimes even worth striving for. Worlds in which recognition is not the only barometer of brilliance or human worth. There are plenty of warriors that I know and love, people far more valuable than myself, who go to war each day, knowing in advance that they will fail. True, they are less ‘successful’ in the most vulgar sense of the word, but by no means less fulfilled. The only dreams worth having is to dream that you will live while you’re alive and die only when you’re dead.

Arundhati Roy feels that only thinkers and authors, poets and philosophers have the prerogative to make people aware of our shortcomings and can herald an upheaval in the realm of our superstitious thinking. She assigns the duty of unfurling the corruptions and aberrations of a nation to the writers.

She is of the opinion that war is not the permanent solution of a problem. One war leads to another. So the Prime Minister's statement after the nuclear test that India's decision to go ahead with the nuclear tests was due to a "deteriorating security environment" has little significance in this regard. So, to Arundhati Roy, only pointing nuclear missiles at Pakistan is not enough to face so many problems like unemployment, poverty, population, casteism and above all bigotry and fundamentalism. She observes:

"Even Pakistan can't be solved by pointing nuclear missiles at Pakistan. Though we are separate countries, we share skies, we share winds, and we share water. Where radioactive fall out will land on any given day depends on the direction of the wind and rain. Lahore and Amritsar are thirty miles apart. If we bomb Lahore, Punjab will burn. If we burn Karachi—then Gujarat and Rajasthan, perhaps even Bombay, will burn. Any nuclear war with Pakistan will be a war against ourselves" (P34)

This shows Roy's universal brotherhood. She proves that a writer is not confined to his nation alone but belongs to all over the world. It is to be noted that modern wars are mostly fought for the sake of fighting. Those are mostly artificial in nature, and people fight because of the whims of the politicians. Soldiers are sacrificed for the so-called national honour or prestige that leads an acrimonious atmosphere between two countries. Roy, especially taking the case of India and Pakistan, says that besides honour or prestige lies a many mis-information and rumours raised by the fanatics of both the sides which lead to so many breaches in our peace and harmony. So, if the barriers of dis-information are broken down, our hostility will change into friendliness.

Thus Arundhati Roy's attitude seems to be dead against the nuclear race of armaments. She harshly satirizes the snobbery and hypocrisy of politics in India. Indian politicians seldom care for the peace and prosperity of general people. They only know how to live upon them and how to grease their own palm. Following the democratic set up, these politicians would even go to the extent of forging artificial identity in case of lack of identity and persuade people to vote for it. Arundhati Roy brings in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and the nuclear bomb instances to show the political process of the search of the nation's identity. Arundhati Roy does not directly find fault with the politicians, rather goes to the nature of our system of centralized government. She says:

"The greater the numbers of illiterate people, the poorer the country and the more morally bankrupt the politicians, the cruder the ideas of what that identity should be. In a situation like this illiteracy is not just sad, it's down right dangerous. However, to be fair, cobbling together a viable pre-digested 'National identity' for

India would be a formidable challenge even for the wise and visionary. Every single Indian citizen could, if he or she wants to claim to belong to some minority or the other. The fissures, if you look for them run vertically, horizontally, layered, whorled, circular, spiral inside out and outside in”(p 39-40).

Roy also gives a poor opinion about the diplomacy of Mrs. Indira Gandhi who injected the venom into our political veins and invented our particular local brand of political expediency. It is she who showed us how to conjure enemies out of thin air, to fire and at phantoms that she had carefully fashioned for that very purpose. She also “discovered the benefits of never burying the dead, but preserving their putrid carcasses and trundling them out to worry old wounds when it suited her” (P.41)

“And what about BJP? It is just the spectre of Mrs. Indira Gandhi –‘a spectre that fed and reared itself in the political spaces and communal suspicion that the Congress nourished and cultivated “(p.43).

Arundhati Roy, a great observer of men and manner, makes a fine comparison between the BJP and Mrs. Indira Gandhi. She says: “While Mrs. Gandhi played hidden games with politicians and their parties, she received shrill convent school rhetoric, replete with tired platitudes, to address the general public. The BJP, on the other hand, has chosen to light its fires directly on the streets and in the homes and hearts of people. It is prepared to do by day what the Congress would only do by night.”(P.43).

This shows that Arundhati Roy has a poor opinion about the Indian political activities. She firmly believes that most of ills of India can be mended if the politicians of the nation know their duties and devote themselves to the progress of the country. But Roy feels that only the reverse of this happens in today’s India. Today’s politicians divorce the milestone and rarely sacrifice their lives on the altar of the nation.

Arundhati Roy expresses a great love and sympathy to the tribal people who are ill-treated – oppressed, cheated, robbed of their lands and discarded like surplus good by the state and its minions. She says that the tribal people are the real inhabitants of the country. Hence the government of India should always pay a heed to the causes of their welfare, security and development. The government could make a public undertaking that more dams like the Sardar Sarovar on the Narmada will not be built, that more people will not be homeless, that they should not be devoid of their original homeland, the forest. But

unfortunately, the government has turned a deaf ear to their several demands. The author says:

“But, of course that would be unconceivable, would n’t it? Why? Because it’s impractical. Because tribal people do not really matter. Their histories, their customs, their duties are dispensable. They must learn to sacrifice these things for the great good of the Nation (that has snatched from them everything they ever had)” (p.46).

