

# **INDIAN CULTURE THROUGH LITERATURE**

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**INDIAN CULTURE THROUGH LITERATURE**

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Sri Aurobindo - 'The Renaissance in India'  
A.K Ramanujan - 'Where Mirrors are Windows'  
Michel Danino - 'Effects of Colonisation'

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## UNIT - I : PROSE

### Lesson 1.1 - 'Renaissance in India' – Shri Aurobindo

#### Structure

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#### 1.1.1 Objectives

- (i) To introduce renaissance as a rationalistic approach to life
- (ii) To critically understand the different phases of Indian Renaissance
- (iii) To locate the nexus between Indian spirituality and knowledge forms

#### 1.1.2 Introduction

In this essay Shri Aurobindo rises the need for Renaissance in the Indian context. His four essays advocate that Renaissance of India must be of forms and not of the spirit. The author discusses the declining state of Indian spirit and attributes it to the stagnation of creative faculty. Shri Aurobindo traces the culturally significant historic past deeply embedded in spirituality which he believes will revive the Indians.

#### 1.1.3 Author Introduction

##### Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950)

Aurobindo Ghose a freedom fighter, philosopher, poet and seer was a man of many dimensions. This versatile persona propounded the spiritual

philosophy of evolution of divine life on earth and worked towards attaining it.

Aurobindo was born on August 15, 1872 in Calcutta to Krishna Dun Ghose a surgeon and Swarnalatta Devi. His father, a former member of the Brhamo Samaj was fascinated by the Western ideas of evolution and development and wanted his children to be anglophiles. Raj Narayan Bose, the famous Bengali writer and nationalist was Aurobindo's maternal grandfather. Aurobindo had two elder brothers Benoybhusan and Manmohan, a younger sister, Sarojini, and a younger brother, Barindra Kumar. Aurobindo's father was keen on educating his children in schools run by Christian missionaries. As a result, Aurobindo began his formal education at a Christian convent in Darjeeling and later completed his schooling in London. During his stay in London he got admitted to King's College, Cambridge and emerged as a distinguished scholar well versed in European Classics. In order to fulfill his father's desire Aurobindo qualified the ICS examinations. In 1893, on his return to India from England, he secured a position in Baroda State Service. Being proficient in languages he dabbled at odd jobs like teaching French and Grammar before he was appointed as the Vice Principal of Boroda College. At Baroda, Aurobindo learnt Sanskrit, Bengali and travelled widely to acclimatize himself with the political upheaval the nation was confronting. After his marriage with Mirinalini in 1901 he moved to Calcutta. In 1906, after joining the Bengal National College Aurobindo became an active member of revolution. Being a fierce advocate of Swadesh and Swaraj, Aurobindo also edited the daily *Bande Mataram* in which he voiced his opinions. In 1908, he got involved in the Alipore Bomb Case and was sentenced for two years. During his imprisonment he experimented with meditation and yogic practices. After his release in 1910, in order to escape warrant and charges of sedition for an article he had published in his magazine *Karmayogin* Aurobindo fled from the British settlement and sought refuge in the then French colony Pondicherry. In 1926 he started an ashram where his quest for finding a divine life on earth and practicing integral yoga could be attained. His distinguished prose works include *The Life Divine*(1919), *The Synthesis of Yoga*(1948), *Secrets of the Vedas*, *Essays on the Gita*(1922), *The Human Cycle*(1949), *The Ideal of Human Unity*(1918), *Renaissance in India and other essays* (1953), *Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*(1973), *The Future of Poetry*(1953) and several volumes of letters. His Magnum Opus "Savitri- a legend and a Symbol" (1940) was compiled in blank verse.



Aurobindo acknowledged that his principles and writings were influenced by *Upanishads* and *Gita*. Peter Heehs states that “Aurobindo’s ‘integral yoga’ sees freedom from the world as the first step of transformation of the world into a vessel of the divine being consciousness-bliss (sat-chit-ananda)” (119) – the Brahman. He philosophised that the Supermind is the causative agent that alters the monotonous livelihood into a ‘Life Divine’. The super mind serves as the link between the ineffable Bhraman and the established world order. The transcendental quality of his work strives to understand the realms of spirituality and are interspersed with metaphysical tendencies.

In 1926, Aurobindo announced retirement and confined him to seclusion handing over the charges to his spiritual collaborator Mirra Alfassa. He died in 1950 due to Uremia.

#### 1.1.4 Summary

The series of four essays entitled “The Renaissance in India” (1918) was expressed as an appreciation of James H. Cousins’ book of the same title. Aurobindo asserts that Renaissance in the Indian context should concentrate on recovering the spiritual knowledge of the past and experience it holistically.

Aurobindo begins with the question as to whether there is really a renaissance in India. He infers that the answer lies in comprehending the meaning of renaissance and realising its potential in the future. Aurobindo staunchly declares that the European sense of Renaissance is not possible in India. It resembles the Celtic movement in Ireland that strived to reawaken the national spirit by finding a new impulse of self-expression which subsequently reshaped the spiritual force. As a result the ‘giant Shakti’ who is shackled by the recent past has to be awakened into a ‘new environment’. Despite the claim that India has always been ‘awake’, a catastrophic phase in the early eighteenth and nineteenth century and the ‘superimposed’ Western ways of life have urged this ‘reawakening’. To accomplish this objective, various factors including (i) the rich Indian past, (ii) ancient spirit of the nation and (iii) spirituality have to be taken into consideration. The essayist deems that in the initial phases, when the Western incursions were pilfering the country’s material resources, it was Indian spirituality that rescued the ‘national vitality’ and sustained the nation’s soul and body during critical times. He further states that any other nation other than India would not have withstood the catastrophe

and 'perished soul and body' long ago. He reflects that though India will retain her 'characteristic spirit' it will undergo a mammoth transformation in the fields of art, culture, literature, philosophy and politics. Aurobindo affirms that the new Indian renaissance will be "forms not contradictory of the truths of life which the old expressed, but rather expressive of those truths restated, cured of defect completed." (5)

Aurobindo avers that the European writers enthralled by the philosophical inclinations, spiritual intuitions and romantic fervor of Indian mind were motivated to write about the idealistic Indian spirit. Consequently, the Indians who were initially imitating their Western masters started to liberate themselves and proudly celebrated their rich sagacious past. Once they discern this, the writers did realise the false opinion that they had been led into. In addition to the Indian spirit, Spirituality is the key element of introducing myriad perspectives to the native. According to Aurobindo the nation is conscientiously conveying the message that the manifestation of the 'physical' can be realised in totality only when it is positioned in relation to the 'supra-physical.' Once man attains this he is capable of exceeding the power he has been authorised with. The past is defined by spirituality, but this abundance should not be a confused grandeur. A strong intellectual impetus structured and characterised by quest for inner law and truth is the third power of ancient Indian spirit.

The author expresses that India has been governed by Dharma and Shastra. While the first period of Indian past focussed on the discovery of Spirit, the second period was engrossed in the discovery of Dharma and the third epoch expounded the intricacies of Shastras. All these three elements coexisted harmoniously with each other in creating ancient Indian culture. During the third phase there was a tremendous proclivity in the intellectual spheres of knowledge. This led to the formation of a 'dominant spirituality' which boasted of "an inexhaustible vital creativeness and gust of life, and mediating between them, a powerful, penetrating and scrupulous intelligence combined of the rational, ethical and aesthetic mind each at a high intensity of action, created the harmony of the ancient Indian culture." (10) The Buddhistic and illusionist denial of life was a feature that fascinated the Europeans. The ideals of Indian mind incorporated both the extremes, indulgence as well as abstinence, stereotyping caste simultaneously while denying caste, monarchy vis-à-vis democracy, spiritual experiences balanced by sensuousness complemented

each other and coevolved in synchrony. The subsistence of extreme binaries resulted in synthetic impulses.

Despite the imprints of the past, one has to look beyond the metaphysical abstractions prevalent in Indian spirit. Spiritual realisation is the crucial feature of the nation's past. The spiritual age through discerning sensibilities and inner experience is a significant phase. The loss of vital energy, quick depletion of rational and creative intuition followed by diminishing spirituality marks the 'movements of retrogression' that consequently led to decline of old civilization.

In this stage, where perfect spiritualisation was waning away the Indian populace were influenced heavily by European ways of lifestyle and culture. Any lesser civilisation in its mimetic practices would have submitted itself to the alien rule, but in the Indian context the spiritual energy though dormant was not yet absolutely inept. This annihilation of European influences resulted in the rise of Indian renaissance.

Taking all these dynamics into consideration, the author insists that destiny of Indian renaissance can only be accomplished by (i) Salvaging the spiritual the ancient spiritual knowledge and experience in its entirety (ii) channelising spirituality into forms of art & knowledge systems and (iii) situating spirituality and Indian spirit in the light of modernity.

## II

The second essay delineates the three phases of the renaissance. The first stage is the response to the European stimulus - a re-examination and blatant repudiation of the ideologies of the past. The second period is a reaction, occasionally with a rejection of what Europe offered and accommodation of the national past. The third phase denotes a process of new creation which is in the process of initial stages. In the light of Indian spirit, the attempt to devise a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is complicated.

Unlike Japan, a swift transformation in terms of modernity is not possible in the Indian context. Only with a reflective and introspective nature can she effortlessly move forward. This resolution and determination will prompt her to the formation of a new human civilisation. A panorama of quick transformation and new modernised India was the vision of the early generation of radicals. Though, they valourised ancient India they couldn't comprehend the essence of Indian spirit in its original sense. The

idea of an anglicised India was neither possible nor necessary. It revived a creative thinking of mind that expedited critical inquiry, fusing old and new ideas thus revalidated the past with novel perspectives.

Aurobindo further draws our attention to the fact that the parochial nature of westernised thinking which devalued the past glory was disappearing. Indian scholars like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Tagore in their works were attempting a new interpretation of Indian spirit. Philosopher Vivekananda through his actions was reacting to this subjugation not by rejecting the past instead by fusing the Indian spirit. But Aurobindo is not content with this incongruous assimilation of Indian and Western sensibilities. He alleges that India has to reclaim its indigenous spirit and integrate Indianness that has traversed over ages. The active acknowledgement about the uniqueness of new Indian signifies the burgeoning of renaissance in India.

### III

Aurobindo's third essay proposes an outline of some of the movements and figures of the renaissance, while directing to the possibilities lying ahead. In the new phase of renaissance, the spiritual impetus of India is undoubtedly the dominant force. By spirituality Aurobindo refers to the Indian Metaphysical thinking (different from the European ways) that will pave way for an 'intellectual approach' which in turn will lead towards a path of 'spiritual realisation.'

He states that all great movements in India, in particular rise of Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj was grounded in spirituality and has a sacred motive. Their motive was to comprehend the 'native tendency of Indian mind.' Brahmo Samaj was a confluence of Vedantic inspiration, religious rationalism and intellectualism. It was established with the notion of restating the Vedanta practices which was founded on the Janna, Bhakti and Karma principles that rule the Indian religious structure. The Arya Samaj recontextualized Vedic ideologies to modern lifestyle. The Ramakrishna- Vivekananda movement intended to synchronize the past spiritual practices with philanthropic and missionary fervour. This Hindu revivalism bolstered ancient sects inclusive of Islamic religion. Aurobindo considers this predisposition toward 'return of spirit upon life' as the key of Indian renaissance. But, the outcome of this New India is unproductive. He considers that Indian aesthetics will gain momentum only if it concentrates on spiritual experience rather than

critical acumen. Instead of exploring new milieu of thoughts there must be a propensity to Indianise modern ideas.

Aurobindo then examines the growth and impact of art, poetry & literature in Bengal and how its intuitive choices furthered the process of self-discovery. Poetry and Literature in Bengal were affected by Western influences. The works of Bankim Chandra and Tagore have initiated novel ways of approaching the future.

He pronounces that despite the chaotic political environment and the prevailing uncertainty looming large, the initial period of artificial imitation of the West is nearing an end and Indian patriotism was gaining the much-needed stimulus. But, the new forms of patriotism are feeble, it will become powerful once it firmly basis itself in culture. This revival of conservative practices and the renovation of Indian spirit is possible only in a liberated space. It is imperative to clarify how renaissance is governed by spirituality.

Aurobindo rationalizes that spirituality cannot be bound within the confines of dogmas or any particular faith. According to him, Indian culture advocates a spirituality which aimed at fullness and inclusivity. It upholds the view that man through his mind, life and body should aim for holistic development. Man must perceive the infinite and greater reality that operates behind all things. This attitude gives a distinct sense to life and alter our perceptions. The mental, vital, aesthetic and ethical parts are expressions of the spirit and as they develop, they make man complete and fulfilled. Intuition and Inner experience, the major facets of spirituality must be understood in relation with the supreme Truth. By doing so, science surpasses the state of being mere physical knowledge and explores new research opportunities. Art and poetry are viewed as sources that reveal the transcendental nature of man and divulge deepest spiritual and universal beauty. Other branches of knowledge inclusive of politics, society, economy also become a means via which man can pursue his search for self and God. Spirituality can be experienced and realised in every aspect of life.

The author stresses that Europe is trying to move beyond the limitations of its past and we should not let our cultural Independence to be stifled by the Europeans. Both Indians and Europeans have had their own downfall. Europe is rectifying her mistake by admitting the wisdom of the East yet at the same time is not abandoning her own truth of life, science and

social values. India too should be as faithful as European powers while contemplating the Indian spirit and modern influence. Indians should strive to be more spiritual than our ancestors.

#### IV

Finally, in the fourth essay, he once again ruminates that the best course of action to India lies in being herself, recovering her native genius, which is a reassertion of its ancient spiritual ideal. Aurobindo emphasises that renaissance can be realised only in terms of 'the principle of spirituality.' The future of India and the world lies in "the knowledge and conscious application of the ideal". He cogitates that India can progress by following the law of her own nature. Religion should not be understood in provincial terms of having ruined the Indian spirit, rather it should be understood in a wider sense. The panacea for all ill labouring human race lies in the ancient knowledge of Indian. The destiny of Indian renaissance can be determined when the nation using the past knowledge and spirituality rises to occasion and seizes her opportunity for the cause of greater good. Whether she can rise up to this task or not is a question that he leaves open.

#### 1.1.5 Short answers

1. According to Aurobindo how does Spirituality play a major role in shaping Indian Renaissance?

Aurobindo asserts that Renaissance in the Indian context is different from the Western realisations of the term. He considers India as a giant Shakti awakening to new forces. In such an environment the nation should free itself from Western influences and adhere to the rich cultural heritage of the past and Spirituality to attain complete Renaissance. Spirituality has been the spirit that everytime united the nation and confronted adverse circumstances. India unlike other nations has survived through ages with the essential spirit. The stagnation of this spirit will be a threat to India's progress. The essential spirit is transforming itself by accommodating new 'philosophical, artistic, literary, cultural, political, social forms' in order to rejuvenate the nation. This new spirit while clinging to the old values will also reinstate the new dimensions of the nation. Aurobindo critiques that Indians had remained as mere 'learners and imitators' of the West who failed to see the remarkable



metaphysics of their religion and literature. He strongly believes that spirituality is the 'master-key' of Indian mind. With the aid of this spirituality India has witnessed the magnitude of 'material laws and forces' and made man realise the power of surpassing his own capabilities. She perceives the innumerable gods beyond man, and the overwhelming eternity that spread beyond Gods in a nutshell Indian spirituality inculcates the wisdom to look beyond the infinite possibilities of life and the manifestations of spirit. Her intuition guides human beings to realise that anything is possible. It also implies that a man with his knowledge and will can master his mind, become one with the spirit and attain the eminence of god. By turning out to be one with God a human can finally become the 'ineffable Brahman' and transcend volatile hierarchies. Aurobindo attributes that the psychic tendency, idealism, yogic practices and insight extant in Indian spirituality had made her reach out to the infinite and possess it. Indian spirituality has not been flourishing in the void. Indian spirituality searches for the inner truth and is grounded on 'dharma'. The discovery of spirit, the discovery of dharma and the formulation of shastras are vital stages of Indian spirituality. The opulent past of the ancient Indian culture is an amalgamation of the spirituality and creativeness that is mediated by rationality and intelligence. India's spiritual tendencies by far are influenced by the rich intellectual tradition. Spirituality does not thrive in an 'impoverished soil', such spirituality exposed to dangerous reaction will turn out to be a morbid one. Spirituality blossoms only in a situation where a race has lived prosperously intellectually and materialistically. Unlike the rich heritage of Indian spirituality, European spirituality has only begun its journey. The Europeans appropriate Indian spirituality with the Buddhistic notion of abnegation of life. They fail to understand that this branch philosophy in its entirety. This tendency to view Indian philosophy in one direction without comprehending its nature to indulge in a 'fine excess' is rather derisory. Indian spirituality fathomed in its 'fullness of detail' ultimately directs one to attain profound knowledge. Indian spirituality in its quest for supradivine attempts to understand divine nature and explore what lies beyond nature. Its 'spiritual atheism' and 'materialistic atheism' a by-product of 'intellectual curiosity' results in formulation of idealism/ethicism. Self-assertion of human spirit, self-abnegation, dependence, self-

submission and self-giving are the principles of Indian mind. The spiritual extremisms do not hinder enjoyment and sensuous experiences. Indian spirituality strives to demonstrate that Indian mind is ethical in nature and does not embrace chaos. The extremes instead of creating disorder is channelled by 'synthetical tendency' that results in harmony of 'intellectual, ethical and aesthetic order'. Indian spirituality is not one dimensional, rather manifold. Aurobindo insists that the first phase of India's eminence is a 'spiritual age' in which she sought to grasp the nature and truth of 'existence'. The spiritual tendency does not restrict itself to the pursuit of the abstract but also embraces diversities of thought and fullness of life. Despite various schools of thought and philosophies, Indian philosophy proclaims that the aesthetic, emotion and sensuous would eventually reach the 'service of the spiritual.' With the decline of intellectual activity spirituality has reached a state, where there is no longer a desire to spread the knowledge of former times, but only 'certain spiritual truths' are highlighted while the others are ignored. The reclamation of spiritual knowledge is possible only by understanding it in its full splendour and depth. The undercurrent of spirituality must manifest itself in new fields of knowledge and endeavour to generate a spiritualised society that will approach problems from an Indian perspective.

2. What are the three phases of Renaissance?

Rebirth or Renaissance involves three stages. In Aurobindo's view, in the first phase there is either a complete disavowal or an attempt to assimilate the essential facets of West with the nation's past. During this period, renaissance is in its nascent stages where the Indian mind reigns supreme, reclaims its truth and accepts the essential facets of modernity. When amended, the foreign elements disappear and become Indianised almost resembling Goddess Shakti. Unlike Japan, India cannot swiftly transform and assimilate because she has to consider things deeply and only a profound understanding of the problems will make her move forward. Even this modification does not fall in on the lines of Western modernism but this renovation becomes an original contribution towards the upcoming of civilisation.

In this phase, the Western educated Indian intellectuals visualise a modernised India but they perceive the country's past as only 'half- civilised' and are influenced largely by the Western ideals.



They overrule the substantial accomplishments of the Medieval period in India and focus on the ancient past. The intellectuals do not grasp the essence and spirit of the ancient past and still extol the Western sensibility. Subsequently they adhere to primitive forms of rationalised religious structure and valorise literature based on the English archetypes ignoring other arts and values. This attempt to fashion an 'anglicised India' is a set back to the Indian spirit. Nevertheless it resuscitates the intelligence that is dormant till then. The desire for reclaiming past knowledge becomes a pivotal force, secondly it makes the intellectuals to view the modern ideas with the wisdom of old culture and finally visualize things in a new perspective. Therefore in the first period though the ancient culture is underrated, there is an impulse to reconsider.

The second period aims at the 'recovery of national poise' by countering the anglicising tendencies with the past national heritage and Indian spirit. Among the Indian intellectual thinkers, then only a few of them are clinging to the Western influences most of them have altered their perceptions and accept the Indian spirit despite its form and move towards fashioning Indian interpretations of modernity. Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Tagore are considered as the pioneers of this stage of evolution. During this time amid flows of conflicting undercurrents, a 'synthetical restatement' of fusing the old and the new had evolved. Vivekananda was an exemplar in reconstructing and preserving the past and the present. The evolution of the new Indian art as one that integrates the essence of Indian spirit and its sensibilities gives a ray of hope in the journey of attaining renaissance.

The third phase of renaissance rests on the need for a new creation.

3. Trace the factors that influenced the rise of 'Great Movements' in India?

In the Indian context, spirituality was not an inaccessible metaphysical concept. Indian metaphysics was entirely different from the influence of Modern European philosophies. In India all movements have evolved with 'spiritual thought' and 'new religious activity'. The Indian perception was that modernization must spring from a spiritual basis and adhering to religious principles. The Brahmo Samaj had from its beginning a cosmopolitan view and was diverse in choosing materials and fusing them. This organisation aimed to combine Vedantic influences similar to the European Unitarianism. The original motive of Brahmo Samaj was

to reiterate the Vedanta on the lines of Jnana, Bhakti and Karma, the introspective and philosophical spiritual outlook.

The Arya Samaj set up in Punjab attempted towards realising the truth in Vedanta and endeavoured to apply Vedic doctrines to modern lifestyle. The movements lead by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda synthesised religious and spiritual experiences carefully with a resilient humanitarian fervour and missionary association. Aurobindo avers that in then India there was a tendency to revitalize religious factions which would gradually lead to a self-affirmation of the Indian spirit and spirituality. Akin to Hinduism, Islam too was returning to its original Islamic thinking. He believes that this attempt to recover its past and realise spiritual thoughts will bear fruit only in the future. In this connection there has been resurgence of old forms, new studies and convalescence which has become the distinguishing feature of new India. The key of Indian renaissance lies in understanding the 'depths of a released spirituality which will show itself again in a pervading return of spirituality upon life'.

Aurobindo critiques that the governing principles of new India has not yet fully emerged and in a state of obscurity. Indian philosophy has been the threshold for spiritual knowledge yet it hadn't resulted in any new creation. The influence of European philosophes also had not amended the poise of India spirituality. The philosophy of Nietzsche, Bergson and James was comprehensible only to a few elite minds and was inexplicable to the Indian spirit. Contrasting to the Western philosophy that evolved through scientific knowledge and critical acumen, Indian philosophy can spring only from spiritual experiences.

4. Substantiate Aurobindo's view that Bengal is the storehouse of original Indian art, literature and poetry.

Unlike in the sphere of philosophy, India had left indelible marks in the fields of poetry, literature art and science. Aurobindo cogitated Bengal as a model terrain where original body of work in the above mentioned fields was produced. Since Bengal art was based on "immediate intuition" he considered that Bengali painters excelled in their artistic craftsmanship and credited them for being far superior to Bankim or Tagore. He located the evolution of new literatures during the period of Western influence. Aurobindo states that excepting for the celebrated paintings of Ravi Verma, Indian art remained dormant. The writers and artists in Bengal artist

excelled, because their works embraced the Indian spirit and were profound in nature. The embryonic stages of Poetry and Literature in Bengal was heavily influenced by the Western artistic canons, resulting in the production of exceptional artists. But the authors were perceptive enough not to imitate the Europeans but assimilate their sterling qualities to suit the Bengali temperament. Despite this effort, the Bengali's were not able to achieve the form and grace of their poetical expression in a foreign language/form and therefore couldn't achieve greatness. Aurobindo comments that the works of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath have greatly impacted the present and foreshadow the rise of 'imaginative and intuitive literature of a new Indian type'.

5. How does society and politics impact spirituality?

Aurobindo staunchly avers that in order to attain complete renaissance the ancient spirit must integrate the soul of Indian nation into a new energy zone. The Indian mind, under the control of Western directions has placed spirituality and intellect on diametrically opposite planes. They have been considered as two distinct principles. The aforesaid argument might lead to the fallacy that India will be compelled to align with the obscure and metaphysical thereby abandoning its pursuit of modernity and reason. Therefore India needs to be guided by doctrines of spirituality in order to achieve renaissance.

According to Aurobindo, one has to realise that the Indian spirituality never in its entirety advocates one to pursue an ascetic life. Indian spirituality cannot be limited to a particular faith. By embracing diversities, Spirituality must be a pathway to comprehend the Greater self and integrate the human values with the divine.

Aurobindo draws attention to the fact that ancient Indian culture was keen on cultivating a strong mind and body which in turn paved way for a better critical sensibility and facilitated progress in philosophy and arts. He further states that in the past, India never suffered from the pangs of poverty and hunger and was rich in its administrative strategies and social policies. Aurobindo is certain that the new India even under these trying circumstances will evolve into a nation greater than its own past.

6. Write a short note on the Spiritual Culture advocated by Aurobindo.  
The spiritual perspective considers that mind, life and body are just

the means and not aims of human beings. It views mind, life and body not as whole being but as a manifestation of the external self. Spiritual view not only limits itself to man and the world, but looks beyond and within it. It aims towards a soul searching journey of the divine within the human. Spirituality makes one see through falsities and harmonises thought and life with all fellow beings. Spiritual culture alters ones perception and views thing in a new light. Aurobindo avers that the spiritual practices guided by ethics would eventually draw one near to God and will open new avenues of research. Art and poetry focus on capturing the elegance of nature and human that in turn spurs imaginative faculty resulting in conceptualising notions of beauty and rationality needed for mankind. Spiritual Culture intends to disseminate the universal truths and informs mankind that politics, society and economy are just facets of life.

#### 1.1.6 Keywords

Indian Renaissance – Holistic Recovery – Spiritual Realisation – Three phases of Renaissance – Integrate Indianness – Solution lies in the recovering the ancient knowledge of the past.

#### 1.1.7 Glossary

Brahman – A supracosmic absolute reality

Renaissance – Revival of culture and art

#### 1.1.8 Self Assessment Question

1. Critically examine the role of spirituality in shaping “Indianess”.
2. In the present scenario with the rapid infiltration of the West, do you think another renaissance is necessary?

#### 1.1.9 References

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## Lesson 1.2 - 'When Mirrors are Windows' - A.K.Ramanujan

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### Structure

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### 1.2.1 Objectives

- (i) To understand the pluralities of Indian Literatures
- (ii) To interpret the notion of reflexivity using literature and epics
- (iii) To familiarize the readers with the alternate traditions and counter narratives.

### 1.2.2 Introduction

A.K.Ramanujan's essay delineates the different forms of Self reflexivity ubiquitous in literature and language. He argues that every work is 'part of a large self-reflexive paradigm' which eventually aids in deconstructing the lexical structures and cultural patterns. A.K.Ramanujan traces the intertextuality prevalent in Greater Tradition, Little Tradition, Countertradition and Alternate Tradition to establish the simultaneous presence and absence of 'order and diversity' and 'openness and closures.' He examines how metaphors and myths abound with self-referential devices, mirrors, shadows and doubles that in turn facilitate a 'language of dissent' to capture the complexities and similitude that co-exists.

### 1.2.3 Author Introduction

#### Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan (1929-1993)

A.K.Ramanujan was a man of many dimensions. An erudite scholar he has made remarkable contributions in the field of linguistics, translation, philology and folklore. His father a Mathematics professor who was passionate about astronomy introduced him to various spheres of knowledge. Growing up in a multilingual household, he developed a penchant for Tamil, Kannada, Sanskrit and English. He began his formal education at Marimallappa's High School and pursued his higher studies at Maharaja College of Mysore. A.K. Ramanujan's father played a pivotal role in shifting his major from Mathematics to English. Pursuing research at the Mysore University, he later became a Fellow at the Deccan College, Pune and earned a Doctoral Degree from Indiana University. This Fullbright Scholar later taught Linguistics at the University of Chicago. He was also a visiting Professor at Harvard and other reputed institutions in the United States. A.K.Ramanujan was a key figure in theorising issues of cultural hybridity, transnational displacement and translation. He galvanised the South Asian Studies Program. His work deliberates the intricacies and possibilities of locating the Indian context vis-à-vis the Western theoretical perspective.