Arundhati Roy expresses her anti-nuclear vision in the last part of the essay. It says that India is a country of millions and millions of people who mostly live in the villages. They have the right to get themselves acquainted with the nuclear blast. But surprisingly enough no body has informed them about anything. Really this is the greatest horror in a country like India that believes in the theory of democracy. Arundhati Roy ferociously flings her anguished reaction to the government in particular and the whole democratic system in general:

“Who the hell conducted those opinion polls? Who the hell is the Prime Minister to decide whose finger will be on the nuclear button that could turn everything we love - our earth, our skies, our mountains, our plains, our rivers, our cities and villages – to ash in an instant? Who the hell is he to reassure us that there will be no accidents? How does he know? Why should we trust him? What has he ever done to make us trust him? What have any of them ever done to make us trust them? (pp. 52-53).

Thus the surmises and prophecies that Arundhati Roy makes in the book is appropriate and inevitable. This dreadful fact is realized by all and sundry, including even those who produce these demonic bombs. What prompts nations to put faiths in its production is mutual suspicion: hatred and fear. So, the real solution of the atomic menace is to change the political climate of the world. And this is exactly what Pt. Nehru did in his life. Moreover, the common man in every nook and corner of the world has to raise his voice against atomic war. Let the peace loving citizens of the world join hands in a crusade against the hellish atomic weapons. They should carry on a worldwide campaign to ban their production and experimentation. The statesman of the world may think in terms of war and new engines of destruction, but the average man in every part of the globe has no interest in fighting. What the common man loves is quiet, secure, peaceful and happy

existence. And this is what should be the principal guide of the politicians and statesman of all over the world.

In short, Arundhati Roy tries to convey in this essay that Science is a blessing when carefully and wisely used and at the same time would turn a curse if used for destructive purposes.

Thus, the essay brings out the anger of the author who feels it her right to voice out her thoughts against the destructive progress of the nation. It very aptly shows the author's anti-nuclear and anti-democratic attitude to the recently conducted nuclear explosion at Pokhran, Rajasthan. It points out the dismay and disgust, death and destruction arising out of the would-be nuclear explosion, which will certainly paralyse and pulverize the holy plan of God.

Questions:

1. Make a critical assessment of Arundhati Roy's *The End of Imagination*.
2. Comment critically on the kind of vision that Arundhati Roy brings out in *The End of Imagination*.
3. Examine Arundhati Roy as a great champion for the cause of peace and prosperity with special reference to *The End of Imagination*.
4. Comment on the prose style of Arundhati Roy.

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J.P. Das' *Absurd Drama*

Introduction:

Jagannatha Prasaada Daasa, popularly known as J.P.Das is an Oriyan Writer. Many of his creative works which cover the different genres of literature like poetry, short stories, plays, novels, children's fiction and so on have been translated into English. He was born in an Orissa Village in the year 1936. He grew up there and did his schooling and college in the small town of Cuttack. He was in Allahabad for his post graduate studies and did his master's degree there. After that he served as a lecturer in the Allahabad University for a year. Later he joined the Indian Administrative Service and did various odd jobs in Orissa and in Delhi. After 20 years of service, he took off to research for a book on Orissan paintings. This is the period, which helped him in analyzing and reflecting on his life. When he was forty-seven, he left the I.A.S and started on his literary career.

J.P.DAS began his creative writing by attempting at poetry, which was published in school and college magazines. After a gap of 15 years, he restarted his literary works, and his juvenile outpourings were published in the form of a book. In 1971, he brought out his first collection of Poems, *Pratham Purush*. Das is now the author of nine collections of poems, five collections of short stories, four plays, a historical novel and a book of poems for children.

He wrote his first full-length play *Before the Sunset* in 1972. This play has only four characters and the play with Om Puri playing the role of the protagonist did well in Delhi. This play, originally written in Oriya, was translated into English and was later published in Enact magazine. His last play written in 1994 is about the early missionaries in Orissa in the early 19th century. Das' other translated works include *First Person, Love is a Season, Timescapes, Silences, Absurd Play, Before the Sunset, The Underdog Plays, The Magic Deer, The Spider's Web*, and so on.

Das started writing fiction rather late in his life and his first short story *Words*, called *Shabdbhed* in the original became very famous. This short story is about a poet and poetry. His famous short story collection *The Pucca Sahib and Other Stories* holds the reader in thrall. In these short stories, J.P.Das is "the quintessential raconteur

with an instinctive mastery of the form that this genre imposes”. He has drawn the material for these stories, from his own experiences in the “bizarre and often grotesque world of bureaucracy as much as from the solid everyday world of middle class India”. Das’ other short story collections include *The Forbidden Street and Other Stories*, *In My End is My Beginning* and so on.

J.P.Das, besides writing poetry, short stories and plays has also set his hands on children’s verses. His children’s verses have been published in two collections called *Odds and Ends*. He himself translated some of his children’s verses and nonsense verses.

Absurd Play is written in the year 1989 and J.P.Das challenges the strategies of traditional drama here. The play has postmodernistic leanings in it and moves away from the conventional mode of writing plays. This play like Das’ many other literary works was originally written in Oriya and was later translated into English.

Absurd Play consists of a play within the play. It exhibits the metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of human existence. The play consists of only three predominant characters namely the Middle Aged Man, Clock Setr and an American Robot. J.P.Das using this minimum number of characters focuses on the instability, absurdity and unpredictability of human life. He questions in the play, the human tendency to analyze life on the basis of the theory of cause and effect.

J.P.Das, in writing about the meaningless existence of human beings has come closer to the very famous writers like Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee and so on. He brings in a pessimistic vision of humanity who are struggling vainly to find a purpose for living. He portrays the world as a world full of pain and frustration that offers no hope to the people. He portrays the contemporary world as a materialistic and corrupt world that has lost all hope and is ready for its doomsday. The play brings out the absurdist dilemmas by abandoning established dramatic techniques. It foregrounds the painful awareness of the futility of human endeavour and prudence through the confrontation between human reason and the inexplicable silence of the cosmos.

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