His compendium of works include *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1967), *Poems of Love and War* (1985), *Folktales from India*, *Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages* (1991), *Is There an Indian Way of Thinking? in India Through Hindu Categories* (1990), *Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation* (1966). He translated U.R.Ananthamoorthy's Kannada novel *Samskara* (1976) to English. A.K. Ramanujan a recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship (1983) was conferred the title Padma Shri in by the Indian Government in 1976. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award (1995) posthumously for his book *The Collected Poems*. A.K.Ramanujan passed away in 1993.

### 1.2.4 Summary

A.K.Ramanujan scrutinises the rhetoric of diversities and pluralities of Indian Traditions in Indian texts. He states that Indian Traditions are organised as pan-Indian Sanskritic Great Traditions and many local Little Traditions. This divisive nature of identifying the Great Traditions for the elite and relegating the little Little Traditions for semi or illiterate people of

rural region results in a form of monism which eventually results in cultural imperialism. He argues that the cultural traditions of India, its pluralities and conflicting natures can be comprehended through context sensitivity and reflexivity. In this essay A.K. Ramanujan makes an intertextual reading to concentrate on three related kinds of reflexivities - responsive (co-texts), reflexive (countertexts) and self-reflexive (meta texts).

A.K Ramanujan points out that in the wake of modernity, Indian texts (which were considered to be methodically present in a 'simultaneous order') were read and re-read using the lens of reflexivity. The tradition of reflexivity focusses on originality and autonomy vested within the text. Through mimicry and conflict, reflexive elements subvert and challenge the normative narratives. The essayist reiterates the idea that all traditions should be positioned within a web of intertextuality and civilisations can be realized through the dynamic inter-relations between different traditions, their texts and ideologies. He elucidates the pivotal role of Reflexivities in understanding both order and diversity, openness and closure of civilisations by attempting a dialogic reading of Tamil language's semantics, Tamil classical poetry, Epics and Alternative Traditions.

He maps the Reflexivity patterns across a varied landscape of texts and traditions. He begins with a demonstration of self-reflexivity of linguistic structures using the Tamil language which has reflexive and benefactive elements not only in nouns but also in verb forms. Following this he examines a few *akam* (interior) and *puram* (exterior) – central & complex pairs in Tamil poetry and poetics. In his analysis of the poems by Otalantaiyar (*Ainkurunuru*), Ponmutiyar (*Purananuru*), Kapilar (*Ainkurunuru*), Erumai Veliyanar (*Purananuru*), Veipatiya Kamakkanniyar (*Purananuru*), A.K. Ramanujan observes that though they are written in different genres they share same landscapes, language structure and poetic code. The poems reify the notion that *akam* and *puram* become mirrors and metaphors for each other. These 'ironic juxtapositions' located in a 'shared universe of signifiers' have to be read within the system of presence and absence. Then the poems become part of the larger self-reflexive canvas where one text becomes the context of other texts. Each poem generates a metapoem which subsequently gives rise to antigenres and metagenres. By juxtaposing Maturai Eruttalan Centamputan (*Kuruntokai*) *akam* poem and Kapilar's (*Purananuru*) poem about *puram* he affirms that unlike the earlier examples in the reflexivity, these metapoems transform mirrors into windows. The language, landscape and culture of the region fashions another similar scape which has endless possibilities.



A.K.Ramanujan contends that Indian literatures is an amalgamation of varied literary, religious, sastric, ideological texts. He reinforces the ideas that in order to read Indian Epics and Mythological traditions one has to be perceptive of the intertextual nature of the texts and equip oneself with the varied background and literary cultures from which the texts emanate. The three primary sastra texts kama, artha and dharma figure in Indian mythology in various instances under different labels, this recurrence signifies the 'interanimation' of local meanings and underpins the intertextuality of cultures. Thereby to understand the essence of the text it becomes mandatory to familiarise ourselves with the canon. Once this is accomplished parodying, subverting and gathering knowledge becomes possible in reading Vedic Texts. He corroborates how the image of Siva and Vishnu complement each other in different space and time.

By reading the two epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, he ventures to explicate how stories within stories and self-referential devices proliferate in Indian Classical Literature. A.K.Ramanujan records that more than three hundred versions of *Ramayanas* have been composed. *Ramayanas* become *meta-Ramayanas* which strongly abound with self-references and draw heavily from earlier narratives. The epic narrated from various perspectives and religious traditions despite holding on to the core plot gradually mutates into a language which says different things in different periods and regions.

The folk versions of the epics domesticate and humanize Gods and heroes. He also brings to fore the fact that references from the epics suggests that they were aware of each other. When Hanuman appears in *Mahabharata* he narrates the entire *Ramanyana* to Bhima. When Arjuna listens to Yudishthira's lie he unconsciously is reminded of Rama killing Vali. Both the text cease to be two different entities and coalesce at a certain point.

*Mahabharata* unlike the monogamous relation in *Ramayana* deliberates polyandrous relationship. While discourses on dharmasukmata (subtle nature of dharma- a melange of good and evil) is advocated in *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* focuses on upholding virtue alone. A.K.Ramanujan likens Rama to a hero who cherishes personal integrity (dhrti) and fidelity. While *Mahabharata* teems with legal debates, *Ramayana* questions acts of truth and is replete with doubts and tests. The Hindu tradition is cognizant of 'co-presence and complementarity' of the two texts & characters Rama and Krsna – the different incarnations of Vishnu. To understand the



mechanisms of reflexive nature of the epics the essayist peruses a Sanskrit poem in which young Krsna dreams about his other incarnation Rama. The 'hypnagogic memory' of one's own past incarnation is not only epiphanic but also can be read as an act of mimeses (25). Rama the former incarnation of Krsna becomes a signifier in the new system. A mimetic act that recurs in various ages in several bodies cannot be reduced to an act of imitation but is introspective and opens diverse vantage points.

Furthermore, he mentions that in complex Indian Traditions, different genres project different realities. The co-existence of such contradictions forges a complex civilisation that can be understood through a holistic reading of presence, absences and memory. Reflexivity becomes the key factor that binds various incongruities and paradoxes present in traditions and concocts a new dialogic language for dissent.

### **Alternative Traditions**

Folklore, Bhakti and Tantra are countersystems that subvert Great Traditions. Folktale (part of oral/little tradition) and Bhakti literature share and explore themes, structures and poetics of and across regions and languages. Ingrained in genres that are regional and trans-regional, they reject the superseding Vedic myths. The alternative traditions inscribe myths with laws of locality and tether the local with pan- Indian myths. The esoteric system Tantra too challenges the orthodox traditions and embraces tabooed rituals. The antistructure Tantra inverts, Bhakti subverts and folklore reworks the narrative of brahminical traditions. In reworking caste and gender hierarchies it contests the establishment and establishes its all pervasive nature. Bhakti literature instead of valourising Gods envisions a society in which the upper caste male is lower than the woman and the untouchable saint. The narrative breaks free of every rule set by Manu, codes are rewritten and Gods too suffer the human tribulations. Ramanujan's reading of Nammalvar's poetry and Mahadevyyakka's poems poignantly illustrates how Bhakti literature systematically destabilizes and undermines the dominant systems.

Folklore defies the philosophies of high culture and pays little heed to the conception of karma. Folklore becomes a medium to interrogate the supremacy of Gods, ordinary women outwit the powerful, subjugated mythical figures like Sita transfigure into a ferocious warrior. In the South Indian myths the goddess is the chief character who guides male gods. The female deity is powerful, indomitable and embodies fury. The deities

personify akam and puram, the village God a human by nature ascends and acquires Godly stature while the consort Goddess diminishes to mere human. The sabotaging of patriarchy and authority with defiance is conceivable only in folktales. Reflexive humour is an essential feature of Folktales.

### Conclusion

The doubles, mirrors and shadows are fundamental elements of Indian Myth and stories. By acutely examining a wide array of traditions, iconic and non-iconic texts A.K.Ramanujan brings out the reflexivity and intertextuality of the texts that accentuates the need to incorporate diverse narrative emerging from plural cultures across ages that go into the making of Indian Traditions

#### 1.2.5 Short Notes

1. How does A.K.Ramanujan argue that Indian Literature is diverse?

A.K. Ramanujan strongly avers that Indian literature is not one but a compilation of many literatures, Indian literature abounds with plurality. He reiterates Wallace Stevens' opinion that subject changes when style changes, therefore writing in different Indian languages/ styles will eventually produce diverse subjects. He negates that view that a particular person/ language /myth /ritual might signify the whole culture. This 'holographic view' results in a uniform texture devoid of discontinuities and negations. Though this is quite attractive, this view is insular and condenses all traditions, great and little into one. A.K. Ramanujan is against this monoism or cultural imperialism and asserts that cultural traditions in Indian are intricately plural and are based on context-sensitivity and reflexivity. In his view, bhakti traditions, tribal traditions and folklores are all responses to each other. These single entities are co-related and engage in continuous dialogic divisions.

2. What are the three kinds of Reflexivity that A.K.Ramanujan emphasizes on?

Awareness of self and other, mirroring, distorted mirroring, parody, resemblances, variance, dialectics, antistruktures, utopias, dystopias and ironies are various forms of Reflexivities. In his analysis of intertextuality in Indian literary texts, A.K.Ramanujan focuses on three kinds of reflexivity (1) Responsive – Where one text responds to another and defines each other: co-texts (2) Reflexive – where

one text reflects on another text and relates directly or indirectly: countertexts (3) Self-Reflexive – where a text reflects on itself: metatexts. Indian Literatures encompassing various languages and dialects generate ‘families of text’ and also individual texts that form ‘a simultaneous order’. With the inception of modernity and the arrival of printing press original ideas and notions of autonomy have become effective. Reflexivities play an important role in comprehending diversities, openness and closures

3. How does A.K.Ramanujan situate self-reflexivity of Tamil Language using Tamil classical poetry?

Tamil language has surplus reflexive features both in its verb and noun forms. A.K.Ramanujan illustrates this reflexive/benefactive opposition quality of Tamil language using pairs of terms in Tamil poetry namely *akam* and *puram* –interior and exterior. In order to signify the ‘responsive’ correlative nature of the language, A.K. Ramanujan critically juxtaposes poems from *Ainkurunuru* and *Purananuru* and comes to a consensus that the poems despite written in varied contexts share same language, imagery, poetic code and similitude to convey different meanings. The different universes of war and love are reflexive of one another. Reading poems from *Narrinai* (*palai* – desert setting) against poem from *Puranauru* (*vakai*- battlefields, victory and deaths), the author reinforces that *akam* and *puram* are reflexive and serve as metaphors of each other. The irony in their collocation becomes powerful in such environment. The poems reverberate with ‘absent presence’. Pathasarathy reinforces McGann’s perspective that in spite of a linear reading a ‘radial reading’ occurs when the reader responds to the presence and absence (15). One poem becomes the context of another and relates with others. Eventually such poems give rise to metapoems and challenge the structural pattern. The genres too beget ‘antigenres and metagnres’. Using *Maturai Ruttalan Centamputan*’s song from *Kuruntokai* and *Kabilar*’s song on *Pari* from *Purananuru* he signifies that metapoems are reflexive in nature and cut across genres. This tendency facilitates the mirrors to become windows. A.K.Ramanujan also brings in instances of comic love poems from *Kalitokai* and *Bhakti* poems that speaks volumes of love and devotion to Gods. He opines that the classical poetic tradition of *akam* and *puram* have flourished largely owing to the reflexivity of various orders inbuilt in them. This enables the

fashioning of a new language, landscape and culture using the Tamil region, its semantics and culture. Therefore reflexivity expedites the creation of infinite possibilities using limited means.

4. "Reflexivity binds traditions together and gives them common yet creative language for dissent" – Discuss this statement with reference to Indian epics

Self-referential techniques and elements of intertextuality are conspicuous features of Indian epics. *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have been translated in various Indian languages.

More than three hundred versions of *Ramayana* exists and when we consider *Ramayana* written or recited in the regional languages, usually more than one version of the *Ramanyana* is prevalent. This gradually gives rise to comparisons between different styles of the text and in a later phase become *meta –Ramayanas*. In *Adhyama Ramayana* composed in the 11 C, when Rama deters Sita from entering the forest, Sita tells him that no *Ramayana* has ever existed without Sita accompanying Rama during his exile. Such self-references present in various editions and renditions of *Ramayana* confer autonomy while implicitly making it a component of a series bearing similitude. The Jain *Ramayanas* and Folk *Ramayanas* essentially use the story of Rama to convey different messages during different periods. There are references to each other texts and themselves. Indian epics also have a tradition where the poet/author (here Valmiki) in the prologue narrates the tale which lead him to compose the epic. Valmiki sees a hunter shoot a pair of birds and curses the hunter. While cursing, he realises that his words have particular metre and thus transcribes the epic in the same metre. In *Ramayana*, Uttarakanda/Uttararamayana, the pregnant Sita is taken care at Valmiki's hermitage and Valmiki teaches *Ramayana* to Sita's twin sons. The young princes unaware of their

origin recite this to King Rama and at this point the hero hearing his own story becomes part of the story.

Like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* also has a story with regard to its origin. The story begins with the snake ritual by a king who happens to be the Pandavas great grandson. He slays snakes in the offers them in the altar in order to avenge his father Parikshit's death who was bitten by a snake. During this sacrifice his ancestors recite to him the *Mahabharata*. The seer poet Vyasa who composed *Mahabharata* is

also a character in this epic. The style of *Mahabharata* is explained as a story within a story. In the folk versions of the epic the invincible Gods are humanized and domesticated.

Furthermore there are reference of *Ramayana* in *Mahabharata*. Both the texts were 'aware' of each another. The Sanskrit version of *Mahabharata* has Hanuman's character narrating the entire *Ramayana* to Bhima. Arjuna compares Yudhishtra's lie to Rama's act of slaughtering Vali. *Mahabharata* relies on Dharma. The Pandavas are polyandrous. Vyasa presents complex characters who fail at their own virtues. The Pandavas have Lord Krsna on their side and win the war through ploys and subterfuges. The epic shows that human beings are innately a composition of good and evil. Every character and incident is subject to examination, their acts have ulterior motives and their ethics are dubious.

The *Ramayana* is unlike *Mahabharata* in its treatment of characters, plot and narrative style. Rama unwaveringly practises monogamy and his character is built on his 'personal integrity' – dhriti. The admirable hero fails when he becomes suspicious of his faithful wife. The epic is filled with instances where Rama doubts and questions the chastity and loyalty of other characters.

Nala's story appears in *Mahabharata*. This substory is narrated to Yudishtra. Nala's life, his exile, separation from wife and despondency mirrors Yudishtra's situation. The world of Rama is clearly divisive. The main characters- the kings, prince, queens and sages are show as moralistic and filled with superego devoid of id, whereas the animal world/demon world is filled with treacherous people excepting a few like, Hanuman, Jatayu and Vibhisana. The incarnations of Visnu, Rama and Krsna appear in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and the Hindu tradition is conscious of this complementary nature. In fact one comes across references of Krsna's 'hypnagogic memory' wherein he recollects his past incarnations.

By reading these two texts A.K.Ramanujan opines that paradoxes, ambiguities, inversions, manifold views are capable of enlivening and affecting one another while consciously articulating conflict and dissent through the same forms. By this means tradition relates with each other and reflexivity become a binding agent that facilitates a shared yet original language for dissent.

5. How does Alternative Traditions subvert the conventional narratives?

Folklore, Bhakti and Tantra are countersystems that subvert Great Traditions. Folktale (part of oral/little tradition) and Bhakti literature share and explore themes, structures and poetics of and across regions and languages. Ingrained in genres that are regional and trans-regional, they reject the superseding Vedic myths. The alternative traditions inscribe myths with laws of locality and tether the local with pan- Indian myths. The esoteric system Tantra too challenges the orthodox traditions and embraces tabooed rituals. The antistructures tantra, bhakti and folklore invert, subvert and rework the narrative of brahminical traditions accordingly. In reworking caste and gender hierarchies it contests the establishment and establishes its all pervasive nature. Bhakti literature instead of valourising Gods envisions a society which the upper caste male is lower than the woman and the untouchable saint. The narrative breaks free of every rule set by Manu, codes are rewritten and Gods too suffer the human tribulations. Ramanujan's reading of poems Nammalvar's and Mahadevyakka's poems poignantly illustrate how Bhakti literature systematically subverts and reverses the dominant systems.

Folklore defies the philosophies of high culture and pays little heed to the conception of karma. Folklore becomes a medium to interrogate the supremacy of Gods, ordinary women outwit the powerful, subjugated mythical figures like Sita transfigures into a ferocious warrior. In the South Indian myths the goddess is the chief character who guides male gods. The female deity is powerful, indomitable and embodies fury. The deities personify akam and puram, the village God a human by nature ascends and acquires Godly stature while the consort Goddess diminishes to mere human. The sabotaging of patriarchy and authority with defiance is conceivable only in folktales. Reflexive humour is an essential feature of Folktales.

#### 1.2.6 Keywords

Reflexivity - Intertextuality – Ironic collocations – everything is a part of a bigger paradigm – Metapoems- Mimesis evokes new signifiers – Alternative Traditions- Folktales- Bhakti Literature- Reflexive Humour – Role of Doubles

### 1.2.7 Glossary

Self-Reflexivity : Reflexivity refers also to the process by which texts foreground their own production, their authorship, their intertextual influences, their textual processes or their reception (Bartlett & Suber, 1987; Hunt & Sampson, 2006; Lawson, 1985; Stam, 1992; Woolgar, 1988)

Akam & Puram : Akam concerns with the subject of love while Classical Tamil Poems under the genre Puram deals with war.

Intertextuality : This term coined by Julia Kristeva signifies the idea that every text is an “intertext- the site of an intersection of numberless text and existing only through its relation with other texts

### 1.2.8 Self-Assessment Questions

1. Attempt an essay on the self reflexivity of Bhakti Texts.
2. “Folktales are part of the system that subverts the hegemonic narratives” – Discuss
3. How do you comprehend the rise of intertextuality and pastiche in the popular culture?

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**Lesson 1.3 - 'Effects of Colonisation' – Michael Danino**

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**Structure**

- 1.3.1 Objectives
- 1.3.2 Introduction
- 1.3.3 Author Introduction
- 1.3.4 Summary
- 1.3.5 Short Notes
- 1.3.6 Keywords
- 1.3.7 Glossary
- 1.3.8 Self-Assessment Questions
- 1.3.9 References

**1.3.1 Objectives**

- (i) To reinstate the superiority of Indian Knowledge Systems
- (ii) Throw light on the fallacies of Western Education
- (iii) To understand the pitfalls in mimicking the West

**1.3.1 Introduction**

In “Effects of Colonisation” Michel Danino foregrounds the need to decolonise the minds of the natives and reclaim India’s rich cultural past. He argues that the colonising forces decimated the value systems of the native by terming them as barbaric and coercing them to mimic the Britishers. Danino explicates the role of western education in undermining the Vedic scriptures and eventually defying the indigenous knowledge system.

**1.3.3 Author Introduction****Michel Danino (1956 -)**

Michel Danino born in France currently resides in India. He researches widely on topics pertaining to Indian culture and civilisation. In his books *The Lost River: On the Trail of the Sarasvati* (2010) and *Indian Culture and India’s Future* (2011) he expresses the cultural connotations



of the nation's rich historical past. Danino is also credited with the translation and publication of the works of Shri Aurobindo. His books on *Sri Aurobindo and Indian Civilization*, *The Indian Mind Then and Now*, and *Kali Yuga Or The Age Of Confusion* demonstrate his competency. He writes on 'protohistory' of India and has lectured extensively on 'Ancient Indian Heritage and Knowledge Systems'. Danino, the founder of International Forum for India's Heritage is also involved in protecting tropical rainforests.

Danino has been a visiting faculty at the Indian Institute of Technology, Ranchi, Kanpur and Gandhinagar. The member of various curricula framing boards at present is a guest professor assisting the Archaeological Science Centre at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar. In 2017, the Government of India bestowed him with Padma Shri Award, the fourth-highest civilian honor for his remarkable contribution to Literature and Education. He is also a chairperson of the Central Board of Secondary Education committee for the Knowledge Traditions and Practices of India.

#### 1.3.4 Summary

In this essay, Danino states that the process of decolonisation can be effective only when the impact of colonisation on the psyche of the native is comprehended.

He begins by arguing that the Muslim had ruled India for a longer period in comparison with the British. The Muslim rulers (despite their brutality) never attempted to control the Indian mind. But the British, unlike the Muslims who invaded India under the pretext of civilising mission attempted to establish their supremacy. They propagated the ideology of being a superior race/nation in the world whose noble duty was to disseminate the highest kind of civilisation. A rhetoric of Britishers possessing a good conscience was circulated while carefully hiding their atrocities. The British rulers while encouraging English and Christianised Education as a democratic and progressive one simultaneously degenerated Indian culture and Hindu society. He points out that with a few exceptions like William Jones, Sister Nivedita and Annie Besant most of the British individuals resented the Indians. In the 1835 Minute, Thomas B. Macaulay blamed Indian culture as being filled with 'monstrous superstitions'. He vehemently stated that everything the Hindus believed in was false be it history, astronomy, medicine and

religion. Since a few of them had to control a larger populace, the colonial masters (Lord Canning and Elphinstone) strictly adhered to the divide and rule policy. The British despite being successful in creating a class of English educated people who were anglophiles were never able to conquer the heart / emotions of the Indians.

Danino critiques that even after attaining Independence, the 'elite' Indians are still hypnotised by the ways of the British. They refuse to see the shallowness of Western thought and ideology. This colonial mind set has not ceased. The tendency to compare Indian state with European places is still on the rise. Indians while setting comparisons with the West are deliberately confine themselves within the realm of the "orient".

Indian mind is being steadily colonised via education. While being inculcated with the western knowledge structures, they are unaware of native Yogic science, ancient medicinal practises of their mother land. They fail to realise that the sequences in Indian mythology precedes the Darwinian evolution and calculation involving speed of light is present in the Rigveda. The essayist alleges that the colonial education undermines the "scientific temper" prevalent in the ancient Hindu Scriptures. According to him the Macaulayan system of education neglected Ayurveda, Siddha system of medicine and professed Sanskrit to be useless. In the curriculum Indian epics, the Veda and the Upanishads do not figure, instead the works of mediocre authors are prescribed for the students.

The Indian history taught to the students are mere renditions of either Western scholars or native historian who imitate their European masters. Danino states that the Western dictum relegating Aryans as people who invaded India from the North Western parts and Dravidians as people from the North who were forcibly driven to South by the Aryan populace was deliberately injected by the European historians. While the textbooks and curricula show "tolerant and liberating" images of Islam and Christianity the critiques of national parties and leaders are not portrayed objectively. The syllabus prescribed by Macaulay is "Soulless and Mercenary", which ultimately destroys wit. He recounts Anandha Coomaraswamy lashing out that English education promotes the loss of spiritual integrity and delivers a sense of alienation. Swamy Vivekananda too reiterates the same thought that English education only makes a child aware of weakness and the child is reduced to a puppet devoid of thinking capability. When Westernised/ modern education fails to accommodate India's ancient view of the world,

the Indian pseudo-intellectuals adhere to the clichés generated by the West. They mimic the ideas of the Western philosophers while ignoring the Indian philosophers. If this attitude to blindly follow the West continues, India will exist in a person's mind alone. As Sri Aurobindo asserts ancient Indian culture which was over powered by European modernism is under the threat of extinction.

### **Maladies of the Mind**

Michael Danino stresses that Indians have lost their capacity to think individually and are coerced into agreeing with the West. He acknowledges that fact that English education in India is a necessary evil and the Western thoughts largely help Indians in their quest for independence. But, he stresses that people are still relying on the European academia despite having attained freedom. The tragedy of Indian education system lies in its failure to form an inherently 'true' Indian education. Danino accuses the country's first education minister and the first Prime Minister for emulating the European ways. He indicts him for having derided Indian culture and embracing European Modernity. The author avers that the Western influence on Indian mind has distorted the thinking capabilities of young Indians. Pluralism and universality which are integral to the Indian philosophical system are missing in the Western discourses, since the West focusses exclusively on divisiveness. As a result, the impact of Western scholarship in India paves way for compartmentalisation and segregation. Terms like "Aryans" and "Dravidians" which are racial indicators gradually have turned into markers of isolation. The multiple approaches to truth that coexisted in India is reduced to a monotheistic perspective- Hinduism. The West narrow down the different approaches as various sects which are constantly at war with each other. Danino states that the Britishers played a major role in cataloguing fluid communities into rigid caste structures. This labelling of lineage subconsciously entered the minds of the Indians who realised their identity through the eyes of the West. Danino affirms that the Indian mind is not able to assimilate the positive elements of Western thought. He states that even Brahmo Samaj & other reformist movements were fashioned along the lines of the European expectations. Instead of negating the term "polytheistic idolaters" conferred on them, the Indians made efforts to build new faith systems. Danino cites Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who ridicules the West for approximating other civilizations as "hopeless, dumb and reactionary". He pities the educated Indians who

look at Europe as the saving grace and import concepts of democracy and secularism from them without realising the anomalies of the Western society. The author brings in Aurobindo's observation that maintains that the Europeans always revel in projecting India as 'superstitious, barbarous, harmful and benighted' everything conflicting to the enlightenment values.

Danino shuns that a few educated Indians denounce their Hindu identity as they equate the term Hindu to intolerance. But in doing so, they forget the fact that Hindu society is built on Sanatana Dharma which respects and embraces all the other faiths. This self-depreciating attitude has become prevalent among the Indian intellectuals who associate a Hindu / Hinduism with fanaticism. Danino believes that this attitude is the outcome of Western education.

### Looking Ahead

In this section Danino says that the barbaric framework thrust upon India has to be broken. In order to recover from the intellectual and cultural disintegration caused by the European education, Indians have to go back to the value systems wherein the soul of India lies. By recovering the ability to question the past and present of West and India, can India regain its self-esteem. Danino again invokes Aurobindo's view that by allowing Europeans to think for us, India will cease to be itself. Indians have a better perception of universe bridging matter and spirit. The Western philosophy focusses solely on 'death' unlike the Indian philosophies that harmonise spiritual and material developments that stand the test of time and rejuvenates itself. India's outlook towards life can reinstate the faith of the earth and all creatures thereby making one realise the 'identity of all soul'. The tide is turning and as a result the Occident is looking up to the East and the wisdom of India is starting to infiltrate the West. In fact, Danino contemplates this will lead to a reverse of colonialism. Danino reaffirms Rabindranath Tagore's view (during his last few days Tagore's faith in Europe considerably deteriorated and he firmly believed) that a saviour of civilisation will emerge from India, and the East will domineer over the West.

### 1.3.5 Short answers

1. How does Danino view the British occupation in comparison with the Muslim rule?

Danino states that the Muslims had annexed India for a long period and their sovereignty had heavily impacted the Indian civilization. But, despite their violent rule and the brutal efforts to convert the Indian masses to Islamic faith they never attempted to conquer the minds of the Indians. Strictly abiding by the Koranic practices & orders they focused on geographical conquests rather than controlling the Indian psyche.

The British occupation unlike the Muslim did not use ruthless means. Besides their motive to plunder they were intent on justifying their “civilising mission” and used it as a means to extend their dominion in India. The British took pride in belonging to a civilized nation that was disseminating ‘highest kind of civilisation’. The colonisers perpetrated this discourse of civilising the uncouth Indians while concealing their appalling behaviour.

2. What were the means by which the British construed Indians as an inferior race?

In order to achieve their objective of absolute dominion over Indians and India, the British promoted an education which was predominantly English and Christianised. Based on Macaulayan standards, they fostered a narrative of Europe being “enlightened, democratic and progressive” community while simultaneously constructing a picture of degenerative India, its worsening culture, religious practices, social system and the need to be reformed. In Macaulay’s Minutes on Indian Education, he stressed that Indian culture lacked reason and was filled with superstitious beliefs. Macaulay declared that Hinduism was a false religion comprising a system of false history, medicine and astronomy. Battered by the divide and rule policy, the Indian appeared as dilapidated in comparison with their European counterpart who was young and dynamic. Though the Britishers succeeded in creating a class of anglicised educated Indians who imitated the English they were never able to conquer the essence of Indian heart.

3. How does the English education and curriculum influence the colonisation of Indian mind?

Danino is worried that even the nursery rhymes taught in India are rooted in the West, therefore the Western psychology infiltrates the young minds easily. The Indians are unaware of their native Yogic practices and blindly follow the scientific texts of West oblivious to

the achievements of Indians in the domains of medicine, physics and science. The teachers ignorant of the nation's rich scientific feats cannot inculcate it to the students. Danino states that ranging from the Theory of Evolution to Quantum Physics everything has been discussed in Indian Vedas. He avers that modern medicine is being extolled at the cost of the ancient medicinal practices of Ayurveda and Siddha.

Sanskrit termed to be a language "barren of useful knowledge" by Macaulay is not taught in institutions. The Vedas, Epics and Upanishads too have met the same fate. While the textbooks carry the works of mediocre writers who write in English, acclaimed writers who pen down their thoughts in their mother tongue go unnoticed.

It is also appalling to consider the fact that Indian history has been written by Western scholars. In doing so the historical tradition and heritage of the country is forgotten. The European scholars have registered their views on Aryan invasion and their contention has sparked a row between Sanskrit and Tamil languages. The Western historians cleverly hide the havoc caused by the Muslim and Christian invaders. Even the Indian historians follow the footprints of colonial masters in their documentation and do not include any sort of critiquing of the Mahatma or the Indian Nation Congress.

The Indian educationists do not tolerate the infusion of Indian culture in the syllabus and are persistent on following a "soulless and mercenary" education. They fail to understand that this "denationalizing education" would be futile and result only in the production of "modern, westernised 'elite'" sans any knowledge of Indian culture.

4. What according to Danino are the influences of Westernised thought in India?

English Education in India has become a necessary evil. In order to tackle the challenges posed by the new order of the world, India has to equip herself with Western thoughts and ideologies. The influence of the West did really play a vital role in the quest for freedom. But, post- independence the laxity of Indians in clinging to Western archetypes resulted in the failure to formulate an Indian education system grounded in its past valorising ancient wisdom. Danino, considers it as the worse tragic error that a nation



can ever commit. He further blames the country's first education minister and prime minister who were English educated and promoted English as a symbol of modernity. In Danino's view Western influences distort the magnanimity of Indian culture. He states that though the Western thinkers awakened the masses in Europe liberating them from their pagan ideas with the aid of Christianity, their vision lacked elements of "pluralism, universality and intergrality" which were the focus of Indian tradition. Danino critiques that the West conceptualise their theories primarily on tenets of exclusivity and divisiveness. The Western idealogues do not embrace the multiplicities involved in religions and ethnicities. Instead they categorically term the different belief systems as sects and brand new ways of thinking as "separate religions". Danino also accuses the British for categorization of the fluid identities into rigid caste structures. Subsequently, this classification becomes imprinted in the subconscious of the individuals as the absolute truth. The subjugated natives accustom themselves to the Western ways of thinking and are not able to look into the deleterious effects of their colonial masters.

5. What is the new challenge that the nation is facing and how can she overcome it?

Danino states that the country has to recover her true essence in a new form. India has to achieve in order to save not only herself but also the West which is in a declining and impoverished state. Only with the aid of spirituality India can rejuvenate herself and to attain such state she has to align matter and spirit. Danino believes that by using their ancient wisdom of synchronising the material and spiritual pursuits. With the aid of an inclusive spiritual approach India can lead others.

### 1.3.6 Keywords

Imperialism – Postcolonialism - Mimicry – Macaulay deriding Hindu/ Indian system of education - colonisation of mind – call for liberation from Western thoughts – Indian spirituality – ancient knowledge systems

### 1.3.7 Glossary

Imperialism :

Mimicry :

Postcolonialism: A theoretical framework to understand the power relations between the coloniser (oppressor) and colonised (oppressed) which started gaining momentum when the native intellectuals started to 'rewrite' and assert their identity and culture

Sanatana Dharma : This Sanskrit term denotes "natural and eternal way" of living.

It encompasses the "duties and practices" Hindus should follow to attain *moksha* – 'spiritual liberation'

### 1.3.8 Self-Assessment Questions

1. By what mean do you think Indian can recover their lost ancient knowledge practices and traditions?
2. Do you think in the current liminal state would facilitate the preservation of a rigid 'national identity' or will foster boundless 'national identities'?

### 1.3.9 References

1. Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Penguin Classics, 2003.
2. <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/6240/sanatana-dharma>
3. Childs and Fowler. *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Outledge, 2006



## UNIT- II : POETRY

### Lesson 2.1 - Swami Vivekananda – “Anges Unawares”

#### Structure

- 2.1.1 Objectives
- 2.1.2 Introduction
- 2.1.3 Author Introduction
- 2.1.4 Critical Analysis of the Poem
- 2.1.5 Explain with reference to the context
- 2.1.6 Short Notes
- 2.1.7 Keywords
- 2.1.8 Glossary
- 2.1.9 Self-Assessment Questions
- 2.1.10 References

#### 2.1.1 Objectives

- (i) Introduces Swami Vivekananda's ideals on humanity
- (ii) Reinstates the need for self-realisation

#### 2.1.2 Introduction

This poem by Swami Vivekananda written in 1898, gives an intense representation of the different phases every person or humanity at large experiences. In each instance he reiterates the need for self-awakening and self-realisation that forms the core of human evolution. The rationale, dauntless spirit and pious nature of an individual are the dynamics on which he has fashioned the poem. The poem juxtaposes human frailties & emotions vis-à-vis ethics and morality in shaping an ordinary person into a duty bound, conscious being.

#### 2.1.3 Author Introduction

##### Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Swami Vivekananda an Indian Hindu monk was a spiritual seeker, an avid reader and ardent orator. Born as Narendranath Datta on January

12, 1863 into an affluent Bengali Family, he was raised in a progressive way. His radical minded attorney father Vishwanath Datta and his devout mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi were instrumental in shaping his personality.

Narendranath, the precocious boy studied at Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's Metropolitan Institution and later at Presidency College & Scottish Church College where he topped in his studies. A trained musician he also excelled in sports. As a student he extensively studied the Hindu scriptures, Western Philosophy and Logic. After completing a degree in Fine Arts he also finished his Bachelor Degree in Arts in 1884. His inherent tendency to reason out coupled with the meticulous study of Western philosophies made him sceptical in his approach towards Indian spirituality. Driven by the urge to confirm the existence of God, he became fervently searching for God. At this juncture he came across the Brahmo Samaj, its ideals to spread literacy and abolish child marriage fascinated him. He became an active member of the society but his questions remained unanswered. A dejected Narendranath was advised by his relative Ramachandra Datta to meet Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa at Dakshineswar. Shri Ramakrishna and Narendra shared a close relationship. To Narendra, Shri Ramakrishna was more than a tutor or companion or god. Under his tutelage, Vivekananda sought answers that he had been searching for, an agnostic became a believer and in a way turned out to be one of the most commendable disciples of Shri Ramakrishna. After the demise of his guru, Swami Vivekananda set on to spread Vedanta and Hindu spirituality to the West. There he rose to fame after his talk at Chicago's Parliament of Religion (1893). Touring The United States of America and The United Kingdom extensively for three years he had a massive following. His spiritual discourses on Vedanta and Hindu philosophies impelled people in the West to convert into Hinduism. His lectures aimed to reinvigorate the Hindu Vedanta that had become dormant. Sirswal notes that he "placed before his countrymen the splendid and invigorating message of the Vedanta which combined the spirituality of the East with the spirit of social service and organizational capacity of the West. This is what his philosophy of neo-Vedantism stands for, and which he used to affect a synthesis of cultures of the East and the West, and thereby to find out the real salvation of humanity." (10). Once he returned to India in 1897 he instituted the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math on the principles of Karma Yoga. He was concerned about eradicating the caste system and was keen on promoting social justice that would uplift the

downtrodden. An active member of the Indian nationalist movement, his works insisted on the need to eradicate abject poverty that would 'awaken a new India'. He strived to create awareness and put an end to the slave mentality that were a result of imperialistic tendencies. His noteworthy work *Raja Yoga* (1896), comprises talks that he delivered in New York , *Karma Yoga*(1896), *Vedanta Philosophy: An address before the Graduate Philosophical Society*(1896), *Lectures from Colombo to Almora* (1897) *Bartaman Bharat*(1899), *Udbodhan, My Master* (1901), *Jnana Yoga*(1899), *The East and the West*(1909), *Inspired Talks*(1909), and *Seeing Beyond the Circle*(2005).

## 2.1.4 Critical Analysis of the Poem

### Introduction

Swami Vivekananda renders a portrait of different phases of a man's life and the trials and tribulations a person has to undergo before realising his inner self.

### Blessed Superstition

The first stanza brings to fore the initial stages of any person or traveller or passer-by which is filled with despondency and dejection. The poet states that a person confronting impediments relentlessly gets drained physically and mentally. As he traverses through failures life becomes a painful experience for him. When he is traumatised by despair and is on the verge of giving up, the bleakness in his life gets dispelled by divine intervention. The wretched man finds solace in this unknown spiritual form and calls it God. He firmly embraces it and worships it. Once he starts believing in God, his life gradually changes. The ray of hope that permeates through all parts of his life transforms him into an optimistic and confident person. He becomes fortuitous and successful. The wise seers mock him and look at this turn of events in his life as 'superstition' and term his faith delusional. But the faithful man, a staunch believer of the superior Grace retorts that even though for others it might be just a superstition, according to him it is a 'Blessed Superstition!' that rescued him from misery and exalted him.

### Blessed Misery

The second stanza captures the following phase of his life. It registers the changes when life a 'pleasure garden' gets reduced to a painful existence.

It sheds light on how the person who is solely mindful of worldly pleasures apprehends his mistake once dark times approach him. Having tasted success in life and endowed with brilliant faculties of health, wealth and power to exercise them the person turns into a hedonist. He reckons the entire world as his playground and considers his fellow beings as lowly creatures who can be bought with money. His insouciant lifestyle and reckless manner mars his reasoning ability. Crammed with selfishness he begins to lose rectitude. Meanwhile his prowess starts collapsing and his constitution declines. The man who was once euphoric about life realises its precarious nature and gradually started abhorring it. Unable to endure the pain of living, he fervently wishes for death, but to his dismay realises that dying is not easy. Once his power and wealth is lost, sorrow becomes his sole companion. This makes him realise the real purpose of life and with humility he begins mending relationships which he had been ignoring. While his 'friends' ridicule his condition and look down on him, he gratefully accepts the series of unfortunate events as 'a blessed misery' that had changed his perspective and made him a better person.

### **Blessed Sin**

In the concluding section of the poem Swami Vivekananda narrates the last but important stage the person has to navigate in order to reach the inner truth. Once the person becomes aware of the fickle nature of his body, he tries to cultivate it, but is weak willed. Despite having a healthy constitution the man's timid nature prevents him from achieving greater things. Being diffident, he hardly challenges his oppressors. While the majority are involved in their fight against the tyrannical rulers, the reticent person chooses to remain in his cocoon and consciously stays away from getting embroiled in problems. All at once he unwittingly gets caught into a difficult situation and is forced to retaliate. Only after he strikes back does the absurdity of his existence till then strikes him hard. He realises that only inanimate objects like the stones and the trees remain stoic and that man is the only creature blessed with the power to fight back and rewrite his own destiny. As soon as he grasps this truth he sheds his timorous nature and perceives life in a new light. The man cognises that only by courageously paddling through the sea of struggles can a person attain Eternal Peace. Instead of cursing his fall, he looks gratefully at the past and is thankful for it. The man feels happy to have committed a 'blessed sin' for it empowered him transforming him into a strong willed and valiant person.

## Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda in this poem reiterates the necessity of self-realisation. The poem is a call to concede one's inherent human weakness and count it as a blessing. The poet avers that one needs more inner strength to acknowledge one's flaw and hail it.

### 2.1.5 Explain with reference to context

1. He knew not what or wherefrom,  
But called it God and worshipped.  
Hope, an utter stranger, came to him and spread  
Through all his parts, and life to him meant more  
Than he could ever dream and covered all he knew,  
Nay, peeped beyond his world

In the above lines, Swami Vivekananda discusses the initial phases of a man, where he is subject to utter dejection and misery. In the early stages of life when the person is completely astray, divine intervention occurs. The man believes it is God who has helped him during hard times. Once he starts trusting the ways of God, his approach towards life becomes positive. Hope permeates through all his endeavours and his life becomes meaningful

The poet staunchly avers that God in his mysterious methods helps people during the darkest hours and enables man to realise his own self. Once the person sets on the journey of self-realisation the search for inner peace and truth becomes attainable.

2. The Sages  
Winked, and smiled, and called it 'superstition'.  
But he did feel its power and peace

These words throw light on the attitude of people who mock the believer. It also suggests that the faith of a person is relentlessly tried and tested by the wise men. The dejected individual, who overcomes his shortcomings by solely trusting the Almighty is looked down by people and his conviction is ridiculed as mere superstitious belief. But the man who has tasted no victory in his life strides through all obstacles only by relying on God. The more his fellow beings poke him the more he starts having confidence in the invincible might of God. The superstition is in fact a boon in disguise that helps him negotiate hardships.

3. Then sorrow came — and Wealth and Power went —  
And made him kinship find with all the human race

The above lines indicate the second phase of the man's life that he is subject to. Once the person tastes success he boasts of his physical prowess and wealth. He becomes contemptuous and sports a condescending behaviour. Only after he loses his power and money he fathoms the wretched state he has been thrown into. As he identifies his flaw he rekindles his relationships. Consequently a new consciousness emerges and he begins to appreciate the importance of human emotions.

In these lines, the poet stresses the need to revitalise human bonds.

4. But stones and trees remain; that man alone  
Is blest with power to fight and conquer Fate,  
Transcending bounds and laws.

Through these lines Swami Vivekananda, avows the need to be courageous. He states that strong will and courage are the prerequisites for any human being. In the last phase of a person's life he is forced to shed his inhibitions and embrace life dauntlessly. The poet reiterates the idea that human being unlike stones and trees is radical and blessed with determination to write his own destiny. Only with a wilful outlook can a person rise above all hurdles in his life and become a victor. Among all the periods of his life this phase propels the individual to achieve glory.

### 2.1.6 Short Notes

1. What is the central theme of the poem "Angels Unawares"?

The poem describes the various phases of the man or traveller in his life journey and the obstacles that he encounters in these different stages. While people sardonically critique the individual as being superstitious he is thankful for the hard times he has been through. He reflects that the miserable state he had overcome and the sin he had committed have uplifted his soul and made him a better human being. The man believes that the hurdles were designed by the Almighty in order to make him more courageous and considerate.

2. What is the significance of the word unawares?

Unawares signifies that everything that every shortcoming or

problem he encountered was inadvertent. It is ironical that the accidental happenings in his life were deliberately planned by God to make him realise his inner resilience,

3. Why does Swami Vivekananda term hope an utter stranger?

The individual battered by travails is unable to bear the burden of living. When he is almost on the verge of collapsing he sees a ray of light which he believes is God, and once he starts trusting he finds succor and is optimistic that he will survive. Till then, the man a sceptic had never contemplated about the presence of a divine power, therefore his life had always been filled with despair and hope had been a complete stranger to him.

4. According to the poet why is it important to be courageous?

Swami Vivekananda states that a healthy constitution doesn't necessarily mean a person is strong, only a person with a strong will and courage is deemed as a resilient person. A person who chooses to remain safe, timid and passive when others are struggling against oppressors is likened to a fly which desires for putrid things to feed on. But the same person can fall (when he stands against the oppressors- commit a sin) from the pedestal of apprehension to harsh reality and fight for justice if he develops a will to do so. Only through such courageous acts of transcending law and standing up for the meek can a person seek eternal bliss. Even if others term this act as a sin, the individual hails this as a blessed sin that transformed him to being a better person.

### 2.1.7 Keywords

Different phases in life – thwarted by failure- divine intervention – blessed superstition – gain power – debauch lifestyle – decline of wealth – realisation – blessed misery – courageous -need to fight against oppressors – blessed sin.

### 2.1.8 Glossary

Insouciant - Indifferent

Rectitude - Righteousness

### **2.1.9 Self Assessment Questions**

1. Critically Analyse the hurdles a person has to confront in order to attain self liberation.

### **2.1.10 References**

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2. [https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Swami\\_Gambhirananda\\_A\\_short\\_biography\\_of/0aEFEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Swami_Gambhirananda_A_short_biography_of/0aEFEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)
3. Biography of Swami Vivekananda. By Nandini Saraf · 2021 [https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Biography\\_of\\_Swami\\_Vivekananda/-aMFEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Biography_of_Swami_Vivekananda/-aMFEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0) Pub: Prabhat Prakashan, 2021.



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## Lesson 2.2 - Rabindranath Tagore- "Freedom"

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### Structure

- 2.2.1 Objectives
- 2.2.2 Introduction
- 2.2.3 Author Introduction
- 2.2.4 Critical Analysis of the Essay
- 2.2.5 Explain With Reference to Context
- 2.2.6 Short Notes
- 2.2.7 Keywords
- 2.2.8 Glossary
- 2.2.9 Self-Assessment Questions
- 2.2.10 References

### 2.2.1 Objectives

- (i) To facilitate the context of the subjugated Indians in their abject state
- (ii) To decode the modes of resistance against hegemony

### 2.2.2 Introduction

Tagore's poem is a call to the natives to challenge the Western dominion. The poem written during the pre-independent period, is relevant in the contemporary scenario too. The poet appeals the individual to claim one's 'identity' and resist any kind of imposed authority.

### 2.2.3 Author Introduction

#### Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Rabindranath Tagore a poet, philosopher and social reformer hailing from an affluent ancestral legacy was an eminent figure in Bengali Renaissance. Enthused by the spirit of renaissance he sought to free Bengali from the traditional influences of Sanskrit and modernise it. His poems are replete with lyrical tonalities and naturalism.

Tagore was home schooled during his formative years. When Rabindranath Tagore was eleven years old he set off with his father Debendranath to visit their estates at various places in India which included Shantiniketan, Amritsar and Dalhousie. During this trip he started reading the Sanskrit works of Kalidasa and developed a penchant for Indian classical writings. In 1877, Tagore was sent to England to pursue his studies, but he soon grew disinterested in the Western discourses. On returning to India in 1880, Tagore started publishing most of his works in Bengali. After his marriage with Mrinalni Devi, he started managing his father's estates. Fondly called as the 'zamindari babu', Tagore traversed the river *Padma* in his barge. During his stay he encountered humble village folks and he documented their warmth, love and poverty poignantly in the writings he produced during that period. The humanist in him empathised with the downtrodden after witnessing their plight in person. His narrative style exemplified the harsh realities of their impoverished lifestyle. The depiction of their life's little ironies became an iconic feature of Tagore's writing. This experience he gained during this period later became instrumental in steering him towards becoming a social reformer.

In 1901, he began an experimental school at Shantiniketan, where he attempted to combine the knowledge of the East and the West. His universalist approach to education gained momentum and later evolved into Visva-Bharati University (1921). Tagore was worried at the colonised state of India and campaigned fiercely to liberate the motherland. After 1912 Tagore toured across the globe to gather knowledge and fiercely campaign for freedom.

In 1912, W.B. Yeats wrote the preface to *The Gitanjali* (1912) – an anthology of poems translated by Tagore from Bengali to English, which later went on to win him the Nobel Prize in 1913. Tagore was conferred knighthood in 1915, but he gave up his title when the country was traumatized by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. A few of Tagore's widely acclaimed works include *Visarjan* (1890), *Manasi* (1890), *Sonar Tari* (1894), *Gitanjali* (1910), *Gitimalya* (1914), *Balaka* (1916), *Gora* (1910), *Raja* (1910), *Dakghar* (1912), *Achalayatan* (1912), *Ghare Baire* (1916), *Muktadhara* (1922), and *Raktakaravi* (1926).

His dramas, short stories, novels, essays, travelogues exemplify his deep knowledge of the classics and also simultaneously demonstrate the reformist zeal in him. This polymath, composed songs (rabindra sangeet) and painted works which garnered international acclaim. Succumbed to illness and pain Tagore breathed his last on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1941.

## 2.2.4 Critical Analysis of the Poem

### Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore composed the poem *Freedom* around the 1900s. In this poem *Freedom*, Tagore contemplates how inaction, subjugation and insecurity of the natives ruin the destiny of the nation. The poem is a clarion call to break the manacles of fear and rise to freedom. The poet envisions that the sons of the soil should end the British Raj and free their motherland.

### Awake and Arise

Tagore's primarily wishes freedom from fear. He believes that by overcoming fear Indians will be able to resuscitate their motherland. The alliteration that he employs in the first two lines expresses his inherent wish for freedom and his fervent desire.

Next, he emphasises that his motherland must be free from superstitious beliefs and ill-logical traditions that binds her to the past. He regards that such regressive practices will hold the country from moving into a bright optimistic future. The nation is akin to an old woman who wants to be free from the burden of ages. The country is personified as a frail woman whose resources have been exploited by the colonisers hence leaving her with a bent back and blind eyes. The poet insists that India should break away from the "shackles of slumber". Tagore directs the nation to follow the star of hope, muster up courage and move into a new free future rather than holding onto the colonial rule which is as still as the dark night. He is certain that one should break free from fear of taking risks.

He yearns for freedom from the anarchy of destiny. The nation is compared to a sailboat which is helmed by insensible rulers who let the boat sail in every direction that the wind blows. Tagore urges the people to take over the captainship from irresponsible colonisers and steer mother India towards promising shores – a hopeful tomorrow.

Tagore wants the people to stop being puppets, controlled and governed in accordance with the wishes of the rulers. He ridicules that the mindless habits of the citizens are orchestrated by the brainless wires of the colonisers. The natives are reduced to obedient puppets who have lost their individuality and meekly replicate their master. In their mimicry they lose their self-respect and fascination towards pursuit of real freedom.

## Conclusion

Tagore has given a new dimension to the word freedom. He reinstates the need to be emotionally free from the chains of the English. This poet doesn't romanticize the past instead paints a grim picture of the nation. It echoes the need to rouse and ameliorate the desperate situation the nation is subject to.

### 2.2.5 Explain with reference to context

1. Freedom from fear is the freedom

I claim for you my motherland!

In these lines written by Tagore in his poem "Freedom", the poet articulates his desire towards achieving an independent nation. He addresses India as his motherland and states that it is due to the negligence and fearful nature of Indian citizens that their mother is still under the colonial rule. He expresses the need to free the nation from different kinds of darkness' that engulf it.

The opening lines of the poem is a rousing call to the Indian populace to unleash their valour. Tagore considers that freedom from fear is the primary step in attaining independence. The alliteration depicts the grim necessity and urgency of the situation.

2. Freedom from the burden of the ages, bending your head,  
breaking your back, blinding your eyes to the beckoning call of the future;

The above lines from Rabindranath Tagore's "Freedom" indicate his fervent wish to end the British rule. These lines are suggestive of the Indian nation's will to free itself from the affliction caused by unbearable yoke of the past. He reduces the pitiful state of the nation to an old mother unable to shoulder the difficulties of the preceding historical period. The fragile woman/ nation becomes compliant and is mortified of her/it's glorious culture. The motherland that clings to the past is absolutely unaware of the promising future that awaited them.

Tagore lines are desperate efforts to resuscitate the natives who are forced to succumb blindly to the colonisers rule in all servitude and were crushed under the imposing reign without realising their potential and their country's future.

3. Freedom from the shackles of slumber wherewith  
 you fasten yourself in night's stillness,  
 mistrusting the star that speaks of truth's adventurous paths;  
 In the above lines from "Freedom", Rabindranath Tagore accuses the Indian nationalists as being bound by laziness and sleeping deeply holding tightly to the old notions of colonial tenets without believing in the optimistic present that relies on new quests of truths. The poet longs for a nation that will be ready to undertake risks and pursue courageous means to achieve independence.
4. Freedom from the anarchy of destiny  
 whole sails are weakly yielded to the blind uncertain winds,  
 and the helm to a hand ever rigid and cold as death.  
 These lines of Rabindranath Tagore's expresses the poets wish to free oneself from the disgrace of being a slave to the foreign assailants and accepting this chaotic existence as their destiny. He employs a metaphor where the nation is compared to a ship that sails recklessly yielding itself to all kinds of winds, unmindful of reaching the destination. This wayward sailboat is captained by an insensible person. Tagore hints at the callous nature of the fellow countrymen who are unaware of unifying the nation and fighting the aggressors. He strongly purports the argument that the attitude to rebel against the conferred fate will certainly bring about a change. He also insinuates the need for a radical nationalist to lead the nation from the dark to empowerment.
5. Freedom from the insult of dwelling in a puppet's world,  
 where movements are started through brainless wires,  
 repeated through mindless habits  
 where figures wait with patience and obedience for the  
 master of show, to be stirred into a mimicry of life.  
 In the above lines, Tagore points out the feeble nature of Indians and the hurdles in attaining independence. The poets believes that the natives must cease to be a puppet whose moves are controlled by the British. He critiques that the acts of the Indian masses are governed by the colonial administration and the people have been trained to follow them thoughtlessly. Unable to make their own individual choices and devoid of freewill the Indian mob have becomes products of mimesis who wait on the beck and call of their

rulers and their entire life depends on replicating the ways of their English masters.

Tagore warns that if this senseless act of mimicking the colonisers continues, then attaining independence will remain a mere dream. Therefore he vehemently appeals to his fellow countrymen to break free from passionately following the ways of the British and cultivate unique 'Indian' ways of approaching things.

### 2.2.6 Short Notes

1. What message does Tagore convey through the poem "Freedom"?

Rabindranath Tagore poem "Freedom" is a plea to his countrymen to liberate their nation by identifying the pitfalls that prevent them. Tagore believes that his motherland must no longer be submissive but counteract. He urges the masses to wake up from deep slumber and be acutely aware of the impending future rather than being stuck in the treacherous past. By lifting the burden of the colonial past and by negating the destiny thrust on it by the imperialists, India can steadily progress towards emancipation. The central focus of the poem appeals the natives to cull out their own identity in spite of impersonating the Britishers.

2. What is the tone of the poem "Freedom"?

The tone of the poem sways throughout the poem. Though it starts with a despondent tone point out at the helplessness of his country to free itself from the shackles of its rulers, there is steady variation. Shades of irony, resentment and anxiety are apparent in the following stanzas when he reproaches his countrymen who are reluctant to act against the domineering powers. But, Tagore ends the poem with a cynical yet positive note when he requests the natives to realise their self-esteem and stop following the Europeans. Despite the indignant tone he maintains he ends with an optimistic milieu.

3. Write a brief note on the use of imagery in this poem.

Tagore utilizes visual, organic and kinaesthetic imagery throughout the poem. His description of the nation as a frail woman burdened with ignominy, stooping low with pain and torture is visually heart wrenching. He employs kinesthetic imagery in the poem when he associates the leadership to the movement of the ships that travels

in precarious weather. The readers empathise with the nation and her pangs of pain, frustration and helplessness as the images are organically construed.

#### **2.2.7. Key Words**

Freedom from fear and superstitious beliefs – country burdened and old – need to awake – take risks – free from anarchy- native must stop imitating the West

#### **2.2.8. Self Assessment Questions**

1. How does Tagore express the real meaning of liberation?

#### **2.2.9. References**

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rabindranath-Tagore>

<https://poets.org/poet/rabindranath-tagore>



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## Lesson 2.3 - Toru Dutt – “Lakshman”

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### Structure

- 2.3.1 Objectives
- 2.3.2 Introduction
- 2.3.3 Author Introduction
- 2.3.4 Critical Analysis of the Poem
- 2.3.5 Explain With Reference to Context
- 2.3.6 Short Notes
- 2.3.7 Keywords
- 2.3.8 Glossary
- 2.3.9 Self-Assessment Questions
- 2.3.10 References

### 2.3.1 Objectives

- (i) To foreground the mythical tale of Sita's dispute with Lakshman
- (ii) Intends to discuss the events that led to the altercation between Sita and Lakshman and its outcomes

### 2.3.2 Introduction

Toru Dutt's *Lakshman* elaborates the incidents that take place in the aftermath of Rama's pursuit of the golden deer. Sita is worried when she hears Rama's cry for help and urges Lakshman to go in search of Rama. Dutt gives a poetical rendition of Sita's fears, impetuosity and vulnerability as she reasons out with Lakshman. Lakshman's tenacious determination to guard her is shattered by Sita's impulsive allegations. This poem portrays Lakshman's dilemma as Sita's insinuates his intentions. The conversation between Sita and Lakshman describes the woman's desperation to save her husband against all odds. The discussion sprawls beyond the confines of the epic and opens up new perspectives.

### 2.3.3 Author Introduction

#### Toru Dutt (1856-1877)

Toru Dutt or Tarulatha Dutt was one of the pioneers of early Indian Writing in English. Gosse in his Introduction to Dutt's Memoir acclaims her as the epitome of 'Modern Oriental' who gives 'an insight into the conscience of the Asiatic'. He further states that her poems, "breathe a Vedic solemnity and simplicity of temper, and are singularly devoid of the littleness and frivolity" (xxiv). Hailing from the culturally rich and sophisticated Rambagan family in North Calcutta, Toru Dutt turned out to be accomplished poet, essayist, translator and novelist. The Rambagan's were part of the 'Bhadralok' - a new class of liberated, westernised and radical Indians with a penchant for literature. Toru Dutt's father Govind Chunder Dutt, a civil servant of highest order was also a poet. Her mother Kshetramoni Mitter too had literary leanings and had translated the monograph "The Blood of Christ" from English into Bengali.

Influenced by the colonial modernity and the missionaries, Toru Dutt's family converted into Christianity when she was six years old. Toru and her two older siblings were home schooled and raised in a modern and idyllic milieu. Govind Chunder Dutt employed private tutors who taught the children French, English, Sanskrit and Bengali. But the happiness of the family was short-lived when their fourteen year old son Abju succumbed to Tuberculosis. The family which was already being stigmatised for their religious conversion could not bear this fatal blow and shattered. Govind Chunder Dutt thought a change of place would ease the pain of their son's demise. Moreover he wanted his daughters have to explore the world and accumulate knowledge and therefore moved to France in 1869. Toru enrolled at a boarding school where she mastered French and took a liking to the writings of Victor Hugo and Pierre-Jean de Beranger. Having spent time in Nice and Italy the Dutt's moved to England where the girls studied Music, History, did translation and subsequently attended "Lectures for Ladies" a short term course at Cambridge. During this period she met Mary.E. Martin with whom she struck a life-long friendship and frequently contacted through letter.

In 1873 Aru and Toru's health conditions started getting frail and the family decided to return to Calcutta. On reaching India, the sisters felt it challenging to adapt to the Indian ways of thinking. Writing became their sole means to escape the stifling atmosphere at homeland. At this juncture Aru too contracted consumption in 1874 and passed away leaving Toru all

alone. Toru having lost her only confidante and soulmate started writing vigorously. She published essays on Henry Derozio and Leconte de Lisle in Bengal Magazine. Toru's debut French novel *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* (*The Diary of Mademoiselle D'Arvers*) was followed by her unfinished novel *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* owing to her early demise.

Toru Dutt's "A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields" (1876) is a compilation of French poems translated by her and Aru. She gained prominence posthumously when Edmund Gosse critically appraised her poem in *The Examiner* in 1877. Her work "Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan" (1882) consists poems based on mythologies and Sanskrit Texts. It includes her frequently anthologised poems "Sita", "Lakshman", "The Tree of Life", "Our Casuarina Tree" and "The Lotus". Her translation of Victor Hugo and M Adolphe Thiers political discourses appeared in "In A Scene from Contemporary History", published in *The Bengal Magazine* (June-July 1875).

### 2.3.4 Critical Analysis of the Poem

#### Introduction

Toru Dutt's "Lakshman" taken from the anthology "Ancient Ballads and Legends from Hindustan" (1882) is a subtle interpretation of the forty-fifth stanza of "Aranyakandam" from the *Ramayana*. This ballad narrates the incident in which Sita asks Rama to procure the golden deer for her and the ensuing tragedy. Rama, who goes in search of the deer realises that Maricha a demon, has come in the guise of a golden deer and slays him. On the verge of his death Maricha calls out for help in Rama's voice. Sita who hears the distant cry is scared that some evil had befallen Rama and urges Lakshman to help Rama.

#### Analysis

The poem begins with Sita crying out to Lakshman to pay heed to Rama's cry for help. Sita presumes that Rama has been surrounded by enemies and is dying. She urges and commands Lakshman to take arms and go in search of Rama. But, Lakshman staunchly believes that Rama is invincible and promises the 'Videhan Queen' not to fear. He talks about Rama's prowess and how animals and demons are terrified at the sight of Rama. Lakshman pleads with Sita to be 'bold, great and wise' for he believes that no harm can befall on Rama. Further he tells her that the wailing of Rama could be a magical ploy by the enemies. Lakshman hesitates to leave

Sita alone and reminds her that his sole duty is to protect her with his life from the evils lurking in the dark waiting for revenge.

Sita misunderstands his reluctance as cowardice. She doubts that all the brave deeds he displayed earlier were possible only because of Rama's presence. In a fit of rage, she becomes suspicious and accuses Lakshman of harbouring evil intentions,

He perishes — well, let him die!

His wife henceforth shall be mine own! Can that thought deep imbedded lie

Within thy heart's most secret zone! Search well and see! one brother takes

His kingdom, — one would take his wife!"

She reproaches him by calling him a traitor and a spy who would only rejoice at the death of Rama. She affirms that unlike Lakshman she chooses to follow Rama whilst Lakshman had sided with 'falsehood, treachery and guilt'. Sita prefers that Lakshman instead of his vain pretentious nature of shielding her must go and rescue his brother. She indicts him of his malicious design.

Lakshman wonders whether this is the 'gentle Sita' whom he had known. Impaled by her words that had lacerated his inner heart like poisoned swords he contemplates whether this is the reward he deserves for his lifelong loyalty and truth. Despite being charged ignobly Lakshman in all his magnanimity forgives Sita. Before he departs, he feels sympathy for her as her words sprung out of rash judgement and implores her to stay safe. He is worried that he has disobeyed the orders of his chief Rama but Sita's accusations, grief and language leave him with no other option. Inflicting blame on himself, before he leaves, he draws a magical circle wherein no evil can enter. He beseeches her not to step out of the circle and bids her adieu. As he parts with her, he seeks her forgiveness and wonders whether they are still friends. He invokes sylvan Gods and prays to mother nature to protect Sita until he and his brother return. He reassures her that the mighty Rama can neither be vanquished by Gods or humans and all the ill omens that had risen will gradually fade away. Resolved to find his brother, armed with the bow and arrow dauntless yet sorrowfully Lakshman ventures into the deep and dark jungle. As he leaves the hoarse screaming of the vulture is heard which forebodes the tragic fate of Sita.

## Conclusion

The poem gives an account of the anxiety and impetuosity of the young Queen juxtaposing it with the composure and tranquillity of Lakshman. While traversing the myth Dutt examines motifs of love, trust and loyalty.

### 2.3.5 Explain With Reference to Context

1. He calls on thee, perhaps his foes  
Environ him on all sides round,  
That wail, — it means death's final throes!  
Why standest thou, as magic-bound?

These words are spoken by Sita when she catches the harrowing cry of Rama. Rama, Sita and Lakshman during their exile at the Dhandaka forest encounter a golden deer and Sita enamoured by the deer urges Rama to go after it. Maricha disguised as the deer lures Rama far away from Panchavati. Sita, awaits her husband's return with the golden deer, instead hears the helpless wailing of Rama for help, which is actually one of Maricha's tactic.

Unaware of the actual situation, Sita is distraught and shudders at the thought that Rama has been fatally wounded. She assumes that the mighty Rama has been hurt and ambushed by his enemies and seeks Lakshman's help. Sita is unable to fathom Lakshman's attitude as he stands still without rushing to the aid of his brother Rama.

The passage from the poem sets the tone of the poem and also foregrounds Sita's anxiety on which the episode is further built upon.

2. Oh calm thyself, Videhan Queen,  
No cause is there for any fear,  
Hast thou his prowess never seen?  
Wipe off for shame that dastard tear!

The above lines taken from Toru Dutt's poem are Lakshman's reply to Sita. When Sita is worried about Lakshman's indifferent attitude to Rama's cry for help, Lakshman reasons out his actions.

Lakshman addresses Sita as the 'Videhan Queen' reminding her of her royal stature and the need to be calm in the face of adversity. In a composed manner he reminds her of Rama's expertise and

dexterity and implores her not to cry. Lakshman's words manifest his faith in Rama's ability. He staunchly believes that no earthly or demonic creature can defeat Rama. Through these words he intends to remind Sita her regal nature and emboldens her to confront the situation without fear. But the agitated queen fails to understand Lakshman's impassive act.

3. Delusive was that piercing cry, —

Some trick of magic by the foe;  
He has a work, — he cannot die,  
Beseech me not from hence to go.

These words are extension of Lakshman's reply to Sita when she urges him to go in search of Rama. This extract demonstrates Lakshman's exceptional reasoning and his faith in Rama's faculty.

Sita is petrified by the wailing, but Lakshman acutely realises that it is a sham. He explains to Sita that the cry is 'delusive', a tactic used by the enemies to lure Lakshman. He believes in the magnanimity of Rama's prowess and assures Sita that Rama is born to achieve greatness and will not die before attaining his goal. In these lines Lakshman begs Sita not to command him to leave, his words exhume confidence and try to console her.

4. But then thy leader stood beside! Dazzles the cloud when shines the sun,  
Reft of his radiance, see it glide A shapeless mass of vapours dun;  
So of thy courage, — or if not, The matter is far darker dyed, What makes thee loth to leave this spot? Is there a motive thou wouldst hide? The above words spoken by Sita to Lakshman foregrounds her impulsiveness. Driven by the urge to save her husband, Sita begins accusing Lakshman by comparing him with his brother and reducing his stature.

Sita mocks Lakshman as being a subservient sidekick to Rama. She compares his presence near Rama to the existence of the cloud beside the sun. Sita taunts him that the cloud looks bright only due to the sunrays and once the sun disappears the cloud is reduced to a dull mass of vapour. Likewise it is Rama's repute and glory that had made the mediocre Lakshman visible. She further affronts Lakshman as having ulterior motives towards her. Fuming with anger she insults him as being hesitant to leave the spot because he covets her. These words of Sita display her corporeal dimensions and diminish her holy persona.

5. He perishes — well, let him die!

His wife henceforth shall be mine own!

Can that thought deep imbedded lie Within thy heart's most secret zone! Search well and see! one brother takes His kingdom, — one would take his wife! A fair partition! — But it makes Me shudder, and abhor my life.

In the above stanza by Toru Dutt, Sita vehemently attacks Lakshman and his character. Sita the helpless wife alleges that Lakshman is rejoicing the death of Rama for he can make advances to Sita and claim her as his own.

Sita derides Lakshman as harbouring evil intentions deep inside his heart to kill his brother so that he can marry Sita. Moreover she scoffs that while one brother took the kingdom from Rama, the other brother is planning to take away Rama's wife which to her seems a fair agreement and division of properties. Sita is shaken by fear and detests such behaviour. Lakshman is deeply hurt by Sita's allegations, but instead of being enraged he feels compassionate towards her and considers it his duty to protect her.

6. If fire can burn, or water drown,

I follow him: — choose what thou wilt

Truth with its everlasting crown,

Or falsehood, treachery, and guilt.

Sita in a fit of rage doubts Lakshman as having conspired against Rama. She continually offends him and mocks his loyalty. When Lakshman does not deter in his spirit, she dissuades him with verbal abuses.

Sita's words manifest her devotion towards Rama, she tells Lakshman that in any adverse situation she had devoutly follow her husband. And she instructs Lakshman to choose the right path. Sita states that Lakshman can either select the righteous path by going in search of Rama or side with treacherous people that would lead to Rama's downfall. In the above extract the readers realise that the goddess/queen has lost her magnificence. Toru Dutt captures the humane side of Sita.

7. Here with an arrow, lo, I trace

A magic circle ere I leave,

No evil thing within this space



May come to harm thee or to grieve.

Step not, for aught, across the line,

Whatever thou mayst see or hear

These lines are spoken by Lakshman to Sita. Lakshman is not daunted by Sita's allegations. He realises that Sita in her desperate effort to save Rama is spewing venomous accusations. Despite getting enraged, he feels sorry for her and vows to protect her. Lakshman remains composed when Sita questions his integrity but when she doubts his morality and intentions he is forced to go in search of Rama.

But before he leaves Sita, the wise Lakshman draws a magical circle with his arrow and instructs her not to step out of it. He beseeches her to stay within the circle despite whatever she sees or hears. Lakshman assures her that no evil/harm is powerful of breaking the magical charm of the circle.

8. For though ill omens round us rise

And frighten her dear heart, I feel

That he is safe. Beneath the skies

His equal is not, — and his heel

Shall tread all adversaries down,

Whoever they may chance to be.

Lakshman utters these words as he starts his journey. His description of nature in all its fury foreshadows the impending danger / Sita's abduction. This stanza also demonstrates Lakshman's faith in Rama.

Lakshman sees the sky darken and hears the vultures screaming as he leaves the bower. He is worried that these ill-omens might break Sita's resolute nature and weaken her spirits. Despite all these scary signs Lakshman is determined that his brother Rama is peerless and no enemy can surpass his prowess. He decisively cogitates that Rama would gloriously vanquish all his foes.

### 2.3.6 Short Notes

1. Who are the speakers in the poem "Lakshman"?

The poem is a conversation between Sita and Lakshman.

2. Who cries for help?

Maricha disguised as the golden deer cries for help in Rama's voice. When Sita hears this delusive wailing she fears that Rama's life is in danger and pleads with Lakshman to help Rama.

3. What charges does Sita level against Lakshman?

Sita levels multiple charges against Lakshman. She calls him a 'blind dumb stone' who is early awaiting the death of his brother. When Lakshman refuses to go in search of Rama, Sita calls him a coward who is worse than an open enemy. She compares him to a shapeless cloud which dazzles only in the presence of the Sun (Rama) and insults him of being jealous. She avers that while one brother took over Rama's kingdom other brother Lakshman is keen on taking over Rama's wife. She accuses him of harbouring a hidden inner motive. Sita also reproaches him of being a spy tracking his banishment and informing them to Rama's enemies. She denounces him of rejoicing the death of her husband Rama.

4. Does Lakshman get affected by Sita's accusations?

Lakshman remains calm and poised in the agonising situation. Though he is taken aback by the charges levelled by 'gentle Sita' he requests her to be less rash in pronouncing the judgment. Being a soldier he understands her grief and forgives her wild and wrong language. He takes the blame for whatever had happened and appeals to her to think better of him in posterity. Lakshman trembles with sympathy for Sita and never loses his respect for her. He asks her to forgive him and prays to Gods to watch over her until his brother and he return.

5. What is the significance of the magical circle?

The magical circle is drawn by Lakshman before he leave the grove. Lakshman unable to withstand Sita's indictments is forced to go. In his absence the magical circle would protect her from evil. Lakshman begs her to stay within the confines of it and not step out in any circumstance. The magical circle also becomes a signifier of power and authority.

### 2.3.7 Key Words

Ballad –Golden deer - Maricha's delusive cry – Sita requesting Lakshman – Lakshman's refusal – her allegations – disheartened Lakshman

### 2.3.8 Glossary

Impious : Disrespectful

Succor : Assist or providing help

Cower : To stoop down or hide

Delusive : False

Lacerate : Tear down

Sylvan God : Gods or Spirit residing in the forest

Maricha : He is a rakshasha/demon who disguises himself as the golden deer to lure Sita

Vidhehan queen : Sita is referred as the Vidhehan queen

### 2.3.9 Self Assessment Questions

1. Write a critical appreciation of the poem by highlighting the Sita's transition from the timid queen to the hysterical wife.

### 2.3.10 References

1. The Dairy of Mademoiselle D'Arvers Toru Dutt Tanslated from French by N.Kamala Penguin 2005
2. Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan Toru Dutt London Kegan Pauul Trench & Co Digitized 23 May 2007

DDE, Pondicherry University

## UNIT - III : DRAMA

### Lesson 3.1 - Girish Karnad - *Naga - Manadala*

#### Structure

- 3.1 Objective
- 3.2 Author Introduction
- 3.3 Naga-Mandala Introduction
- 3.4 Characters
- 3.5 Naga-Mandala Synopsis
- 3.6 Summary
- 3.7 Explain with Reference to Context
- 3.8 Short Notes
- 3.9 Self Assessment Questions
- 2.10 References

#### 3.1 Objective

- (i) Aims to introduce Karnad's nuances in adaptating of a folktale to the sensibilities of the contemporary generation
- (ii) To familiarize the readers with the non-conventional stylistics of the playwright
- (iii) To comprehend how the Karnad's rendition of an ordinary tale deconstructs hierarchies and challenges patriarchy

#### 3.2 Author Introduction

##### Girish Karnad (1938-2019)

Girish Karnad, an acclaimed playwright and actor contributed tremendously to the growth of Indian Theatre. Hailing from Matheran, Bombay he studied in the Marathi medium. Owing to his father's transfer, when his family had to move to the Kannada speaking sections of the then Bombay Presidency young Girish Karnad came across Yakshagana performances and 'nataka mandali' troupes and was instantaneously smitten by them. He obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics & Statistics from the Karnataka University. Karnad availed the prestigious

Rhodes Fellowship and was a scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he earned a Master's Degree in Philosophy, Political Science and Economics. On his return to India he secured a job at the Oxford University Press, Madras. Here he became associated with the famous The Madras Players-one of the oldest amateur theatre groups.

Karnad rose to fame as his plays encapsulated the modernist dilemma from a mythological reiteration. The ease with which he infuses myth and history not only delights the audience, but exemplifies the existential angst, greed, and hypocrisy that a person is subject to. He translated his Kannada plays into English. His first play *Yayati* (1961) based on the mythological character King Yayati had strains of Camus and Satre. Karnad was keen on encapsulating the disillusionment of the contemporary society. In his work *Tughlaq* (1964) he drew similarities between the reign of Tughlaq and the post Nehruvian era that suffered heavily from conviction and contentment. He penned *Hayavadana* (1970) relying heavily from *Kathasaritasagara* and *Naga-Mandala* (1988) was written solely based on the local folklores. While the former clinched Kamaladevi's Award of the Bhartiya Natya Sangh (1972) the later received the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the most creative work (1982). This was followed by *Taledanda* and *The Fire and the Rain*. Girish Karnad's love for the craft lead him into filmmaking. He wrote the screenplay for U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara* and also played the lead in the movie. Karnad donned the hat of a director for *Vamsa Vriksha*. Since then he had been a popular actor in the Indian Film industry.

Girish Karnad was a recipient of the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan awards by the Indian Government. He was conferred with the Jnanapith Award- the highest literary award.

### 3.3 Naga-Mandala Introduction

Girish Karnad wrote the play *Naga-Mandala* in 1987-88 during his sojourn as Visiting Professor at University of Chicago and Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence. Published in 1988, *Naga-Mandala* is based on two oral tales from Karnataka narrated to him by the eminent scholar A.K. Ramanujan. In this two-act play, he uses elements from traditional theatre to weave the oral folk tales passed by women story tellers. In this rendition of Kannada folk tales, Karnad attempts to break from grand narratives and tradition. The play drawing heavily from the folk tales stirs in a new sensibility using the concept of traditional story teller. It works on various levels as it poignantly raises questions of the veracity of the narrator and challenges the power vested

within the author. The main story comprising the snake-lover is ingeniously placed within the framework of the Story – Flames and the Narrator. The author plays with the paradoxical nature of folktales which defy the need of the narrator and pattern, but he simultaneously reiterates the need of the storyteller who need to pass these folktales across generations. The snake-lover story comprising Rani, Appanna & Cobra mirrors the human predicament that oscillates between the fiction and half-truths (Paranjape). Karnad's characters realise that in the quest for 'truth' they might ruin their hopes, lives and happiness and are satisfied with the ordained 'realities'(Bhatra).

Karnad's tale peruses the operations of patriarchy that incarcerates women while probing the notions of chastity, fidelity and empowerment. The play also called the "Story Theatre" functions on different levels. The play by itself is an attempt to deconstruct the notion of traditional using the folk theatre. Karnad does this categorically while still adhering to a few parameters of the theatre practices. The playwright while cleverly infusing various conventions of the theatre like the chorus, music and interludes concurrently critiques it and wilfully projects an alternate 'reality'. As Makarand Paranjape observes in the *Indian Express* the play, "is fine play, powerful, gripping and exciting . . . it uses tradition creatively and sensitively, dipping into the rich storehouse of our heritage to create a new work which not only entertains us, but replenishes us culturally and also challenges us and our modernity".(qtd in blurb)

### 3.4 Characters

- The Man
- The Flames
- The Story
- Rani (meaning the queen)
- Appanna (denotes any man)
- Kurudavva (means the blind one)
- Kappanna (the dark one)
- Naga (the snake/cobra)
- Three village elders



### 3.5 Synopsis

*Naga-Mandala* begins in a temple with the prologue presented by Man, Flames and Story. The Story narrates the tale of Rani, Appanna and the Cobra to the Man. *Naga-Mandala* is essentially the story of the newlywed Rani (queen of long tresses). She is married to Appanna (any man), a rich youth whose parents are dead. Appanna takes Rani to his village after the marriage but treats her indifferently as his interests lie with his concubine. The young bride raised like a princess by her parents feels all alone, homesick and devastated after the marriage as her husband hardly treats Rani with love. Appanna comes home only during the day to bathe and have lunch, then he locks Rani within the house and walks away to visit his concubine. Rani's only communication to the outside world is through the barred window as she remains waiting for him all night. Rani who is isolated seeks solace in imagination as she subconsciously starts weaving imaginative stories. She initially visualizes her to be in a magical garden carried by the eagle (Appanna) who separates her from her parents.

Kurudavva (the blind one) along with her son Kappanna (the dark one) arrives to visit the newly-weds and is shocked to see Appanna in his concubine's courtyard. Rani meets Kurudavva through the window and begs her to inform her plight to her parents. Kurudavva driven by sympathy decides to help Rani. Kurudavva narrates the story of her past. She tells Rani that since she had no suitors she procured three pieces of magical roots from a mendicant. A distant relative of her married her after consuming the food in which she had ground the middle-sized root. Now recognizing the seriousness of Rani's problem, Kurudavva offers to give the remaining two roots that will help Appanna overcome his infatuation with the concubine and fall in love with Rani. Kurudavva advises Rani to use the smaller root. She grinds the smaller root and pours it into the milk and gives Appanna but gets scared when Appanna goes into a deep sleep and takes him for dead. But when he wakes up after splashing water on his face she comes back to her senses. She gradually becomes determined to put an end to Appanna's tantrum. Rani conceives Appanna as a demon who locks her up like a caged bird in the castle, and fancies Kurudavva as the saviour / the big whale with the love portion the panacea for her marital malady. Kurudavva suggests that Rani should use the bigger root to win over her husband. Taking her suggestion, Rani grinds the root into a paste and mixes it into the curry. But there is a loud

eruption and the curry turns blood-red. Panicked by the turn of events, Rani is apprehensive of feeding the root to Appanna, therefore she pours it into an ant-hill.

The cobra residing in the ant hill drinks the love portion mixed curry and instantaneously falls in love with Rani. The snake follows Rani and sees Appanna slapping her locking her inside the house. He feels sorry for Rani and at night enters the house through the drain in the bathroom and assumes the form of Appanna. Naga in the form of Appanna makes love to her during night and disappears at dawn. Appanna who returns home in the morning neglects and abuses her. Rani is confused at this strange behaviour of her husband. She thinks that everything is a fantasy until she realises she is pregnant. Naga is dumbfounded by this news and asks her to keep this a secret. When the baby bump becomes visible Appanna fumes with anger. While he tries to kill Rani by throwing a huge stone on her, the cobra intervenes and saves Rani and the child. As Appanna decides to report Rani's infidelity to the Village Elders the lights change to night and Naga enters Rani's house and consoles her. Naga is aware that Rani will have to prove her innocence and chastity by undertaking the traditional ordeals, he advises her to undergo the snake ordeal rather than holding a red-hot iron rod or put her hand into boiling oil. He assures her that the cobra will not bit her and requests her to speak only the truth. Abiding by Naga's instruction Rani insists on the snake ordeal. She walks to the anthill, pulls the Cobra and swears that she has not touched any man excepting her husband and this cobra since her arrival to the village.

Once she proclaims this statement, the Cobra spreads its hood over her head like an umbrella and curls over her shoulder like a garland. The crowd is stupefied at this miracle and the Village Elders not only decree her as Goddess but also instruct Appanna to treat Rani with obeisance for the rest of his life. Appanna though clueless pays heed to their order. His concubine is ashamed and does menial work at Rani's house. Rani, her husband and son live a happy life.

Naga/King Cobra resurfaces as it cannot forget Rani. Naga still in love with Rani cannot harm Rani and her family, therefore he enters into her long tresses and strangles itself. The next morning Rani finds a dead snake fall from her hair. She makes her son cremate the snake and light the pyre. Rani insists that since their family was saved by a cobra their son should perform all the rituals and observe cobra's death anniversary solemnly.

When there is a dispute between the flames regarding the end of the story the man provides an alternate happy ending. In this version Rani is aware of the snakes love and it becomes part of her long hair and resides in their blissfully without the knowledge of her husband.

### 3.6 Summary

#### Prologue

Girish Karnad employs the narrative technique of narrating a story within the story. The prologue set in a temple disrupts the image of traditional and omniscient narratorial voice. It introduces a doleful writer sitting in the inner sanctum of the temple alongside a disfigured idol, he is cursed for having committed the crime of producing boring plays that make audiences asleep and therefore is berated to remain awake all through the night. Following the insipid author drowsily battling a life and death situation, a parade of Flames gather at the ruined temple. The Flames cognizant and informed are gossiping among themselves about the state of affairs in the village. A new flame, a latecomer to the meeting narrates the incident of the untold Story that jumped from an old woman's mouth and transformed itself into a young woman which led to a conundrum in the old lady's household. The flame chronicles the autonomy vested within the Story and that absurdity and futility in gaging a story. The Story in the form of a young woman dressed in a new colourful sari is enthusiastically welcomed by the flames sits despondently in the corner, the Story is dejected as she cannot pass her tale and the flames are sympathetic towards her. The man who has been paying heed to the conversation springs at her and grabs the Story by her wrists forcing her to tell the story. As the man promises to pass on the tale to others, the self-respecting Story begins the narration as the he and flames listen attentively.

#### Act I

Rani (Queen of the whole world/Queen of the long tresses) is married to the young affluent Appanna and sent to his village. On the nuptial night he locks her and leaves for his paramour's house and gradually it becomes a recurring pattern. Rani is confined within the domestic space and kept in isolation, Appana visits her only for lunch. Lonely and frightened of the dark, Rani mechanically gets accustomed to the chauvinistic indifference of Appana and the monotonous life. Longing for emancipation and love, she has imaginary conversations with an eagle which would carry her beyond seven seas to the magic garden and eventually to the safe haven

of her parents. Deprived of love and bored to death, she longs for her husband to return to her.

The news of Appanna visiting his concubine's house reaches Kurudavva (best friend of Appanna's mother), so she along with her son Kappanna comes to visit Rani. Kappanna carrying his blind mother Kurudavva on reaching Rani's house finds it locked. Dismayed, the mother and son discuss Appanna's abominable activities, Rani overhears this conversation and comes to his window. As Kappanna keeps vigil seated under the tree, Rani recounts to Kurudavva about Appanna's inhuman treatment. She requests Kurudavva to send word to her parents and save her. Moved by Rani's quandry, Kurudavva sends her son Kappanna home instructing him to procure two roots wrapped in a piece of paper placed inside a coconut shell safely hidden with a wooden box. She comforts Rani with her own story of how she won over her husband using the magical root given to her by a sage. She bequeaths the herbs to Rani and counsels her to drug her husband first with the smaller root and then the bigger one. Kappanna whistles alerting them of Appanna's arrival, Appanna detests the presence of visitors and resolves to buy a watchdog to prevent meddlers from visiting Rani.

Rani mixes the small root into milk and gives it to Appanna. After consuming it in a single gulp he falls asleep. But after waking up from the daze, nothing seems to have changed, Appanna again locks her and goes to meet his concubine. Kurudavva who comes to check upon Rani finds that nothing has changed. She insists that the Appanna's infatuation is not an ordinary one and suggests feeding him the larger piece of root. As Rani pours the paste into the curry there is an explosion and the curry turns blood red, steam, pink and furious envelopes her. Petrified by the poisonous red she is uncertain of its outcome and pours it into a nearby ant-hill. The moment she turns back, the King Cobra in the ant-hill having consumed the portion falls in love with her, he lifts his hood, hisses and follows her. Restless and excited he keeps trail of her. After lunch, when Appanna indifferently locks her and goes away, the King Cobra moves towards the house, enters through the drain in the bathroom and assumes the form of Appanna. King Cobra- Naga watches her as she sleeps.

## Act II

As the night creeps in, Naga disguised as Appanna visits her, admires her long hair, enquires about her parents and listens to her affectionately.

She falls asleep in his arms and he promises to visit her at night. Appanna who unlocks the door in the morning behaves apathetically with Rani. She is shocked at his insolent behaviour and convinces herself that the bliss of last night must have been a dream. The following night when Naga enters, she enquires him about his strange behaviour, brutal during the day time and the considerate at night. He swears his love for her and soothes her. As she prepares to sleep in his arms, Rani is terrified at the sight of blood on his cheeks and shoulders that look like tooth-marks and rushes to bring the ointment placed in the mirror-box. As she opens the Mirror box, she sees a cobra's image in the mirror and shrieks. Naga moves with a lightning speed and gently pushes away the mirror-box and Rani shudders thinking of the snake, but is relieved to find that there is no cobra in her room. She applies ointment on his wounds. Naga fulfils her carnal yearnings and reassures her that he will come home every day twice – at night and again at mid-day. He instructs Rani that whenever he comes and goes at night, Rani should always stay within the room and not look out of the window.

Kurudavva and Kappanna come to visit Rani, Kappanna as usual lowers her to the ground and sits under the tree. Kurudavva stumbles over the dog as she goes to the door and calls out to her son. The duo find the dog dead and hear a man's footsteps inside the locked house. Kappanna spots a King Cobra coming from Rani's bathroom drain and screams. Hearing his cry, Rani rushes to the bathroom hoping Appanna is not there. She is bewildered for Appanna has suddenly disappeared into thin air and Kurudavva ensures her that for the past half an hour no one has come out of the house. This incident leaves them all confused.

Appanna comes home in the mid-day only to find his dog dead. Lamenting, he had spent fifty rupees for the dog he is certain that the cobra from the ant-hill must have bitten the dog and yells at Rani. Rani instantly is reminded of the blood on Naga's cheeks but forgets it as she is immersed in her domestic chores. The death of the dog infuriates Appanna who brings a mongoose home. The mongoose only lasts a day, and it is also found dead with bits of flesh under its claws and bits of snakes are found in its teeth. That night Naga does not visit Rani and for the next fifteen days there is no sign of him. The fight with the mongoose had injured him severely. Rani spends her night pining for him. After a fortnight when Naga returns, Rani is worried looking at his scars and tends to his wounds by applying ointment. Though she never bothers him or questions the nature of his wounds she is confused for the scars seem to disappear during the day time.

As her relationship with Naga progresses, she informs him of her pregnancy. Naga is not happy and asks her to keep it a secret. At this moment Naga fades away and Appanna appears accusing Rani as a harlot and repudiates that he is the father. Naga, the cobra watches this through the window and when Appanna tries to beat her the cobra hisses loudly and distracts him. Rani uses this opportunity to lock herself in the house and Appanna swears he will take her to the Village Elders and punish her. As Appanna leaves, Naga enters and Rani catechize him regarding his behaviour. Naga convinces her and advises her to take the Snake ordeal. Naga instructs her to only tell the truth and vows that her husband will become her slave from the next day.

Before the trial begins, the Village Elders too are affected by Rani's choice of Snake ordeal. The traditional tests in their village court usually comprises of tests where the suspect either took the oath while holding a red-hot iron or plunged the hand in boiling water, seldom did the defendant opt for swearing by the King Cobra. This extraordinary news of the Snake trial spread and attracts large animated crowds. The village court resembles a country fair and the elders insinuate she should desist from this stupidity. They even persuade her to prefer the red-hot iron rod ordeal over the Snake. Meanwhile Kurudavva intervenes the scene and is vexed because her son Kappanna has been missing for a week. Karudavva is certain that Kappanna had been abducted by a yaksha woman / a snake woman and is in a hysterical state. Rani realises that desires really reach out from some world beyond right into one's household and plunges her hand into the ant-hill and pulls out the Cobra. She takes an oath on it swearing that she hasn't touched any male excepting her husband and the Cobra. On hearing her words, the cobra slides up her shoulders and spreads its hood like an umbrella over her head. The Cobra sways its hood gently and moves around her neck like a garland.

The crowd witnessing this incident sings hosannas and cheers Rani and the panchayat astounded by this miracle pronounces her a divine being. The elders declare that Appanna is the chosen instrument for revealing Rani's divinity and he has to spend his life in her service. Mortified, Appanna repents his misdeed and accepts her. Rani and Appanna are happy with the child. Meanwhile the Cobra, decides to pay her a visit and enters the house taking his human form. He sees Rani sleeping contently and cannot bear to see his Rani – the queen and fragrance of his nights cuddled in another man's arms. He contemplates killing her but his profound love for her prevents



him from doing so. He transforms into a small, thin snake and hides between her long tresses so he can play with her for one last time. Overcome by despair he ties her long hair into a noose and places it around his neck.

Rani wakes up and feels her hair weighing a ton. As her husband Appanna combs her hair struggling to get the comb through, the dead cobra falls to the ground. Appanna is relieved that the son has been saved and calls her a goddess. Rani appeals to him to cremate the snake and the fire should be lit by her son and every year their son should perform rituals to commemorate Naga's death. Though Appanna is worried letting the son perform the rituals while he is alive, he adheres to Rani's desire.

As the story narrates the conclusion the listener – the man does not accept this conclusion. He provides an alternate ending to the tale where Rani finds the cobra falling from her head and he is alive. When Appanna tries to kill the snake, Rani hides it back in her hair safely and the hair becomes a symbol of marital bliss. In his narration all the characters live happily ever after.

### 3.7 Explain with Reference to Context

1. "I was wrong. Perhaps death makes one sleepy. Every night this month I have been dozing"

The above words are uttered by the Man. As the night starts growing dark, the man – a playwright sits in the inner sanctum of the temple trying desperately to stay awake. The man reminisces how writing bad plays and staging them had impacted him. Since he let down the audiences who trusted him and made them fall asleep in broken chairs the sleep of the people had turned against him and become a curse – the curse of death. In order to escape the curse of death a mendicant advises him to keep awake at least one whole night that month, if he succeeds in doing so he will live else he will die on the last night of that month. Therefore in an attempt to save his life, the Man listens to the tale narrated by the story all night.

In this context, Karnad parodies writers and critiques the state of art of theatres. He also reinforces the idea to break stereotypes and evasively urges the creators to come up with new ideas to engage the audiences.

2. "My mistress, the old woman, knows a story and a song. But all these years she has kept them to herself, never told the story, nor sung the song"

These lines are told by the New flame to its fellow flames as it arrives late for the night gathering. The New flame tells that there was a 'to-do thing' at the house that particular night and therefore the delay in joining the others. The New Flame narrates the story of its mistress – an old woman who knew a story and a song, but kept it to herself without sharing it. The story and the song felt suffocated being imprisoned within the lady. One afternoon as she was sleeping with lips wide apart, the story and the song escaped from her mouth. The story transformed into a young woman and the song became a sari that the story draped herself in and hid in the attic. The story and the song – in the guise of a young woman in the sari stepped out of the old man's room as the old woman after finishing her chores entered the room. The sight of a damsel rushing out of the old man's room led to a row between the husband and the wife. The story and the song which were trapped within the woman felt vindicated with this revenge.

Through this incident the author establishes the supremacy of the craft- story telling and also purports the idea and the need for the story to be passed on. Moreover Karnad hints that anyone who tries to restrict/keep the story to themselves will be reproved.

3. "Then Rani's parents embrace her and cry. They kiss her and caress her. At night she sleeps between them. So she is not frightened any more. 'Don't worry,' they promise her. 'We won't let you go away again ever!'"

These lines suggest Rani's disposition, she utters them to herself as she mechanically starts cooking. Rani the newly wed bride after moving with her husband to his new village finds life bleak. The callous nature of her husband who is unwilling to consummate their wedding creates a void in her life. Rani, who spends all day staring blankly at the window as her house is locked by her husband has no other option but to use her imagination to create an alternate space wherein all her 'desires' are fulfilled. She fancies a realm where she feels protected by her parents. In her utopian domain her parents do not send her with the insensitive Appanna, instead they promise to make her stay beside them. She imagines her as the princess whereas Appanana appears as the stage with golden antlers and eagle in different instances.

Such instances of Rani fabricating her down dreamland recurs throughout the play. Through the world she conjures up, Karnad



not only reveals her disposition but also plays with the concepts of truth, reality and half-truths. The play is already a story inbuilt within a story, in this context Rani's world of fantasy challenges the reader/audiences to differentiate 'truth', 'reality' and 'imagination'.

4. Do you know what I ask for when I pray to Lord Hanuman of the Gymnasium every morning? For more strength. Not to wrestle. Not to fight. Only so I can carry you around"

The above words are spoken by Kappanna to his mother Kurudavva. Kappanna is in his early twenties and is introduced to the audiences as the dutiful son who carries his blind mother around the village while informing her the day-to-day happenings. Though the son has a fair countenance Kappanna spots Appanna in a concubine's courtyard and informs his mother. Kurudavva, a friend of Appanna's mother troubled by this piece of information cannot sleep a wink and rushes to see the new daughter in-law. Kappanna repents telling her the news as he has started having a back ache carrying her all the way to Appanna's house on his shoulder. Kappanna considers Appanna as a lunatic who tortures his wife by locking her indoors. In the above lines author depicts a picture of Kappanna's temperament and frame. In the latter half of the play through Kurudavva the audiences are informed that Kappanna besotted by a yakshi is missing. Kappanna is the common man who cares for his mother, gets agitated at a fellow being mistreating his woman, feels pity for Rani and rushes to help her, but ultimately falls for a 'beautiful girl'.

5. "I was born blind. No one would marry me. My father wore himself out going from village to village looking for a husband. But to no avail."

The above lines are spoken by Kurudavva to Rani. Kurudavva apprehends that Rani's marriage has not been consummated as Appanna is smitten by another woman. In this context she narrates her story to Rani. Kurudavva the blind woman had no suitors despite her father's meticulous efforts. One day she came across a mendicant to whom she served food and took care, the mendicant pleased by her actions gave her three pieces of roots and advised her to use the smallest piece first and if it yields no result only then to try the middle sized one and in case it also fails then finally use the largest piece. He assured that any man who consumes those roots

would definitely marry her. Kurudavva fed the middle sized root to her distant cousin, who eventually fell in love with her, married her and remained faithful till death. Kurudavva who had used the middle sized root offers the other two roots to Rani and urges her to feed it to Appanna.

The above lines while depicting the plight of Kurudavva also incidentally throws light on the need for women to succumb to the marital system in a society. The play at large subtly discusses issues of chastity and fidelity involved in a relationship.

6. "Now don't be silly. I am not a mongoose or a hawk that you should be so afraid of me."

The above lines are spoken by Naga (in the form of Appanna) to Rani as he visits her at night assuming the form of Appanna. Rani is irked by the dog Appanna had brought home that morning, it's barking had deprived her of sleep in the morning and she feels sleepy for the first time at night after coming to the village. Naga/Appanna's unexpected arrival during night and his love baffles her. He instructs her to be fresh and bright when he comes home and reassures his love. When he asks Rani to put her head against his shoulder she gets scared and then Naga comforts her saying he is neither a mongoose nor a hawk to be frightened and stay relaxed. Naga adores her as the 'snake princess' and encourages her to speak about her parents.

The above words divulge the 'humane' nature of Naga and his unconditional love for Rani. He also deftly exposes his 'true'/snake self when he compares mongoose and hawk as deadly creatures. The lines also exalt Naga's protective and compassionate approach.

7. "I was a stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here. But now I am a woman, a wife and I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot."

Rani speaks these lines to Naga when Naga requests her not to disclose the news of her pregnancy to anyone for a few more days. The submissive Rani, who had obeyed Naga/Appanna becomes furious and refuses to keep it a secret. The baffled woman cries at him as she really is not able to relate to the face in the morning and touch in the night as they seem to differ. The only thing that remains constant either in the morning or night is that she is not

allowed to ask questions. Fed up with this approach of her husband she demands an explanation. She asserts that she has matured and is going to be soon a mother, therefore needs him to explain the charade to her and why Appanna's attitude changes like a chameleon from day to night. Rani tries hard to comprehend but in vain. The only thing she realises is that she is expecting and it is not part of her dream. This exchange between Rani and Naga illustrates the transformation and evolution in Rani's character. It also displays Naga's vulnerability and the defiant outlook of Rani to guard the child in her womb.

8. What am I to do? Is the whole world against me? Have I sinned so much that even Nature should laugh at me? I know I haven't slept with my wife. Let any miracle declare her a goddess. But I know! What sense am I to make of my life if that's worth nothing?

The above lines are spoken by Appanna. As the play ends the Man and the Story converse and the man is certain that Appanna will spend his days in misery. Appanna hadn't touched his wife and when she announces the news of her being pregnant he is taken aback, accuses her and reports to the Elders of the village council. Rani proves her innocence by choosing the snake ordeal and is absolved of the charges of adultery laid against her. Even after the verdict pronounces Rani as the diving being Appanna is quite uncertain. Appanna opines that the entire world has turned against him and he has to silently suffer all alone.

Though the judgement in the village council had vindicated Rani it had started eating up Appanna's mind. The chauvinistic husband realises that he has been reduced to a mere cuckold.

9. How could I even hope to retain the human form? For me-yes, only her long locks. Dark, jet-black snake princesses.

These words are the parting words of Naga. Naga enters Rani's house through the drain and notices Rani sleeping on her husband's shoulder with her child beside her. Though he feels jealous at the slight of Rani being with another man, he is unable to kill her. Naga comes to terms with the truth that he is not a human being and therefore cannot assume the form of Appanna forever. For one last time he looks longingly at her long tresses and enters them. In one version of the story he hangs himself in her long locks and is found dead whereas in an alternate ending he resides in Rani's long hair and she helps him escape from her husband.

### 3.8 Short Notes

1. Trace the influence of Brecht's Epic Theatre on Karnad's *Nagamandala*

Brecht's Epic Theatre "demonstrates the principles of multiplicity and simultaneity" (Batra 161) while consciously doing away with the aesthetic and idealistic elements. Karnad's *Nagamandala* does not negate Brechtian conception to elude the willing suspension of disbelief, interestingly he rather sensitized the Indian audiences to the 'potentialities of non-naturalistic techniques' present in our folklore and theatres.

Karnad introduces Brechtian alienation technique when he fuses the human and snake world into one. The magical prowess of the cobra constantly reminds the audience that they are watching a play. As Karnad himself observed, "The various conventions-the chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing of human and non-human worlds-permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative attitudes to the central problem. To use a phrase from Bertolt Brecht, these conventions then allow for 'complex seeing.'" (Batra 162)

Elements of the epic theatre can be traced as the choral and music is provided by the Flames while the Story narrates the play to the man who is keen on not falling asleep. In addition the Brechtian influence can also be felt in the linear narration of Kurudavva and the abrupt change in scenes from day to midnight and village square etc.

2. Draw a brief character sketch of Rani.

Rani is the only child to her parents and therefore they cherish her as their queen of the entire world. Her long tresses seamlessly flow till her silver anklets and she knotted her hair it glistens and coils like a cobra on her neck. Her ears resemble the hibiscus flower, and her skin is as soft as the tender mango leaves. Her silky lips and slender form enhance her grace. Rani's parents found her a suitable rich husband, who took her to his village after she reached 'womanhood'.

Rani grows homesick as her husband Appanna ignores her and spends every other night with his mistress. She becomes frightened and sick at this repulsive behaviour of her husband who locks her

all day inside the house. Her only communication with the outer world is looking through the barred window. She longs for love, her helplessness induces her to concoct and visualises imaginary scenarios. Her dreams are wish fulfilments that manifest her inability to breakout from a calamitous marriage and a frigid husband. She has reveries in which an eagle carries her across the seven isles to a magic garden. In the garden under an emerald tree her parents await her arrival. She contemplates that the eagle (saviour) would emancipate her from this ill-fated marital life and desperately awaits the arrival of a redeemer. As the onset of darkness scares the little girl, she envisions the presence of her parents and dreams of sleeping in between them. Their imaginary embrace eases her pain and her parents promise to not let go of her. Rani also fantasizes that a stag with golden antlers visit her and ask her to go with him. The stag tells her that he is indeed a prince in disguise. Rani is 'bored to death' confined within the house and has suicidal thoughts, she confesses to Kurudavva that she plans to jump into the well.

Rani befriends Kurudavva and follows her instructions to mix a magical root in the curry and feed her husband. But she becomes apprehensive when she has to rise to the occasion. When the curry turns red, she is appalled at the 'horrible mess' she has created and decides not to commit a 'heinous crime' by serving the curry. She pours it into an anthill where the cobra resided. Cobra on consuming the magical portion falls in love with Rani.

But, Rani is unaware of the happenings. Naga (cobra) assumes the form of Appanna and enters the house. Seeing Rani Naga swoons over her. Rani is pleasantly shocked at the sudden change in behaviour of her husband and wonders why the husband who loves her at nights is cold to her and sport a 'scowling face' during the mid-day. Rani tells Naga, "Goodness! Goats have to be sacrificed and buffaloes slaughtered to get a word out of you in the mornings. But at night-how you talk! Snakes and lizards may do what they like, but human beings should have some sense of shame." (25)

There is a visible transformation in Rani's gait and attitude once she comes into contact with Naga. Once she discovers she is going to bear a child, Rani the innocuous girl turns into an assertive woman. When Naga pleads with her to keep her pregnancy a secret, she rebukes him. Rani is fed up with Naga's dubious attitude and refuses to be compliant.

She realises that 'the face in the morning unrelated to the touch at night'. Rani confronts Naga, "I was stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here. But now I am a woman, a wife, and I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot. Not a cat or a sparrow. Why don't you take it on trust that I have a mind and explain this charade to me? Why do you play these games? Why do you change like a chameleon from day to night? Even if I understood a little, a tiny bit- I could bear it." (32)

When Naga instructs her to opt for the ritual Oath by Cobra before he leaves her for the last time, Rani is intuitive that things are going to change. She wishes to hold Naga 'like a baby' in her arms and safeguard him.

Though Rani is uncertain at the beginning of the ordeal she decides to prove her 'innocence'. Holding the cobra she declares that her hands had touched only two men – her husband and this cobra, the snake clings to her shoulder like a garland. As Rani emerges victorious from the Snake ordeal, she is deified by the village elders and Appanna seeks apology.

Though the character of Rani depicts the evolution of an 'ignorant girl' into an authoritative female protagonist, through Rani Karnad documents the desire of the woman. At the end of the play she realises that there are things beyond human perception and wit, she senses the presence of 'desires reaching out from some world beyond right into our beds'. Rani's naivety regarding Naga wanes when insists her son to light Naga's pyre and perform rituals every year commemorating Naga's death. Karnad uses the image of Rani to negotiate conceptions of chastity, love, fidelity and happiness.

### 3. Comment on the ending(s) of the play

Naga-Mandala narrates the tale of Rani's miserable life in Appanna's household. Appanna is indifferent to Rani and locks her in the house, he comes home in the mid-day only for lunch and goes to his concubine's house. Kurudavva, the blind woman and her son Kappanna give Rani a magical root to win her husband's love. But unfortunately, Rani becomes scared seeing the portion and pours it down an anthill. The cobra in the anthill drinks it and falls in love with Rani. The Naga visits Rani at night taking the form of Appanna. Rani assumes that Naga is her husband. Naga the passionate love showers her with adulation and they spend the nights happily as a result Rani becomes pregnant. Appanna is shocked to learn that Rani is pregnant



and swears he has not fathered her child. He goes to the Village Elders for justice. Rani is baffled by his behaviour. At night Naga disguised as Appanna advises Rani to take undergo the sanke ordeal and tell the 'truth'. She wins her honour by holding the cobra and testifying the truth in front of the entire village. The mob is awestruck and considers her as Goddess incarnate. Appanna becomes a reformed man, Rani is blessed with a son and lives happily everafter. This ending makes the Flame unhappy and it prepares to leave, the man who is listening to the story is unsatisfied with the ending, he feels it is unconvincing and that there are too many loose ends.

Therefore the Story continues its narrative. Naga visits Rani at night at the usual hour. He sees Rani sleeping on her husband's shoulder, her long tresses let loose flows down and her child is sleeping beside her. She looks content. Naga is pained to see his beloved in the arms of Appanna. He is maddened by anger and desperately wants to kill Rani by poisoning her. But then he realises that he can never become a human and he still loves her. The realm of snakes and the humans can never merge. Apprehensive, he ties a noose in her tress and hangs himself to death. On waking up, Rani finds that her head 'weighs a ton'. As Appanna combs her hair a dead cobra falls from her hair. He is sure that Rani is a goddess who has save him and the child. Rani tells Appanna that the Cobra has saved their life and has given their child, 'the gift of life' hence their son must cremate the cobra and perform the rituals of a son every year on the cobra's death anniversary. The Story finishes its narrative and leaves but the Flames are still unhappy with the sad ending. The request the man to come up with a happy ending.

In the Man's narration, as Rani combs her hair a live cobra slithers from her long tresses, Appanna searches frantically for a stick to kill the snake but Rani lets her hair down and asks the snake to hide in between it, she pats her hair and says, "This hair is the symbol of my wedded bliss. Live in there happily, for ever." (46)

The dual ending of the play signifies that, "Naga or the Nagin in people's lives cannot be strangled or cremated because at the time of crisis, such as the one explored in this play, the individual does need to look to the unconscious to fulfil the need generated by the reality of his/her condition" (Batra 202)

4. Describe the role of Flames.

The readers are introduced to the Flames in the prologue. In the village once the lamps are put out at night, they gather at remote places to gossip amongst themselves. The Man waiting in the temple is shocked to see four Flames floating in the air. They are giggling in female voices and enter the temple. Flame1 is waiting for the other Flames well ahead, it informs them that since its stingy master had run out of kusbi oil and peanut oil he had to put off the light early and therefore it had arrived early to the temple. Flame 2 sneers at its neighbour and boasts that coming from a family near the coast it would only settle down for coconut oil. The Kerosine Flame/Flame 4 which arrives late to the meeting says that it will never have any difficulties from now on and narrates its story. The master of its house had an old mother who was sick and her stomach was bloated. The Flame was lit all night and it had to stand witness to the 'stank of cough and phlegm', but the old woman died that morning. No sooner had the mother died, her son and daughter in law put down the lamp and were happy, therefore the chased Flame came rushing to the gathering. Hearing this Flame 3 says they have to witness whatever is unpleasant. As they are chattering, a New Flame enters with its fair ashare of a tale of how the Story and the Song which were gaged by an old woman felt all choked up and finally escaped from her mouth when she was sound asleep with mouth opened. The Story took the form of a woman while the Song became a Sari she could wrap herself in. They mischievous Story and Song took revenge on the old woman by creating a commotion in her house by stepping out the old woman's husband's room when the lady entered.

In fact the New Flame directs the Story and Song to follow her to the temple and all the Flames welcome 'the poor things' driven away by the mistress. Their introduction provides an aura of magical realism to the play and sets the tone for further action.

## 2.8 Key Words

Epic Theatre- Folktales – Myth – Story



### 3.9 Self Assessment Questions

1. Trace the ideas of chastity and fidelity in Karnad's Nagamandala
2. Critically analyse the role of Naga in the drama.
3. Do you think *Naga-Mandala* can be read as a feminist play?
4. How does the subplot of Kurudavva and Kappana add significance to the narration?
5. Which ending is more appealing and why? Justify your argument with a critically evaluation.

### 3.10 References

#### Primary Source

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## UNIT - IV : FICTION

### Lesson 4.1 - Neela Padmanaban - Generations

#### Structure

- 4.0 Objective
- 4.1 Author Introduction
- 4.2 Synopsis
- 4.3 Chapter wise Summary
- 4.4 Short Notes
- 4.5 Glossary
- 4.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 4.7 References

#### 4.0 Objective

- (i) To familiarize the students with the significance of conceptions of rituals and tradition in the early post independent Tamil landscape

#### 4.1 Author Introduction

##### Neela Padmanabha (1938)

Neela Padmanabhan hails from Kanyakumari. He writes in Tamil, Malayalam and English. Padmanabhan documents the emotionally charged situations that prompt the individual from small towns to rise to occasion and broaden their horizon. A master of realistic portrayals, his characters defy the societal hierarchies and challenge parochialism. This celebrated litterateur, was honoured by Ilakkiya Chinthanai (one of the eminent Tamil literary organizations in the state) for his noteworthy contribution to the literature. He has instituted prestigious award 'Neela Padmam' and 'Thalaimuraikal' to encourage the budding writers.

Padmanabhan has written twenty novels, short stories, essays and poetry. His notable works include *Thalaimuraikal* (1968), *Pallikondapuram* (1970), *Uravugal* (1975), *Min Ulagam* (1976), *Thee* (1985), *Yaathirai* (1977), *Anubavangal* (1977), *Murivugal* (1985), *Therodum Veedhi* (1987), *Dhavam Seidhavargal* (1991), *Vellam* (1994), *Koondil Pakshigal* (1995), *Ilai Uthir*

*Kaalam*(2005). *Ilai Uthir Kalam* won him the Sahitya Akademi Award for Tamil in the year 2007. Earlier in 2003 he won the Saitya Akademi Translation Award for translating the works of Ayyappa Panikar from Malayalam to Tamil.

#### Note on the Translator

Kaa.Naa. Subramanian (1912-1988)

He is an eminent literary critic, translator, novelist and poet from Thanjavur was one of the pioneers of modern Tamil literature. He initially published literary reviews in *Manikodi*, *Swadesamithran* and *Saraswathi* and later went on to publish magazines *Ilakkiya Vattam*, *Sooravali* and *Chandraodayam*. Kaa.Naa.Su was a prolific writer who intended to create a Modern Tamil Canon. Among his many novels *Atkoli*, *Oru Naal*, *Poithevu* are still in vogue. He also wrote poems under the pseudonym Mayan. He has translated the works George Orwell, Par Lagerkvist, Selma Lagerlof, Thoreau, Andrer Gide, Dickens, Pearl S.Buck, Henrik Ibsen, Camus and many other European writers. He was conferred the Sahitya Akademi Award (1986), Govt. of Tamil Nadu award and Kumaran Asan award.

## 4.2 Synopsis

Neela Padmanabhan's *Thalaimuruaigal* published in 1968 was translated as *Generations* in English by Ka.Naa.Subramaniam, a celebrated Tamil writer. The novel set in the 1940's traces the evolution of modernity and change among the Eraniel Chetty community. This Bildungsroman delineates the physical and psychological growth of Diravi who is caught between the dilemma of tradition and rites vis-à-vis emancipation and liberation. The story revolves around three generations of Unnamalai Aachi's family and the trials and tribulations they undergo. Through Unnamalai Aachi, Neela Padmanabhan draws a vivid portrayal of the Chettis of Eraniel- a small migrant group in Kanya Kumari District bordering the present day Kerala, their distinctive culture and values of chastity on which the community thrives.

The story starts with Unnamalai Aachi paying obeisance to the Singa Vinayaka deity. Despite being afflicted with Filarisis, she tends to the household duties and educates her grandchildren about the Seven Towns people's rich cultural past. Unnamalai Aachi's family consists of her son Nagar Pillai (Dorai), his wife Kuttiamma and daughters Unnamalai, Nagammai, son Diravi and youngest daughter Visalam. The two elder

children have been married off, Unnamalai is married to Thapasi Pillai and Nagammai has tied the knot with Sevantha Perumal. The fifteen year old Diravi and ten year old Visalam are in school and dote their grandmother. They love listening to her narrate the stories of Goddess Oduppari, Thangamme & Thayamme (the virgin sisters worshipped by the Eraniel Chettiar Clan). Unnamalai Aachi's brother, the seventy year old Koonangani Pillai lives adjacent to her house with his wives Ponamu Achi and Ananji. Koonangani Patta also has a mistress, Ammukutty Ammachi. Krishankutty Nair and Bhargavi are born to them. Krishankutty marries Thangammai and has a son Sasi. Sasi is of the same age as Diravi, but looks as delicate as a girl, charming, fair skinned with dark hair. Bhargavi is married to Chellan Nadar a coconut climber who is from Nadar Community. After Chellan Nadar meets with an accident (slips while climbing the tree and breaks his leg), Patta financially looks after them. Koonangani Paatta's father Mootha Pillai Mookandi Chettiar used to be an influential person in Tiruvancode. Koonangani the pampered child had a salacious adulthood. Therefore when Paatta is thrity, he is married to Ponamu Achi, who is from a poor family at Padmanabhapuram. The couple does not have an heir even after ten years of marital life. Eventually, Paatta's sister, Unnamalai Aachi arranges for Paatta's second marriage with Ananji Pillai Aachi. After Paatta arrives in Eraniyal with his wives, Ponamu Achi is blessed with three children – Iyavu, Nilapillai and Pitcha Pillai. Koonangani Patta and Ponamu Achi's daughter Nilapillai who lost her husband Hariharaputra to small pox lives with her young son Chidambaram. She carries an illicit relationship with Chidambaram's teacher Kumaraswamy known as Korami, a widower. Ananji Aachi has twin children- Thayi and Andi Pillai. Koonangani Paatta's sons took after the father and were disreputable.

Nagammai who was married six months ago to the affluent Sevantha Perumal resides in the vicinity at Puthen Street. She is troubled by her mother in law, Papathi and is constantly subjected to ill-treatment by Sevantha Perumal, who blames her of being barren. Papathi is a greedy woman who had driven away her husband Kannu Pillai when he was afflicted with leprosy. Kannu Pillai found refuge in his mistress Krishna woman.

Diravi is aggrieved about his sister's plight and is unable to concentrate during the class hours. He is reminiscing the pains his father underwent to get his sister married, the visits to the astrologer and the money spent

generously for the wedding haunts his mind all through the day. Fellow villagers console Nagaru Pillai and suggest to convene a meeting at night in President Velu Pillai's house to arrive at a solution. In the meeting Sevantha Perumal demands that Nagammai has to be subject to a thorough examination by a gynaecologist, this statement leads to a fight between the two groups and Diravi is too weak and tired to witness the situation and comprehend it. As Nagammai returns to her father's house, everyone is in despair. Diravi seeks solace in the friendship of his friend Kuttalam. Kuttalam belongs to a socially inferior class. His father Thirukoothan Pillai is considered a simpleton and his mother Pichaimuthu died four years ago. Kuttalam is repeating class eighth, he always stands by Diravi. When a fellow classmate speaks ill of Nagammai he thrashes him mercilessly.

The gloomy atmosphere shrouding Diravi's home is dispelled by the news of his sister Unnamalai's baby shower/Semmantham. The house gets into a feisty mood and an elaborate account of the rituals and preparations are fastidiously provided. Diravi's brother-in-law Thapasi Pillai, a decent and good natured man is the reader of the puranas in the Pazhavada Vinayak temple. He earns his livelihood by reading Tiruppugazh, Tiruvembavai, Ramayana, Mahabharatham. As Diravi's family are busy with the preparation for Seemantham, Nagammai's mother in law Papathi surreptitiously arranges a second marriage for her son Sevantha Perumal with Vadivu, the 18 year-old daughter of Ekkimatan Pillai and Bhommu to hide her son's impotent nature. Enraged at this news Nagaru Pillai sends Nagammai to Sevantha Perumal's house. In a fit of helplessness she tries to commit suicide, but is prevented by Papathi, beaten mercilessly and sent back to her house by Sevantha Perumal. Achi advises her to forget Sevantha Perumal and move on with her life. Unnamalai akka gives birth to the Iyyappan, and returns home to Pazhavada with her child and husband.

Amidst the chaotic situation at home Diravi passes and is in SSLC, his father wants him to secure a government job. Meanwhile Diravi meets Kuttalam who has now become a merchant peddling goods, though he is happy for Kuttalam, Kuttalam's sympathy and concern towards Nagammai bothers Diravi. The relationship between Sevantha Perumal and Vadivu has worsened, Papathi has lost her authority. Diravi's family is already deep in debt (having borrowed for the harvest), in addition to that they have to perform ceremonies adhering to tradition & rituals. They extravagantly celebrate Unnamalai akka's son's first birthday. As the kozhukattai festival

takes place every member of the town revel in the festivities. Diravi passes SSLC and decides to pursue teacher training at Neykaranpatti which would fetch him a government job as a teacher. Visalam attains puberty and the ceremony is celebrated with grandeur. While everyone is rejoicing, Diraviyam is keen on avenging Sevantha Perumal who accused his sister Nagammai and is waiting for a right opportunity.

Having completed the teacher training Diraviyam is not able to get a government job and in order to get into a private school as teacher he is demanded a bribe as thousand rupees. He borrows the sum from the village trustee Velu Pillai leaving his house as collateral, but when he is not able to pay his debt he is forced to vacate the house and relocate. His family also seemed to be disintegrating. The women in Diraviyam's house had stopped Visalam from going to school once she attained puberty. Ponamu Achi's condition worsens after Nilapillai's elopement and her dying wish is to get Iya Pillai married. The wrangle between Kolappa and Thayi becomes a routine occurrence. The henpecked husband stoops low and tarnishes his image. Ponamu Achi, a diabetic patient dies after her son's wedding. After her death, Koonangani Paatta's life becomes miserable and his property is divided among his heirs. Iya Pillai, his wife Vellammai and his younger brother Picha Pillai leave for Trivandrum to set up a shop. Ananji Pillai, her son Andi Pillai, her daughter Thayi and Thayi's son stay at the house and are always finding fault with Koonangani Paatta. Andi Pillai finishes his SSLC and goes to Nagercoil and studies a course for electricians which fetches him a mill job. Ananji Pillai and Thayi too leave Eraniyal and join Andi Pillai at Nagercoil. After Patta's children move away, people assume that Koonangani Paatta will shift to Unnamalai Achi's house, but he staunchly refuses and manages all by himself despite his old age.

Diravi is twenty years old and gets a job at Karingal Government School. He teaches up to eighth standard and also takes some private tuitions to repay his debts. At the high school, he makes friends with the fifty year old Moses, who is fondly called MAMA as he has a double M.A., Moses' wife Rosammai is a doctor at Neyyor hospital and on his advice Diraviyam takes Nagammai for an examination. As the doctor certifies everything is normal with Nagammai, Diraviyam resolves to get her remarried to Kuttalam who has expressed his interest in marrying Nagammai.

With the changing times Diraviyam plans to shift to Karingal. Nagammai's health condition progresses after taking pills, Unnamalai Akkaa's son begins schooling at Pazhavada and it is also decided to get

Visalam married to Tapasi Pillai's second cousin's son Bhagavati Appan. Diraviyam now a matured person tells his parents his desire to get Nagammai married to Kuttalam and is readily given a nod. Unnamalai Achi's succumbs to the filarial fever and dies. Diravi resumes work two days after Achi's funeral and learns that he is likely to be transferred to Shencottah. As Diravi is making plans to get Nagu married to Kuttalam, Sevantha Perumal and his wife Vadivu conspire to kill Kuttalam. Kuttalam who jumps into the well to save Sevantha Perumal gets killed. Sevantha Perumal loses his sanity and is sent to Oolampara Mental Asylum in Trivandram. Diravi along with his parents and Nagu bids farewell to Eraniel and moves to a new destination hoping to find comfort.

### 4.3 Chapterwise Summary

#### Chapter 1

The novel set in 1940's begins on a cold December morning. As patches of modernity hover here and there, the quaint village largely lacks modern conveniences like electricity. The bells of Singa Vinayaka temple serve as a wakeup call for the folks. The readers are introduced to the sixty year old matriarch Unnamalai Achi and the Chetti lifestyle. Neela Padmanabhan gives an overview of the structure of a traditional Chetti house. The older women and men sleep in the verandha while the young stay inside. The houses were constructed in such a way that women cannot be seen by strangers, the people from outside can only get glimpses of the woman's anklets. The house has two doors. The first door opens to the courtyard and the second door leads to the inner rooms, which is fixed to the wall in the verandah. The entrance is small and one has to squat and bend to enter the rooms. It is constructed in such a way to safeguard the young maidens from strangers and the doors too are six inches thick. There is a huge roof near the verandha. The kitchen is located on its right while the granary stands on the left.

Unnamalai Achi believes it is auspicious to wake up and see the fronds of the coconut palm the first thing in the day. Then she massages her stiff and swollen legs with oil. When she was young Unnamalai Achi had contracted elephantiasis while bathing in river Valli, as a result she frequently suffers from terrible leg pain and lymphatic fever. Despite her leg pain, she starts waking up her grandson Diravi who sleeps with her in the verandah. Achi has a little white hair and is always seen with sacred ash. The smeared sacred ash has left an everlasting discoloration on her



forehead and owing to old age her eyes have sunken. Her flaring nostrils and huge earrings adds beauty to her smallpox marked face. Diravi is reminded of a 'shrunk pickled mango' when he sees her face. He also wonders why she is always clad in white clothes.

As Nagar Pillai starts to brush his teeth with the ash stored in the bucket, Kuttiamma, Nagar Pillai's wife covers her daughter Visalam with a blanket and proceeds to wash the soot covered utensils using coconut coir and ash. Unnamalai Aachi finishes massaging her leg and grind her betelnut in the stone and pestle. She then washes the courtyard with cowdung mixture. Unnamalai is disgruntled that the old head shaking lady - Ekki does not give enough cowdung.

## Chapter 2

Woken up by the family, Diravi sits in the verandha and starts reading with a chimney light. This served him a dual purpose, while he read he also got plenty of time to converse with his grandmother who was meticulously moistening and cleaning the front yard. Diravi who is anxious about the proceedings of the world would raise his doubts loudly and Achi would resolve them. In this way he got to learn the stories, traditions, customs and habits of the community into which he had been born. The fifteen-year-old Diravi asks Achi why none from their community had been bitten by a snake. Achi tells him that a Snake would never bite or hurt the Chettis – Seven towns' people as their home deity is Odupparai – Goddess of Snake. She adds the seven towns names are Eraniel, Pazhavadia, Pappanapuram, Parakka, Midalam, Kolachal and Tiruvancode. Originally these seven towns' people were from Kaveripoompattinam. To a confused and exclaimed Diravi and Visalam, Achi narrates the story that began in Kaveripoompattinam. According to the myth, there lived a king in Kaveripoompattinam. When he was gifted corals by a neighbouring emperor, the King wanted to string the corals into a necklace for his queen. The merchants and goldsmiths of the town found it impossible to pierce through the small corals to make a necklace. The King finally sent for the well known chettiar and ordered him to string the corals into a necklace by the next morning else he threatened him with a death sentence. The heart broken Chettiar discussed this issue with his two daughters Thangamme and Thayamme- both virgins, beautiful and celestial. The clever daughters dipped the corals and thread in jaggery and arranged them in a row near an ant-hill. During the night, the ants had passed into the corals and strung it into a chain.



The Chettiar overjoyed with the result, gave the necklace to the king. Enthralled by Thangamme and Thayamme's wit, the King wanted to marry both of them. But the Chettiyar did not want his daughters to be married out of his caste. Feeling insulted by the King's desire, he locked the girls in the basement and killed himself. The curse of the virgins befell on the kings and the city perished. Some of the menfolk of the Chettiar families fearing the anger of the King moved away from Kaveripoompattinam and reached Eraniyal. They Chettiars moved fearing the King gradually moved away to the nearby the seven towns with their deities Singa Vinayaka and Nagaramma. Diravi's father scolds Achi not instructs her not to narrate such stories and distract the children during their study hour.

### Chapter 3

After the daybreak, the village becomes animated. Men are on their way to the fields, women go to fetch water and people are on their way to the temple. Unnamalai Achi grumbles that despite the wealth of activity in the street, in the opposite house belonging to her brother Koonangani Pillai no one has woken up. Her brother too is heard complaining loudly that the women of his house are lethargic. As he is blaming, Ponamu Achi comes with the broom and bucket to sweep the street. Despite being fifty years old, she looks young. Unnamalai Achi tells her to get up early and finish the work. Ponamu too wants to wake up early and complete the chores before Achi, but is not able to do so. When Unnamalai Achi asks about his brother's second wife Ananji Pillai Achi who is sleeping inside. Ponamu Achi says Ananji will 'break him open and salt him' if he dares fight with her. A resentful Unnamalai not wanting to create more rift in her brother's family leaves the place.

The children are studying. A fifty year old man from Puthan Street, who works under Sevantha Perumal rushes to see Nagar Pillai house. On seeing this uncalled guest, Kuttiamma is worried and enquires the purpose of his visit. The man asks Nagar Pillai to accompany him to Sevantha Perumal's and meet Sevantha Perumal and his mother Papathi. This news makes Kuttiammai anxious and she starts worrying for her daughter Nagammai. Nagammai is one and a half year older than the fifteen year old Diraviyam who studies in the tenth grade. The youngest daughter of the family Visalam is 10 years old. Six months earlier, Sevantha Perumal had

married Nagammai. Nagaru Pillai, who was all set to go to Kurunthancode that morning goes to Puthen Street instead. Diravi is troubled thinking of his sister and decides to look into Nagammai's house on his way to the school.

#### Chapter 4

As Diravi enters Nagu Akka's husband's house, he understands that something is amiss. His father who sat on the verandah looks dejected. Sevantha Perumal's relatives Ekki Matan Pillai and Saastha Pillai are whispering into his father's ears. In the kitchen, his sister Nagu is lying on her stomach and sobbing. Nagammai's mother-in-law Papathi accuses Nagu of being barren, she accuses Nagammai of having committing a sin in last birth and therefore she is sterile. Diravi is not able to fathom the reason for Papathi's 'throaty mutterings.'

The crowd has grown larger and the village elders advice Nagaru Pillai to take his daughter home. Diravi's father was frustrated at the way things were shaping, he helplessly cries out that people from Eraniyal are indifferent to justice and bigotry. But Sevantha Perumal suggests that Nagaru Pillai must take Nagammai to a lady doctor and get her examined. Diravi cannot comprehend the situation and rushes to school. At school, as Inji Kolappa Pillai is busy teaching English lessons, Diravi contemplates as to why the evil woman Papathi and Sevantha Pillai insist on taking Nagu Akka home. He also wonders why Thangamme and Thayamme had to die. Instead of dying they could have married the King and lived happily thereafter. Worried that Nagu will die of sorrow and weeping, he is annoyed at Sevantha Perumal. Nagaru Pillai marries off Nagammai to the thirty five year old Sevantha Perumal as he hailed from an affluent family. Sevantha Perumal's mother Papathi, had chased away her husband Kannu Pillai. Kannu Pillai had contracted leprosy and was taken care of by his mistress the Krishna woman. Diravi does not remember much about his eldest sister Unnamalai's wedding which had taken place at Pazhavada a few years ago but he remembers even the minutiae details of Nagammai's marriage which had happened only six months back

He recounts the instances that lead to Nagammai's wedding. In the temple, when Papathi meets Unnamalai Aachi, she expresses her interest to marry Sevantha Perumal known as Mookan to Nagammai. Diravi's family

is scared about Papathi's reputation. Nagar Pillai scoffs her as a greedy woman who would demand a huge dowry and cannot be easily gratified.

But things take a turn with the intervention of the seventy year old Koonangai Patta. He persuades everyone in the house for the marriage. In his view his eldest daughter has become a destitute and Patta says that whatsoever the reason is everyone should reconsider their idea so that Nagammai will be richer and happier in future.

## Chapter 5

During the school intermission, the worried Diravi goes home. On reaching home, he finds his house crowded with neighbours. Koonangani Paatta and Annamalai Pillai are talking loudly and Nagar Pillai sits holding his head in hands silently with his eyes closed. Ponamu Achi cries to Diravi about Nagammai's helpless position. Ananji pillai Achi scolds Ponamu Achi for burdening the young Diraivi with familial worries. The fellow villagers comfort Nagar Pillai that marriages cannot be dissolved easily and they would help to resolve the problem. The villagers decide to convene a meeting that night at President Velu Pillai's house where brother-in-law and his men had to be present.

Even at school Diravi is not able to concentrate in Krishna Panicker's class. The memory of Nagammai's marriage arrangements disturb him and he recollects everything that had happened in the past. Diravi's father Nagar Pillai put much effort to get his daughter married. He along with Koonangani Paatta and his elder son-in-law had gone to Thengapattinam to consult an astrologer. The astrologer calculated and stated that it was a rare match and hence Nagar Pillai arranges the wedding.

## Chapter 6

Krishna Panicker notices that Diraviyam is inattentive in the class and inquires him. Following Panicker's class, it is Elizabeth John teacher's history classe

. But, Diraviyam's mind is digressing and still thinking about the plight at home. Despite being in the class his memory traverses back to the arrangements made during Nagammai's wedding. Despite Nagar Pillai informing Papathi that the horoscopes match, the old woman was sceptical. She agreed to the wedding only after consulting the horoscope with her brother Odiyan Pillai. Following his approval of Mookan and Nagammai's horoscopes, Papathi demanded some old lands which will yield

'five kottais of paddy, gold jewels worth 30 sovereigns, and 2000 rupees' cash as dowry. She also coerced them to bear the marriage expenses, give vessels for domestic use and distribute enough milk, fruits and sweets to the towns folk. Nagaru Pillai was not able to meet their demands, instead he offered the land with 4 kottais of paddy, 2000 rupees in cash and 500 rupees for the wedding ceremony. In addition to this 6500 rupees, he gave 1500 rupees to Papathi for clothes and other expenses.

## Chapter 7

At school the arithmetic teacher is absent and the children are let free. Diraviyam is not inclined on playing in the ground as his mind is racing with thoughts. He reflects how joyous the morning of nitchayathamboolam had been, the arrival of guests and the fixing of auspicious day for the wedding. The wedding ceremony was arranged with grandeur. The guests were fed to their stomachs content and the pandal pole was planted ceremonially, Saris, clothes and dhotis were purchased for the wedding couple. He recollects how gold was melted to make thali for the bride. This in itself was a small ceremony and everyone from the town had gathered for this auspicious ritual. Diravi's father purchased new pillows and satin mattresses for the couple. Diravi's courtyard was covered by a pandal and silky covering and wedding platform was designed with small pillars with temple pots on the top. The decorations done with paper looked magnanimous. Sweets and cakes were prepared in the makeshift kitchen in the backyard, women were busy grinding flour on wooden pestle. The pandal and courtyard were decorated with flowers.

## Chapter 8

This chapter introduces Koonangani Patta's Malayali mistress and her family. Ammukutty Ammachi summons Diravi to talk about Koonangani Paatta. Ammukutty Ammachi is Koonangani Patta's mistress and has the couple has two children Krishankutty Nair and Bhargavi. Krishankutty is married to Thangammai and the couple along with their son Sasi live with Ammachi. The delicate Sasi is as old as Diravi, he is charming and fair skinned with dark hair. Sasi's sister Amminikutty a year or two older than Salam was fond of Diravi. Ammukutty grandmother wants Diraviyam to inform Koonangani Patta to visit her to discuss a serious issue regarding Bhargavi and Chellan Nadar.

**Chapter 9**

As the day light is fading into dusk, Diravi reaches home. He recounts a similar incident that had happened earlier. Earlier too, when he was asked to convey Ammukutty Ammachi's message to Koonangani Paatta. Ponamu Aachi and Ananji Pillai Aachi who heard the news started berating Koonangani Paatta and called Ammukutti Ammachi all sorts of names. Koonangani Paatta's childhood narrated by Unnamalai Aachi is presented in this chapter. Koonangani Paatta's father Mootha Pillai Mookandi Chettiar was an influential person in Tiruvancode. Koonangani Paatta was born late after much penance and wore a nose ring for ten years to fulfil his parents' vow (In those days nose ring was worn by a girl or boy child to show that the child born to the parents after a very long period). Koonangani Paatta was pampered by his parents had no interest in studies. When he was eighteen, he fell in love with the Nadar Christian teacher Eli, who came home to teach Unnamalai Aachi.

**Chapter 10**

This incident with the teacher worried Paatta's parents. They were certain that if the boy was allowed to continue without work, he would fall into bad ways. Hence to keep him preoccupied his father entrusted him with the responsibilities of gathering the harvest, talking to the tenants, collecting and bringing home the produce from gardens and fields. Koonangani Paatta's expenses were mounting and he was not able to account for his expenses. Unamalai Aachi and her mother on their visit to Vellai Malai temple encountered Ammukutty and her mother Bhavani. Velu the cart driver informed them about the affair between Ammukutty and Koonangani Paatta. Koonangani's father was ashamed of this and refused to marry Koonangani to Ammukutty.

**Chapter 11**

Diravi on his way back home is still bewildered at his brother-in-law's act of driving away Nagammai from home. He begins to feel restless and sets off to deliver Ammachi's message to Koonangani Paatta. At Paatta's house he sees Aunt Nilapillai's son Chidambaram dozing with a book in his hand. Aunt Nilapillai is the daughter of Koonangani Paatta and Ponamu Aachi. She lost her husband Hariharaputra to small pox and is survived by her only son Chidambaram. Chidambaram's teacher Kumaraswamy known as Korami, a widower is sitting in close quarters

with Chidambaram and Nilapillai Aunt. Diravi senses that this relation between Korami and Nilapillai is illicit.

## Chapter 12

At the Community President Velu Pillai's house the meeting commences at ten. Papathi's youngest brother Odiyan Pillai, along with his sister's son-in-law Thanu Pillai and Puthan Street Ekkimatan Pillai take turns to set out their case in loud voices. Paatta states that it is a crime against womanhood to send a married girl to her home just after six months of her wedding. Annamalai Pillai challenges Sevantha Perumal to disclose his accusation loudly. Sevantha Perumal claims that though Nagammai looks like a woman she is not so and blames it was a sin to have arranged a marriage. He demands that a doctor must examine her, but does not state the purpose of examination. This statement sparks a quarrel between the two groups. Annamalai Pillai voices out that if the marriage had to be annulled, then the dowry and gifts too had to be returned. Papathi, the worst miser of all kinds retaliates saying that Nagammai had been fed for the last six months and no more compensation can be given. The unkind mob makes indifferent remarks that it is her fate to live like that and she has to repent for the sins of her past life. Diravi whose eyelids are drooping slowly loses control of the on going confusion.

## Chapter 13

No consensus is arrived at the assembly, as a result Diravi's family seems dejected. Diraviyam's Father is lost in his own thoughts, Aachi could do anything but curse Mookan. Mother is perpetually angry with Salam and Diravi is bitter towards everyone. Nagammai's problem couldn't be resolved even after the intervention of the town trustees. This chapter introduces the reader to Kuttalam, a friend of Diraviyam. Kuttalam belonging to a socially inferior class and lives in Puthan Street. His father Thirukoothan Pillai is considered a good for nothing fellow and his mother Pichaimuthu had breathed her last four years ago. Kuttalam is a miserable student who is repeating his eight standard. His grandmother forces him study. Kuttalam is from humble background but is sturdy and healthy. He has a mind of his own and does not listen to his father. A few consider him rude and sharp tongued and he jumps into quarrels. No one has any regard for him, but no one meddles with his affairs. When a quarrel breaks out in among Diraviyam and the other boys while playing, Kuttalam rises to occasion and beats Ambalavanan who speak ill about Nagammai. This



incident draws Diravi close to Kuttalam. After that incident Diravi begins to seek out Kuttalam's companionship and only with him he is able to talk frankly. Speaking with Kuttalam comforts him.

Another significant incident concerning Koonangani Paata and his daughter Sasi's aunt Bhargavi is recounted in this chapter. Sasi's aunt Bhargavi gets married to a coconut climber who is from Nadar Community. Bhargavi's husband Chellan Nadar meets with an accident, he slips and falls while climbing the tree and breaks his leg. Bhargavi seeks the help of Ammukutty Ammachi. Koonangani Paatta who hears this from Ammachi consoles her and assures to give her some money that would be helpful to their daughter. Hearing this Diravi feels sorry for Chellan Nadar. He likens Bhargavi's position to his sister Nagammai's plight and feels Chellan Nadar is far better human in comparison to his brother-in-law Sevantha Perumal.

#### Chapter 14

Koonangani Paatta's predicament is elaborated in detail in this chapter. Koonangani Paatta had lived for five years in Ammachi's house. His affection for Ammachi had kept him steady; he never looked at another woman. It was said that it was only due to her influence that he returned to his family. His mother was determined to get him married and finally he consented to marry Ponamu on Ammachi's insistence in order to please his mother. Paatta was thrity at that time. The marriage was not a great success. Ponamu Aachi was from a poor family at Padmanabhapuram. Even after ten years, they did not have an heir. After his mother's death, Paatta's sister, Unnamalai Aachi arranged for Paatta's second marriage with Ananji Pillai Aachi. After Paatta arrived in Eraniyal with his wives, Ponamu Aachi was blessed with three children – Iyavu, Nilapillai and Pitcha Pillai. Ananji Aachi too had twins- Thaiy and Andi Pillai. Koonangani Paatta's sons took after the father and were notorious. He was troubled by the frequent fights between his wives and his ashamed of the fact his sons were mercilessly beating him. He realised that since he had treated his father disobediently, his sons did not love him. He was also guilty that he drove his father away from home and therefore had to bear the pain inflicted by his sons. Diravi is instructed by Andi Pillai to deliver a jacket to his sister, Thaiy Pillai aunt's house and via this we are given an elaborate description of Thaiy Pillai. Thaiy was married to Kolappan, who had a shop of indigenous medicines in the market-roots,

plants, leaves, branches etc. Kolappan was a henpecked husband who tortured his mother Sembi Atha. Diravi juxtaposes Sevantha Perumal with Kolappan

### Chapter 15

Diravi runs into Kannu Pillai. Papathi's husband, Kannu Pillai affected by leprosy had been driven away by his wife Papathi. Being thrown away from home, Krishna Atha gave him the needed shelter. Kannu Pillai laments to Diravi about Papathi's cruel treatment towards Nagammai. He insists that the family must file a case against Mookan and Papathi, and he is ready to support Nagar Pillai in this cause. When Diravi informs this to his father, Nagar Pillai is perplexed. He is afraid that the family affairs will be discussed in a public forum and will not alleviate Papathi's painful memories. In the meantime, Nagammai's mother-in-law Papathi returns the vessels in small lots but not all of it; only a part of what was given is returned. Diravi is occasionally thinking of the matters of the past and his hatred for Papathi, Sevantha Perumal and the community augments.

### Chapter 16

This chapter portrays the elaborate arrangements made of Diravi's Eldest sister Unnamalai Akka's Seemantham /Baby shower. News from Pazhavadaï arrives that Unnamalai sister is expecting a child. Diravi's brother-in-law Thapasi Pillai is a decent and good natured man. He is very light skinned and called a "white man" by many. His brother-in-law is the reader of the puranas in the Pazhavadaï Vinayaka temple. He earns his livelihood by reading Tiruppugazh, Tiruvembavai, Ramayana, Mahabharatham. Brother-in-law sends invitations to everyone in the family for seemantham. Diravi did not like him earlier, but is now fond of him for every time Thapasi Pillai pays a visit to Eraniyal he gifts Diravi with a chakram coin, and Unnamalai would always bring him his favourite sweets and savouries. Nagar Pillai literally begs and borrows money from people to prepare the five eatbles to be given to Unnamalai in the fifth month of pregnancy. He is worried that town people would scorn at him if he does not make arrangements for the Semmantham in a grand scale, therefore he sells the paddy and with that money prepares seven eatables to be taken to Pazhavadaï during the seventh month. Excepting Unnamalai Aachi and Nagammai everyone else including Koonangani Paata, his wives and also Thai aunt go to the Seemantham carrying gifts for Unnamalai. As the



mellifluous sounds of the Pipes fill the air and drums are beaten to mark the auspicious occasion, Unnamalai clad in a silk sari is presented with eatables and vessels. The bangle seller comes and adorns her hands with bangles. At Unnamalai akka's house they feast, sing kolavai and celebrate the occasion. Unnamalai takes blessings from everyone at Pazhavada and heads to her mother's house at Eraniyal for delivery. Thapasi Pillai is almost in tears as his wife leaves delivery. Diravi and his family return in a spring axle cart with Unnamalai akka. Though everyone is happy, Diravi is still bothered by the thoughts of Nagammai akka's future.

### Chapter 17

Diravi wakes up to commotion at his house, and sees people weeping and murmuring. Neighbours and relatives have assembled in the courtyard. Diravi comes to know that Papathi had gone to Velli Malai and got her son Sevantha Perumal married at five that morning. To conceal Sevantha Perumal's impotence, Papathi arranges a second marriage for her son with a young girl named Vadivu. Vadivu is the 18 year-old, is the eldest daughter of Ekkimatan Pillai and Bhommu. Ekkimatan had ten children. Except for the third child Velappan he was blessed with nine girls. Ekkimatan was not able to eke out a living and found it really hard to even feed his large family. Therefore, when Papathi went with this marriage proposal the couple readily accepted to the proposition. Enraged by the news of Sevantha Perumal's second marriage, Nagar Pillai drags Nagammai from home and leaves her at Papathi's house. At Papathi's place Nagammai is made to starve and is beaten cruelly by her husband. Achi and mother constantly plead with Nagar Pillai to bring back Nagammai home. Even after the persistence of Thapasi Pillai and Iyam Pillai who come to visit Unnamalai akka Nagar Pillai is reluctant to bring Nagammai home. But, one fine morning Sevantha Perumal drops the frail Nagammai at Nagar Pillai's doorsteps and declares that they cannot take responsibility of her at their place.

### Chapter 18

The episode of Sevantha Perumal throwing away Nagammai spreads quickly. Nagammai unable to bear the painful beatings and pangs of starvation even attempts suicide by hanging herself from the crossbeam in Perumal's back verandah, but is stopped by Papathi. On returning to her parents' home, Achi advises her to forget Sevantha Perumal and move on.

Unnamalai akka delivers a baby boy at one o'clock in the night on an Uttarattathi day. The arrival of the child replaces the gloomy atmosphere at home with happiness. Diravi is initially scared to see the little 'red, rat like thing as if dipped in blood' lying next to Unnamalis. A telegram is sent to Tapasi Pillai. He along with his father Iyam Pillai, and two or three women relative arrive with turmeric, betel leaves, plaintains and sugarcanes to greet the child. Diravi and Salam distribute plantains and sugar to all the houses in the street. With Unnamalai Aachi's relentless care the baby transforms into a charming child. She feeds the child digestive medicine, and sings lullaby to the child in the hammock. Many rituals relating to the child birth takes place in the first few weeks. Tapasi Pillai's relatives from Pazhavada, Kuttiamma's parents Subbu Pillai Paataa and Nagammai Aachi from Padmanabhapuram and her brother Pandaram Pillai, his wife Ammalu along with their daughter Kuzhalamangai from Kulachal also come to visit the baby boy. Diravi calls Subbu Pillai as Pappanapuram Paata. Subu Pillai was into a government job, he was one of the secretaries of the Travancore Dewasome Board. He was a powerful man, who displayed his knowledge wherever he went. He was married to the sharp-tongued Nagammai Aachi and they had one son Pandaram Pillai and five daughters Kuttiamma, Mookkammai, Berarni, Shunmukam and Bhagavathi. Pandaram Pillai was a rich miser. His wife Ammalu is 'crazy, half-wit' but since she was rich none dared to talk about it. Nagammai Aachi always implied that Diravi was to marry Kuzhalamangai and claim the wealth of Pandaram Pillai.

The most important ceremony is touching of the pot of water ceremony to purify oneself. Things including "a new sari, blouse, a shirt, waist-chain for the child, a cradle, a string bearing necessary stone and iron talisman to save the child from indigestion" (144) were procured. People smear turmeric on Unnamalai's face and she puts the iron ring into the pot of water placed in the courtyard. Mother with peper chilli mix held in her closed fists circles Unnamalai head thrice to ward off evil eye. Then Unnamali touches the new pots in the kitchen to purge herself. The child is then given to the father and waist chain with talismans is tied. The relatives and visitors leave after consuming the feast. The relatives who come to visit Unnamalai akka and her son instead of enquiring about the mother and the child are more interested in the story of Nagu akka and abuse Sevantha Perumal for ill-treating her and shamelessly marrying another girl. Everyone is sympathetic towards Nagammai. Only after forty one days the mother of the new-born child is permitted to go oprut. As

soon as Unnamalai akka returns home, Kuttiamma makes 'auspicious liquid' shows it to the mother and child smears a dot on the their forehead to protect the mother and child. Diravi is mildly surprised by the end number of ceremonies and beliefs associated with birth. A month later, Unnamalai's husband along with her child Iyyappan return to Pazhavada.

### Chapter 19

Diravi passes and is in the SSLC class. His father wants him to pass SSLC and get a government job. Diravi is aware of the situation at home. The sentimental attachments and dilemmas he had to battle are now replaced by real life challenges. Whenever Diravi accidentally runs into Sevantha Perumal he avoids him and no longer considers him as a brother-in-law. It is also rumoured that Papathi does not get along with Vadivu and is always at odds with Sevantha Perumal. At Koonangani Paatta's house too, his wives are quarrelling on one side and his children on the other. Ponamu Aachi wants her son Iyavu to get married and she is worried that her daughter Thayi is constantly picking up a fight with her mother-in-law and frequently visits her mother's place. The scandal about the affair between Korami teacher and Nillapillai Aunt is no more a secret. On his visit to Ammukutty Ammachi's house, Diravi finds Amminikutti bathing near the well. Though she is just two years older than Salam she is now a grown up woman. Ammachi is suffering from her monthly bouts of Filaria. There Diravi learns that Sasi has gone to Neyyatinkara to visit his aunt Bhargavi. While he is returning from Ammachi's house, he meets Kuttalam. He learns that Kuttalam has become a hawker and sells mochai gram in his cycle as his father had had a paralytic attack and is bedridden. Talking with Kuttalam he realises how Kuttalam has been forced to sacrifice his youth in order to meet the harsh realities of life.

### Chapter 23

Diravi clears his teacher training exam but securing a government job is not easy. To get a job in a private school, he is expected to pay a bribe of thousand rupees. As he does not have any option, Diraviyam shows his house as collateral and borrows thousand rupees from the trustee Velu Pillai. On failing to pay the debt he will have to vacate his house and hand it to Velu Pillai. Diraviyam works in a middle school and finds teaching interesting. But to his dismay Diraviyam is not paid properly in the school and the entire family is disappointed in his choice of profession. The

women in Diraviyam's house have stopped Visalam from going to school once she attained puberty. The wrangle between Kolappa and Thayi has become a routine occurrence. The henpecked husband has sunk so low and tarnished his image. Ponamu Achi's condition has worsened after Nillapillai's elopement and her dying wish was to get Iya Pillai married. It is alleged that Iya Pillai has an illicit affair with a Pandarathi in eastern Mandapam. Iya Pillai's reputation preceded him and no one was willing to give their daughter to him in marriage. Hence from Kallukutthi, big-lathi Pothi's granddaughter Velammai, a spinster is approached for Iya Pillai. Ponamai Aachi, a diabetic patient dies after her son's wedding. After her death Koonangani Paatta's life becomes miserable and his property is divided among his heirs. Iya Pillai, his wife Vellammai and his younger brother Picha Pillai leave for Trivandrum to set up a shop. Ananji Pillai, her son Andi Pillai, her daughter Thayi and Thayi's son stay at the house and are always finding fault with Koonangani Paatta. Andi Pillai finishes his SSLC and goes to Nagercoil to study a course for electricians which will fetch him a mill job. Ananji Pillai and Thayi too are planning to leave Eraniyal and join Andi Pillai at Nagercoil. It is decided that Koonangani Paatta will shift to Unnamalai Achi's house, but he staunchly refuses it and manages all by himself despite his old age. Koonangani Paatta realises that he has to shoulder this burden at such ripe age for he hadn't treated his father well.

## Chapter 24

Diravi is twenty years old and he gets a job at Karingal Government School. Karingal was some miles on the road from Eraniyal to Kuzhithurai. Diraviyam has become an experienced teacher. Since Karingal is a High School, he teaches only up to eighth standard. He also takes some private tuitions to repay his debts. At the High School he makes friends with Moses, an elderly teacher. The fifty year old Moses is about to become the next Headmaster and is fondly called MAMA as he had a double M.A. Moses is amicable and humble, his wife works as a doctor at Neyyor Hospital. Moses asks Diraviyam what is troubling him at this young age. When Diraviyam shares the story of his sister Nagammai with Moses, Moses directs Diraviyam to get Nagammai examined by his wife Rosammai. While Diraviyam is contemplating the practical difficulties of taking Nagammai to Neyyor hospital without people's knowledge he meets Kuttalam who is planning to open a shop that sells Eraniyal lace cloth. From Kuttalam he learns that Kannu Pillai's mistress Lakshmi has

sold her buffaloes and using that money had taken him to Leporsy Centre at Noorandu. Kuttalam also informs him that Vadivu is disgruntled and is aware of Sevantha Perumal's infertility. He also indirectly hints his desire to marry Nagammai and seethes with rage at Sevantha Perumal's act of deserting Nagammai. This conversation with Kuttalam eases his troubled mind. Diraviyam recollects that his grandfather Subbu Pillai is a revolutionary, who advocated widow remarriage. Diraviyam is determined to fight for his sister's cause irrespective of the community's reaction. He resolves to get Nagammai remarried.

## Chapter 25

Diravi's uncle Pandaram Pillai, approaches him to marry his daughter Kuzhalamangai. Diravi's father Nagar Pillai is worried by the fact that Nagammai's future is at stake and Visalam has to be married. Nagar Pillai considers that there is no need to rush Diraviyam's wedding. Diravi's father a self-righteous person has never been fond of money. Pandaram's newfound interest towards Diraviyam (the govt. employee) irks him. Annoyed by Nagar Pillai's attitude, Pandaram Pillai fixes his daughter's wedding with Thangappan. Kuzhalamangai is married to Thangappan who is called "Symbalan" owing to his dandyism. Thangappan son of Ekkiammai and Sonachalam Pillai is unemployed and only cares about his appearance. Diravi's family is not invited for the wedding. After the wedding Thangappan the rich son-in-law hardly recognises his relatives and friends. The townsfolk called him "Symbalan Koi Thampuram" who survives only because of his marriage into a rich family.

Moses reminds Diravi about Nagammai's appointment with doctor Rosammai, but Diravi is preoccupied with many other things bothering him. Meanwhile, Kuttalam who is now running a successful enterprise renews his request in Nagammai whenever he meets Diraviyam. Nagammai is always doing chores at home. She is psychologically wrecked after the harassment she faced at Sevantha Perumal's house. Visalam's future prospects too are bleak because of Nagammai's plight. Nagammai faints frequently and Diravi takes her to Rosammai doctor. The doctor declares that it is her weak constitution that has led to fainting bouts and she is perfectly healthy. The doctor also calls Sevantha Perumal an idiot for abandoning his wife and impugning her.

## Chapter 26

Diravi is finally relieved that there is no fault with Nagammai, and wants to confront Sevantha Perumal regarding this issue. Diraviyam is resolute about uniting Nagammai with Sevantha Perumal. As he approaches Sevantha Perumal and proposes the idea of sending Nagammai to his house after six/seven years, Sevantha Perumal is reluctant to accept his offer. Diravi gives him a week's time to reconsider his decisions, but even after two weeks Sevantha Perumal doesn't pay heed to Diravi's request of taking back Nagammai. Diravi approaches Sevantha Perumal and challenges him that he will get Nagammai married to a better person and she will bear a child. When Diraviyam informs Sevantha Perumal that Kuttalam has expressed interest to marry Nagammai, Sevantha Perumal calls Kuttalam names to which Diraviyam retaliates. He calls Sevantha Perumal a eunuch and walks away in frustration.

## Chapter 27

As time passes, Nagaru Pillai's household too witnesses changes. Nagammai's health condition progresses after taking pills, Unnamalai Akkaa's son starts his schooling at Pazhavada and it is decided to get Visalam married to Tapasi Pillai's second cousin's son Bhagavati Appan. Bhagavati Appan is a clerk in the Manavalakkurichi Sand Company. Diravi asserts that irrespective of Nagammai's condition Visalam had to be married off immediately. It is decided that Salam will inherit the house and the lands will be handed over to the prospective son-in-law. The family plans to rent a house in Karingal where Diravi can take private tuitions. Though initially there is a furore, they have no other means except approve Diravi's idea. Visalam's wedding takes place at Pazhavadi, and Bhagavati Pillai wins over everyone with his pleasant nature. After the wedding, Diravi now a more responsible and mature person expresses his concern over Nagammai to his father Nagaru Pillai. He recounts his encounter with Sevantha Perumal and his vow to get Nagammai married to Kuttalam. Father, mother and Nagammai readily accept Diravi's suggestion, but it is difficult to convince Achi who is not able to adapt to modernity.

## Chapter 28

Diravi decides to get Nagammai married to Diravi at Velli Malai in the month of Aavani. Unnamalai Achi is upset that her family's condition



is deteriorating financially. In addition to this, her brother Koonangani Patta's health too is bothering her. Aachi's filarial fever is taking a toll on her. She falls and becomes bedridden. The bed sores, her leg pain and stress deteriorates her health. Ammukutty Ammachi, Sasi, his father Krishnan Kutty, mother Thangammai and Amminikutty come to visit her. Sasi had passed SSLC and is working in the Nair Service Society Bank at Trivandrum. In the cold month of Margazhi, Unnamalai Aachi passes away. Again, the house is filled with rituals, bemoaning old women and relatives. The relatives pick up quarrel claiming that the body had been carried to the funeral ground before their arrival and discrepancies arise as to who should lit the pyre.

### Chapter 29

Following the death of Unnamalai Aachi, a sixteen-day ceremony is observed in which old women wail and sing songs. Diravi resumes work after two days post Aachi's funeral and learns that he is likely to be transferred to Shencottah. His colleague Moses convinces Nagaru Pillai regarding Nagammai's wedding. Meanwhile, Sevantha Perumal goes missing and no one seems to know his whereabouts. Kuttalam is certain that Sevantha Perumal has become insane. Nagammai's marriage is arranged with Kuttalam. The neighbours and townsfolk look down contemptuously on Diravi's family and accuse them of having no self-respect. Vinayaka Perumal, the community trustee threatens Diravi that his family will be anathemised from the community. Kuttalam and Diravi are not intimidated by these acts and are firm in their decision.

### Chapter 30

Aachi's absence is felt all over the house. Nagammai's marriage is fixed on a Friday in the month of Thai and Diravi plans to conduct the wedding in a grand manner. Diravi is transferred from Karingal to Sencottah, after Nagammai's wedding the family plan to shift to Sencottah from Eraniyal. Diravi feels that at Sencottah a new life is awaiting him. A festival is taking place at Sollamatan temple beyond Puthan Street. A big festival with villupaatu and dances are held all through the night. Though the invites for Nagammai's wedding have been printed and duly distributed, Diravi is quite worried. His premonition comes true as when Boothan who works at Kuttalm's shop informs Diravi of his master's death. Boothan tells as the festivities were happening in the Sollamtan temple Sevantha Perumal was



in a state of uncontrolled excitement, he pulled the whip from Ponnappan's (the man who was possessed by Sollamatan) hand and in a state of frenzy jumped into the well. When Vadivu sought the help of the villagers no one offered to rescue him except Kuttalam, the good natured man who always had a soft corner for Vadivu. Kuttalam jumped into the well to find Sevantha Perumal but died in the process, ironically Sevantha Perumal who was assumed to be dead emerged alive from the well. It was later found that Sevantha Perumal and his wife had been all along planning to kill Kuttalam, Sevantha Perumal who had been hiding inside the well had throttled and drowned Kuttalam. But all this was hearsay and nothing could be proved. Sevantha Perumal becomes hysterical and is sent to Oolampara Mental Asylum in Trivandram. Diravi dejectedly moves with the family away from Eraniyal in search of solace and new life.

#### 4.4 Short Notes

1. How does Neela Padmanabhan cull out the role of rituals and centrality of ceremony in shaping the Chetty community?

The novel reflects the life and tradition of Eraniel Chettiars- a community that thrives on age old beliefs & rituals meticulously preserved by a generation of believers. The story is interspersed with intricacies of various rituals including a wedding, seemantham, food feeding to the baby, kozhukattai festival, puberty ceremony and an elaborate description of Aachi's funeral services followed by the Sollamatan temple festival in the last chapter. The novel highlights how each phase of a person's life is associated with a ceremony in the Tamil culture. The frugality of the Chetty's disappears into thin air when occasion calls. They laboriously prepare and revel in festivities despite their impecunious state. Diravi's father looks old for his age and is brow beaten by continually being in debt. His mother Unnamalai Aach and Kutiamma too insists they have to be an exemplar to their kith and kin in observing rituals and never compromise on relaxations.

2. What is the theme of the novel Generations?

This bildungsroman problematizes the dominant notions associated with gender, tradition and caste in the milieu of change and transformation. Diravi hailing from the Seven Town Chetty family in Eraniyal from a very young age witnesses the rituals, hardships and complexities in a relationship the woman is subjected to. Remaining a passive spectator all along his childhood, Diravi is discontented and

musters up courage to challenge the dominant mainstream ideology that suppresses women in the guise of tradition. The novel brilliantly divulges the impact of education in bringing about a massive change in a person's (Diravi's) attitude and personality. The work is a blatant call to adapt oneself in accordance with the changing times.

3. Describe in brief the representation of gender in *Generations*.

The novel begins with Unnamalai Aachi paying obeisance to Singa Vinayaka and reiterating the importance of their caste and clan. The matriarch inculcates the significance of the Chetty clan to her grandchildren by reiterating the story of the 'celestial damsels' Thangamme and Thayamme who helped their father in resolving the complicated task of stringing small corals into a necklace. The King was overwhelmed by the brilliance of the virgins and wanted to marry them, but the Chettiar was reluctant to marry his daughters out of his caste. The Chettiar felt insulted at the king's action because he believed that, "Even a king could not have the daughter of a self-respecting Chettiar for his bride, try how he might." (Padmanabhan 29) The Chettiar women are valorised for their chastity are confined to the alleyways, after they came of age they are never allowed to come out of the house in broad daylight. An unmarried woman cannot present herself before any men. Kutiamma always tells Nagammai, 'why do you peep and show yourself. Virgins should lie in their corner and not show themselves.' (Padmanabhan 50)

Not only does Padmanabhan show compliant women restricted within the houses but sketches out manifold representations in his novel. Papathi, Nagammai's greedy mother in law who is concerned only about the dowry and remarrying her son, Kuttiamma, the timid house wife who watches everything helplessly, the carefree Visalam, the grief stricken Nagammai, Unnamalai akka married to Pazhavadaï becomes almost like an outsider, Vellachi, the fishwife & head shaking old woman – the gossipmongers of Eraniel, Ammukutty and her granddaughter (who live in the distant grove and can never become part of the Chetty community despite having had children with Koonangani) are demonstrations of various female temperaments. Different states of mind ranging from vicious (Vadivu), educated & liberated (Rosammai), vulnerable (Nagammai), caring (Krishna Atha), wise (Unnamalai Aachi), decadent (Nilappillai) are presented in the text. These women are adjudicated in terms of their marital status and piety.

Nagammai is considered as sensitive and susceptible until she remains alone pining for the wicked Sevantha Perumal whereas once Diravi intends to get her married to Kuttalam no one is happy about it. Nilapillai surviving with her five year old son is looked with indifference but when she moves out of Eraniel with Korami she is branded as licentious. Despite the fact that Nagammai is the chief deity of the Chetty Clan the women in the novel are forced to succumb to the edicts of the patriarchal structure that hold them tight.

4. Give an account of Nagammai's wedding

Nagammai's wedding which forms the crux of the plot, documents every aspect of a Tamil Chetty marriage. The omens to be checked before setting out to invite people and the kolavai song sung before any auspicious occasion are discussed in detail. Nagar Pillai and Papathi negotiate the enormous dowry given to the groom. The engagement or the nichayathamboolam is followed by the erection of the first pandal pillar – wherein a pole adorned with turmeric and kumkum is placed in the south west corner of the yard by the elder son in law and Malu Pillai (Ponamu Achi's son). The gold-thali melting ceremony is done in the presence of the relatives. The entire town is fed with a rich feast of “aviyal, potato podimas, pachadi, kichadi, mago gose, pappadam, dry-fried things, sugared banana chips, ghee, lentils, sambhar, pulisseri, rasam, three kinds of payasam and buttermilk.”(68) As the wedding day arrives, Diravi's courtyard is covered by a pandal and silky covering and wedding platform is designed with small pillars with temple pots on the top. The decorations are done with paper but look magnanimous. Sweets and cakes are in the makeshift kitchen in the backyard, women are busy grinding flour on wooden pestle. The wedding even comprises a vegetable cutting ceremony on its eve.

5 How does Diraviyam's family celebrate the Unnamalai akka's Seemantham?

The fifth month ceremony for Diravi's elder Sister Unnamalai akka is celebrated with opulence as she had conceived after a long time. Diravi's father 'begged and borrowed the required money' for making eatables for the expectant mother in her fifth month. During the seventh month, seven eatables are made and taken to Pazhavada. Father sells paddy and with that money distributes

eatables, sweets and savouries to the townspeople. As the pipes are played and drums beaten, Unnamalai akka draped in a silk sari with a red mark on her forehead is made to sit on a platform. The bangle seller gives her and other girls bangles, women sing kolavai and after a wholesome feast they leave for Eraniel with a piece of eatable tied to the end of Unnamalai's sari.

6 Examine the character of Koonangani Paata.

Koonangai Paata, the seventy year old bald man is Unnamalai Aachi's brother. He is a healthy and upright man, who is fond of Diravi. Koonangani Paatta's father Mootha Pillai Mookandi Chettiar was an influential person in Tiruvancode. Koonangani Patta was born late after much penance and wore a nose ring for ten years to fulfil his parents' vow (In those days nose ring was worn by a girl or boy child to show that the child born to the parents after a very long period). Koonangani Paatta, pampered by his parents had no interest in studies. When he was eighteen, he fell in love with the Nadar Christian teacher Eli, who came home to teach Unnamalai Aachi.

This incident with the teacher worried Patta's parents. They were certain that if the boy was allowed to continue without work, he would fall into bad ways. Hence to keep him preoccupied his father entrusted him with the responsibilities of gathering the harvest, talking to the tenants, collecting and bringing home the produce from gardens and fields. Koonangani Paata's expenses were mounting and he was not able to account for his expenses, he also began a relationship with Ammukutty. Koonangani's father was ashamed of this and refused to marry Koonangani to Ammukutty. But, Koonangani Paata lived with Ammukuty for five years and had two children – Krishnankutty and Bhargavi. On Ammukutty's insistence and to fulfil his mother's wish he consented to marry Ponamu, who was from a poor family in Padmanabhapuram. When the couple remained childless, Paata's sister Unnamalai fixed up another marriage for Paata and he ended up marrying Ananji Pillai. Later both Ponamu and Ananji settled in Eraniyal and bore children- the former was blessed with – Iyavu, Nilapillai and Pitcha Pillai and the latter gave birth to the twins Thayi and Andi Pillai. Paata's children never paid any heed to him. His wives were frequently quarreling between themselves and his sons were wayward. Age

had made Koonangani a wiser person. He is concerned about the lives of Nagammai and Diraviyam. When Papathi demands for dowry it is Koonangani Paata who reasons out with her.

7 Why did Sevantha Perumal forsake Nagammai?

Sevantha Perumal's mother Papathi approached Unnamalai Aachi with the marriage proposal at the temple. After Aachi conveyed it to her daughter in law Kutiamma and son Nagar Pillai, they after consulting the astrologers arranged Nagammai to be married to the thirty year old Sevantha Perumal. At the beginning they were quite uncertain, but their initial hesitation was rebuffed by Koonangani Paata who felt that Nagammai would lead a better life when she is married into an affluent family. After six months of marital life, when Sevantha Perumal was not able to produce an offspring he blamed Nagammai for it. He and his mother Papathi physically assaulted Nagammai and harassed her. When the young girl was bewildered by all this domestic violence, they chased her away and also declared in panchayat meeting that Nagammai must be medically examined and given treatment by a female doctor.

8 What is the relationship between Korami and Nillalapillai?

Nilapillai is the daughter of Koonanagani Paata and Ponamu. Her husband Hariharaputra succumbs to small pox, she lives with her only young son Chidambaram. Korami known as Kumaraswamy who is also a widower is Chidambaram's teacher. Nillapillai falls in love with Korami and on the day of kozhukattai festival she elopes with him. The liaison between Nillapillai and Korami delineates the changing notions of chastity and the need to adapt oneself to modern times. The old fashioned Unnamalai Aachi, who was a young widow herself left with a five year old Dorai voices her dissatisfaction and chides Nillapillai for being, 'not modest and restrained' (163). On hearing Nillapillai's elopement, Ponamu Achi is devastated. When people reproach her for being lenient and careless in raising her daughter she gets ill and becomes bedridden.

9 Describe the Kozhukattai festival.

Kozhukattai festival is celebrated by the Seven Town's Chettiar community at Odupparai temple to pay homage to the Odupparai serpent goddess, Nagammai when the stars and planets align in a particular position. Everyone belonging to the Chetty clan

go to Odupparai and bake kozhukattai's. They bake enormous kozhukattai's each weighing 'half a measure of rice flour, a pound of sugar, a coconut, cardamom, dried ginger and fruits.' (160). The moisture released from the sugar and fruits holds the kozhukattai together. The festive air sets in Chitirai as people begin to whitewash and clean their house. A huge trench is dug and firewoods are lit to prepare a communal oven for baking the massive kozhukattai's. The first batch of kozhukattai's is baked for the temple following which the individuals bake theirs. On that night families' camp in the temple premises hearing the the Nandan story by Tarabhai, watching fireworks and cooking their kozhukattai's. Early in the morning, after bathing in the river Valli, the devotees lay the padayal food before the deities adorned with sandal, new clothes and flowers. By noon the women folk of Eraniyal cook their ponkal and offer it to the goddess. In the evening people start moving for it is believed that snakes would haunt the temple precincts.

10 Why did Diravi choose to become a teacher?

Diravi was the first person in his family to pass SSLC. Due to his financial constraints he could not afford to go the college and moreover his responsibilities were mounting. Diravi was not old enough to procure a government job and getting one was also not an easy one. His neighbour Annamalai Pillai advised him to go to Neyyattinkarai and join the basic training school to become a teacher. So Diravi thought that since not much recommendations were required for the post of a teacher he could get a job as soon as he finished studying and could shoulder the responsibilities of his family.

11 Explain the relationship between Moses and Diraviyam.

Moses was a teacher at Karingal Government School. The fifty year old man was a popular teacher at school and was expected to become the headmaster within a couple of yeras. Bespectaled and dressed in a mull dhothi and bush shirt, his white hair was receding. His broad forehead and hitlerian mustache made him distinctive. He smile was infectious and he had the habit of consuming betel leaves. He was called MAMA, since he had double M.A. in Literature and Mathematics. His wife Rosammai worked as a doctor in Neyyor hospital and the couple had no children. Moses was a 'modest, unassuming man' whom everyone considered 'reliable, frank and affectionate' (192). Moses becomes Diravi's mentor and helps him



resolve Nagammai's plight. Only on his advice Diravi take Nagammai to Moses' wife, doctor Rosammai for a general examination. Moses reminds Diraviyam that he is educated and has to do away with ridiculous practices and superstitious taboo's. Moses' concern inspires Diravi to do the right thing in Nagammai's case.

12 Attempt a brief character sketch of Unnamalai Aachi

Unnamalai Aachi, the matriarch of family is pious and ingrained in tradition. Despite her swollen legs (afflicted by elephantiasis) she rises early and assists Kuttiamma in all household chores. She, being the repository of pride, stories, superstitions and faith is keen on passing it down to her grandchildren. Aachi smears holy ash on her forehead and is always spotted with her huge earrings. An ardent theist she leaves all her worries to God and rests peacefully even amidst crisis.

As a child, Unnamalai Aachi the precocious child was raised fondly by her father. He employed a Christian Nadar lady Eli to teach her when she was seven or eight years of age. Later she was married to Diraviyam Pillai in a pompous ceremony but, lost him when her son Nagar Pillai was hardly five. Early widowhood made Unnamalai Aachi resilient but had confined her within the house, as a result of which she is not able to comprehend the progressive ways of the world. She shuns down ideas like remarriage and love. When Sevantha Perumal and his mother Papathi citing that times are changing requests that the groom and bride must see each other, she becomes furious, "How are these days different? Do crows fly wrong side up these days? Do sheep and cows walk on two feet now? It is these men that are becoming different. What can the times do for that?" (57).

She orders Salam to check the omen before the women of the house step into the street to invite the town people. Aachi periodically grumbles at Nagammai's ordeal, but once Sevantha Perumal disowns Nagammai absolutely, she thoughtfully consoles Nagammai to consider him dead and be happy. After her granddaughter Unnamalai delivers a boy, she rejoices and spends her time giving digestive medicine to the child and singing lullaby to the child sleeping in the hammock. She goes into a rage when Nillapillai goes away with Korami and blame the time of Kali for altering the minds of people. Aachi is not able to comprehend the need for



Nillapillai to be married and happy. The superstitious beliefs with which she has been raised prevents her from acknowledging the dire need for Nagammai's remarriage. She asserts, "Men are like that. It is nothing new or to be wondered at. But when women too venture into these things, then the world is certainly coming to an end. It is the progress of Kali." (222) Aachi breaks down when her brother Koonangani Patta became absent minded and starts to roam around aimlessly after his wife's death, Her filarial bouts too intensify her grief. One night she falls down and breaks her leg and becomes bed ridden. Unnamalai Aachi listens to Nagammai reading the *Ramayana* as she breathes her last. Though Aachi sticks to gender stereotypes, customs and rituals she is a realistic portrayal of a generation.

### 13 Comment on the tragic end of Kuttalam

Kuttalam is Diravi's classmate, who is repeating his eight standard. Most of the boys from wealthy and 'good homes' do not play with Kuttam as he is poor and belongs to a 'socially inferior' class. His father Thirukoothan Pillai is considered 'a simpleton' and his mother Pichaimuthu died some four years ago. His grandmother forces him to attend school, she does household work and with hard earned money feeds him. Kuttalam despite his humble background is sturdy and healthy. He has a mind of his own and does not listen to his father. A few consider him rude and sharp tongued. No one has any regard for him, but no one meddles with his affairs because he always beats those who try to discipline him. When Diravi's classmates Ambalavanan and Madevan poke fun at Diravi's sister Nagu, Kuttalam rises to occasion and beats Ambalavanan. This incident draws Diravi close to Kuttalam. After that incident Diravi begins to seek out Kuttalam's companionship and only with him he is able to talk frankly. Speaking with Kuttalam comforts him. Kuttalam gives up his studies and becomes hawker. He works hard and rises in life and plans to open a shop. When he meets Diravi, he still retains the same warmth he has had for him and expresses his desire to marry Nagammai, he also smacks Sevantha Perumal for having neglected Nagammai.

Later, Diravi after serious contemplation is determined to marry Nagammai to Kuttalam against the hostile advice of his neighbours. The wedding is almost fixed, but Kuttalam dies/is killed before the

wedding. Sevantha Perumal and his second wife Vadivu hatch a plan to kill Kuttalam. Accordingly Sevantha Perumal jumps into the well and Vadivu seeks help from Kuttalam to rescue him. The unassuming Kuttalam immediately rushes to aid her, but Sevantha Perumal who hides in the well waiting for Kuttalam throttles and kills him.

- 14 Analyse the transition of Diraviyam from a carefree youth into a responsible adult.

*Generations* is a coming of age story of Diraviyam. The blithe young boy is shaken up by the harsh realities of the world when his sister Nagammai is driven away from her mother in laws house.

Diravi's entire childhood collapses as his sister's traumatic plight affects everyone at his house. In his school his attention gets distracted reminiscing about the past, recounting the arrangements meticulously made for his sister's wedding. The young boy goes with his father to the village head's house hoping that the issue would be resolved, but to his dismay the affair becomes even more muddled. The naïve Diravi is not able to figure out why Sevantha Perumal behaves in a brutal manner. His mother's endless lamentations add to his misery

Growing up in a friendly neighbourhood among close relatives, Diravi is sent on errands that are far beyond his age/wisdom. He acts as a pacifier and messenger for Koonangani Paata and Ammukutty Ammachi. Even when he witnesses the relationship between Nilapillai and Korami he does not rat out, rather he ignores it. He constantly thinks about his sister's future.

In addition to the crisis at home, Diravi's family has to perform one ceremony or other every now and then. Whenever Nagar Pillai is in need for money be for the seed or other ceremonies, Diraviyam is sent to borrow the money. This makes him realise the dire need to earn money and a respectable job.

His experiences he witnessed in his formative years impel Diravi to rebel against the stringent traditions and customs practised by the Chettiyar community. The young boy who in the beginning of the novel worries about Thangammaye and Thayammaye, later reckons at the futility of clinging to age old superstitions. Despite looking up to the legendary tales of his clan, he takes after his grandfather – a revolutionary as his role model. He firmly

believes that changes should be brought about irrespective of caste and class distinctions. His relationship with Kuttalam defies the social order. He dismantles the superstitious belief of the society by taking steps to marry Nagammai to Kuttalam, despite the community threatening to anathematise them. The doting brother keen on his sister is unmindful of himself getting married to Kuzhalamangai. He is happy for his friends, when Kuttalam's textile business flourishes or Sasi lands a job he rejoices at their hard earned success. Diravi nurtured in a traditional household matures into a progressive and radical youngster who shoulders the familial responsibilities.

#### 4.6. Glossary

Aachi : Grandmother

Patta : Grandfather

Seemantham : A ceremony performed by the Tamil speaking people during the eighth month of a woman's first pregnancy.

Kozhukattai : A sweet made using rice flour filled with jaggery and coconut

Ponkal : A sweet dish made of rice, jaggery, cardamom. Usually made as an offering to god during special rituals or festivals

Puja : offering

Sollamattan : Another name of Sudalai Madan – a deity who is custodian of the burial ground

Villupattu : Folk Music where the main singer had a long ornamental bow adorned with small bells. He/she simultaneously plucks the strings of the bow while singing.

#### 4.7 Self Assessment Questions

1. Do you consider *Generations* as a Bildungsroman?
2. Customs and Traditions form an integral part of the Tamil Chettiar Clan – Justify citing references from the text
3. Attempt an essay on the depiction of Gender and Caste in *Generations*
4. Describe the role of minor characters in the novel

#### 4.8 References

Padmanabhan, Neela. *Generations*. Trans. Ka.Naa.Subramaniam. Niyogi Books, 2021.

## UNIT - V : SHORT STORIES

### Lesson 5.1 - Devdutt Pattanaik - Indian Mythology

#### Structure

- 5.1 Objective
- 5.2 Author Introduction
- 5.3 Synopsis
- 5.4 Short Notes
- 5.5 Glossary
- 5.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 5.7 References

#### 5.1 Objective

- (i) To familiarize with the rich mythological past of Indian religion
- (ii) To orient the readers with puranas, epics and folklores of the Hindu tradition

#### 5.2 Author Introduction

Devdutt Pattanaik, author of popular bestsellers is a doctor by profession. In his writings he interweaves myth with fiction, throwing light upon ancient Vedic practices and wisdom. He anthropomorphizes Gods and Demons. His knack for story telling is combined with religion, symbols and rituals. His extensive work on mythology, fables and parables echoes the rich spiritual lineage. An exceptional illustrator he provides sketches for his books. Pattanaik in an interview with Sinha states that “no society can exist without myth as it creates notions of right and wrong, good and bad, heaven and hell, rights and duties.” He is a brilliant columnist and prolific writer who has more than fifty books to his credit. His major works include *The Pregnant King* (2008), *Shiva: An Introduction* (1997), *Vishnu: An Introduction* (1999), *Devi, The Mother-Goddess: An Introduction* (2000), *Indian Mythology: Tales, Symbols, and Rituals from the Heart of the Subcontinent* (2003), *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013), *Devlok with Devdutt Pattanaik* (2016), *Adi Purana: Entire Veda as a Single Story* (2021), *The Stories We Tell: Mythology to Make*

*Sense of Modern Lives* (2022), *Garuda Purana and Other Hindu Ideas On Death, Rebirth and Immortality* (2022)

### 5.3 Synopsis

In this book Devdutt Pattanaik uses ninety nine tales to divulge the intricacies of Hindu Mythology that abounds with symbols, rituals and metaphors. He catalogues the balance between good and evil, light and dark which is integral to the Vedic tradition. A comparative analysis of the Eastern and Western belief system and mythospheres, enables him to arrive at a prudent worldview.

#### Introduction: Constructing Hindu Myth

Pattanaik begins his argument by drawing our attention to the different belief systems prevailing in India. He avers that Indian religion, unlike other religious structures does not believe in one God. It believes in the presence of several Deities, Karma and many 'heavens' and 'hells'. Pattanaik reiterates the idea that Indian religion is a way of life and in order to grasp the essence of Hindu Mythology one must move away from binary oppositions imposed by the Western paradigm

He contends that Indian nation had been under the rule of various dynasties. While the Mongols, Greek, Persians and Mughals never bothered about the natives, the British realised the heterogenous nature of their religion which intermingled 'the sacred' and 'the secular'. Initially the British used the term "Hindoo or Hindu" to denote people who spoke Hindi, later it was used as an identification marker for people who weren't Muslims, Christians, Sikhs or Jains. Pattanaik points out that only in the year 1830 the religion was associated with 'high-caste brahmanas' and inadvertently the colonisers began to identify Brahmanism within the Hindu rituals. A sway of scientific progression was gaining momentum in the nineteenth century England. This impact of Enlightenment was felt in the colony and the Britishers started to gather data of the Brahmanical text and documents their religious customs. In the process of documentation, the scriptures that appealed to the European sensibility were classified as the 'high vedas' and the rest were labelled as the 'low shastras'. Texts that dealt with tantric were disregarded as witchery. While the classical texts aroused the Orientalists to understand the 'exotic noble savage' the folk traditions impelled the missionaries to civilize the pagan.

Narratives on Hindu art, culture and rituals have been heavily conditioned by the colonial discourses. The Brahmanical elites who were exposed to English education, began reconstructing the Hindu religion in accordance with the biblical ideologies. The author aims to reread the myths in a postcolonial perspective and also understand the Hindu ethos. Correspondingly the book is divided into four chapters (1) Mythology: Studying Myth (2) Mythosphere (3) Mythopoesis (4) Mythography

### **Mythology: Studying Myth**

The author using the paradigms of symbols and rituals delineates the relationship between myth and culture. He studies the story of “Vishnu and the Earth” from the Bhagavata Purana. According to the Purana, Earth was vexed by the atrocities of the Kings who were exploiting her, therefore she took the form of a cow and pleaded to her father Brahma to help her. Her udders were sore and back was broken. Seeing her state, Brahma sent her to Vishnu. Vishnu was moved by her plight. He promised to relieve her burden by killing the kings who made her bleed. And therefore he took the incarnation of Parashurama, Rama, and Krishna killed the wicked kings and restored order.

This story of Vishnu, his conch, discuss sudharshana, his blue colour might be meaningless to others but to the Vaishnavas they represent Dharma. While the blue colour signifies his all pervasiveness, the serpent on which he reclines denotes unfailing regularity. In his incarnation of Krishna he is the cowherd – Go-vinda /Go-pala. He tends to the cows which is nothing but the earth and in turn the cow's milk nourishes humanity. This relationship between Krishna and the cow forms the basis of vegetarianism practiced by the Vaishnavas. It also might be one of the reasons for the taboos associated with beef eating among the Vaishnava Hindus. Hence the Mythology related to Vishnu can be comprehended by placing it within ‘a special vocabulary’. While it influences the believer, for the non-believer the tales and vocabulary might not be convincing. To a pragmatic person the narratives might sound ‘absurd’ and ‘fantastic’ and therefore be reduced as ‘myth.’

### **Myth and Mythology**

A myth can be perceived on two levels, it can either be ‘sacred’ or ‘irrational’. Myths are built on the faith of the believers. Suspension

of disbelief plays a vital role in conferring 'divinity' to mythical element. Myths become vehicles of cultural transmission and can be comprehended by 'logos' or Mythology. Pattanaik defines myth as a synthesis of "macrocosm (universe), mesocosm (society) and microcosm (humans)".

Mythology comprises (i) meticulous compilation of myth and comparing one 'mythosphere' with another (ii) locating the revisions and adaptations of myth over time and its relevance in different cultural and historical contexts - mythopoesis and (iii) mythography – understanding the various interpretations of myth and why it is accorded a sacred status.

### **Sacred Narratives, Sacred Symbols and Sacred Rituals**

Sacred Narrative: A tale is accorded sanctity only when its narrative is revered by both the communicator and a large group of audience. A sacred narrative reverberates with insightful questions of life. Three different instances & renditions from Mahabharata regarding the narrative of the chaste Renuka, wife of Jamadagni and mother of Parashurama are taken for discussion. The first incident "Renuka's Umbrella" narrates how Renuka, the doting wife is habituated to running after and collecting the arrows which her husband Jamadagni shot. On a sunny day when she suffers the pangs of heat and is not able to return home on time, Jamadagni threatens to shoot an arrow at the Sun. Sun apologises and presents Renuka with an umbrella that would protect her. The second narrative on "Renuka's Infidelity" too has its source in *Mahabharata*. Renuka develops adulterous thoughts as she watches the King and Queen indulge in carnal passion. Jamadagni is irked by her sinful behaviour and orders her sons to kill her. While the four sons refuse, the fifth son – dutiful Parashurama (an avatar of Vishnu) obeys his father and axes his mother. However later when Parashurama requests his father to resurrect Renuka, Jamadagni obliges. The last narrative taken from *Yellamma Mahatmya* "Renuka's Head" is a reinterpretation of the former story. When Parashurama tries to kill his mother, she finds asylum in a lower caste woman's house. A furious Parashurama not only beheads his mother but also shears the lower caste woman's neck. When Jamadagni vests his magical power in Parashurama to restore Renuka to life using holy water, the anxious boy interchanges the heads and the bodies of the two women. The low caste woman's head with Renuka's body is accepted by Jamadagni whereas the



person with Renuka's head and the lower caste woman's body becomes deified as Yellama.

Among the three narrative "Renuka's Umbrella" seems like a mere parable. The second one "Renuka's Infidelity" has mythic powers as it tries to uphold 'social order' and 'patriarchal values'. It also elevates Parashurama's disposition and exalts Renuka's status. The third narrative is packed with rich mythic power. As it balances the tensions of an adulterous wife and chaste lower class woman, it also opens the manifold possibilities of the severe patriarchal system, caste structures, notions of morality & punishment. Interestingly the story of Yellamma is not present in the Sanskrit texts. Anthropologists have documented the tale and it has been preserved orally from one generation to other. Folk theatre, small priest, ceremonies and rituals have been instrumental in "freezing" this sacred narrative over time.

### Sacred Symbols

Devdutt Pattanaik states that signs and symbols can be subject to manifold interpretations. He uses the story from Orissan folklore based on Arjuna and Navagunjara to exemplify the point. In this short story Arjuna comes across a beast which has, "head of a rooster; the neck of a peacock; the back of a bull; the waist of a lion; the feet of an elephant, a human, a deer and a tiger; and a serpent for a tail." (Pattanaik 19) Arjuna realises that this creature is an incarnation of the divine and begins worshipping it. Using this tale as the fulcrum, Pattanaik illustrates how Indian mythology is loaded with symbols of fertility and monastic. He draws attention to the figure of Kandarpa the Indian God of Love who carried a bow made of sugarcane and flower tipped arrows. But when Hinduism opted for an austere monastic view the fertility views were slowly incorporated within the incarnations of Krishna and Vishnu. In the image of Krishna though there is a strong reflection of Kandarpa, the sensual aspects are mellowed down with piety.

He also throws light on the story of Markandeya. Markandeya had a vision, in which he saw heavy rain flooding the earth. As the water level rose Markandeya climbed a banyan tree to seek shelter and there he found a toddler beaming and radiant seated on a banyan leaf. He was inhaled by a young child and there he witnessed the celestial beings, heaven and underworld – a 'perfect inside' and once the child exhaled him he fell into a catastrophic imperfect outside. The banyan

tree represents permanence and the baby is symbolic of regeneration whereas water signifies change (26). Hindu mythology grants equal share to both the sexes and valorises the idea that woman cannot exist without the man.

Pattanaik uses the story of Ardha-nari “The Half-Woman God” from the Tamil Temple Lore. The story revolves around sage Bhiringi, who wanted to circle Shiva and worship him. Shakti wanted to teach him that both the male and the female are inseparable and sat on Shiva’s lap. Bhiringi was keen on only paying obeisance to Shiva and therefore took the form of a bee in order to fly in between the couple and thereby fulfil his wish. But to his dismay, Shakti infused herself into Shiva, thus becoming part of his body – the ardha-nari. Bhiringi did not give up easily, he turned himself into a worm that would go across the two and eventually separate them. This enraged Shakti and she cursed him that his narrow intention of not obeying a woman would deprive him of the faculties a man begets from a woman. Subsequently Bhiringi was reduced to a skeleton and eventually realized his mistake.

Fertility symbols have a great role in all the rituals connected with the women. On auspicious occasion every household is adorned with fertility symbols like the conch shells, fish and tender mango leaves. While distinguishing Fertility rites and Monastic practises as binary opposites, fertility rite embodies carnal pleasures and violence to reach nirvana and it appreciates material pursuits and worldly affairs. Monastic rites aim at deliverance from worldly quests and its objective is to find ‘eternal spiritual bliss.’

The Fertility rituals are performed by the husband and the wife. In order to support this contention, Pattanaik brings in the story of “A Golden Effigy of Sita” from Uttara Ramayana. Rama the King of Ayodhya is shunned, for his subjects considered Sita as a woman of ‘soiled reputation.’ This forces Rama to disown Sita. He is not able to perform any ritual without the aid of his wife, therefore he sculpts a golden effigy of Sita. Only after placing this golden statue beside him, he is able to execute the rituals successfully. The authors illustrates the differences between Fertility rites and Monastic Practices as given in the table below

| <b>Fertility Rites</b>   | <b>Monastic Practices</b>   |
|--|---|
| Aim is to harness the abundance of nature  | Aim is to break free from the control of nature   |
| All rituals symbolically communicate materialistic intentions to the cosmos                                    | All practices distance the aspirant from the ways of nature   |
| All rituals symbolize sex or violence  | All practices are antisex and antiviolence  |
| Appreciate sex and violence as the fundamental principal rotating the cycle of life                            | Abhors sex and violence, as they bind creatures to the unending cycle of rebirths   |
| Final destination is paradise, where earthly joy never cease even for a moment and where the flesh is immortal | Final destination is liberation from the flesh and the earth , a merger with God, and assimilation with the universal consciousness |
| Seek eternal material comfort  | Seek eternal spiritual bliss  |

(Pattanaik 31)

### Sacred Rituals

Pattanaik defines rituals as means of “communicating with the cosmos”. Rituals can be understood only by situating it within narratives and symbols. In Orissan folklore the presence of Lakshmi is associated with the incense sticks and lamps. When there is a disregard for performing rituals Goddess Lakshmi will leave the household. Rituals can be (i) contagious (ii) invocatory (iii) social (iv) sympathetic and (v) transactional.

| <b>Type of Ritual</b> | <b>Objective</b>  |
|-----------------------|---|
| Contagious            | Attributing specific qualities to certain objects           |
| Invocatory            | Offering hymns and chanting prayer songs                    |
| Social                | Enabling movement from one phase to another                 |
| Sympathetic           | Placing symbols in the environment                          |
| Transactional         | Contributing things to the cosmos in lieu of mutual benefit |

(Pattanaik 33)

### The Function of Myth

Myths facilitate a paradigm through which a structural coherence is accorded to the chaotic life. A paradigm enables an individual to ruminate on the 'idea of perfection' in material world and opens possible options in the spiritual realm. A linear paradigm propagates the view that there is no life after death. Judaism, Christianity and Islam adhere to this philosophy. The cyclical paradigm there is rebirth after death and a person's present life is determined by his past deeds. In this cyclical paradigm karma governs samsara or brahmananda

| Linear Paradigm   | Cyclical Paradigm  |
|---|--|
| Believes in only one life followed by 'an eternal hereafter' Ex. Judaism, Christianity, Islam | Insists that every living being has a past life before birth and future life after death.<br><br>Ex. (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism) |
| Aims to return to original perfection   | Keen on breaking free from rebirth   |
| Considers that life is not perfect due to the attitude of human beings                        | Cogitates that a person's present condition is a result of his past sins   |

### The story of Creation

According to the Hindu mythology a woman named Shatarupa is responsible for creation. Brahma is Shatarupa's father and creator. Her purpose of existence is to help Brahma find an answer to "Who am I". When the observer (Brahma) seeks answer to this query he shuts his eyes. Once he shuts his eyes the cosmos disappears and this phenomenon is pralaya. During pralaya – 'the cosmic inertia' matter exists but does not manifest itself. Creation as a process begins once Brahma finds the answer to "Who am I". During this juncture, cosmos is asleep/ in the state of nothingness awakens, but spirit awakens and questions rise and subsequently answers are found. The cyclical process repeats itself and the 'material reality' is realised in the form of Shatarupa. According to the Hindu belief the cosmic life

span 'kalpa' consists of four yugas – 'childhood, youth, maturity and senility of the cosmos.' Devdutt Pattanaik gives an illustration of this in his book p.38

|         | Quarter | Yuga    | Phase of the Cosmos | Reproductive Activity | Means to acquire wealth | Number of legs the bull of dharma has |
|---------|---------|---------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Kalpa   | First   | Krita   | Childhood           | Thought               | Charity                 | Four                                  |
|         | Second  | Dvapara | Youth               | Touch                 | Force                   | Three                                 |
|         | Third   | Treta   | Maturity            | Intercourse           | Trickery                | Two                                   |
|         | Fourth  | Kali    | Senility            | Perversion            | Exploitation            | One                                   |
| Pralaya |         |         | Death               | Non-Existence         |                         |                                       |

(Pattanaik 38)

Pattanaik narrates the story of "Rama's Ring", "A Place for Indra", "Shambuka Beheaded" and "The Beheading of Shiva" to explicate the nature of paradigms.

"Rama's Ring" is a folktale from *Ramayana*. As the time for Rama's death approached, Yama was not able to enter Rama's city for it was guarded by Hanuman- the monkey god. Rama knew that Hanuman would not leave his side and in order to distract Hanuman threw his ring on the floor and asked Hanuman to fetch it. The moment the ring fell down it cracked the floor and Hanuman had to follow it. As he ventured underground he founds an end number of the copies of Rama's rings. The custodian of the subterranean land told Hanuman that whenever a ring falls down it is an indicator that Rama is about to die and many rings had fallen in the past and will be falling in the future too. This folklore rationalises the presence of cyclical nature of life and the implications of samsara.

A similar message is conveyed in "A Palace for Indra". Having its source of origin in Brahavaivarta Purana, this story begins with Vishwakarma's inability to build a grand Palace for Indra. Despite all efforts of Vishwakarma, Indra was disgruntled. Vishwakarma sought help from Brahma, who in turn invoked Vishnu. Vishnu taking the form of a boy visited Indra's palace. The boy informed Indra that he had come to see whether Indra's palace was better than the previous Indra. When Indra

was befuddled, the young boy told him that there are numerous Indra's in the parallel universes and that this Indra is one among the many Indras. The boy also declared that when Indra blinks a human dies, likewise a Indra dies when Brahma blinks. A Brahma dies when Vishnu blinks and a Vishnu dies when Shiva blinks, therefore Indra is just an insignificant particle in the grand scheme of the cosmos. This made Indra realise that there have been better versions of him in the past and will be in future too. He comprehends the futility of feeling himself superior to other. Through this story the author conveys the "endless, boundless and infinitely repetitive" events one is subject to.

Pattanaik draws parallels between the paradigms of Goddess, Chinnamastika – the headless god who embodies aggressive sexual passion with the violent bearings with Lalita-Tirupurasundari – the coy and divine. While the former is acceptable the latter is considered unacceptable. Accordingly "the part of the paradigm that is desirable is accepted within the society and the rest is rejected." (41). In art Brahma's paradigm is represented by a circle. The circle epitomises the "untamed" mindscapes and within the circles is the present a square that manifests the idea of culture. The coarse mind is domesticated by dharma that govern culture.

"Shambuka Beheaded" is an excerpt from Uttara Ramayana reinstates that idea of varna-ashrama-dharma. Rama rules according to Dharma. But his dharma is broken when Shambuka, a shudra practices tapas. According to the cosmic life span, Rama ruled during the era of youth in which only brahmanas, kshatriya and others were allowed to follow ascetic practices. Therefore Rama beheaded Shambuka and reinstated dharma. Vishnu appears in various incarnation, whenever there is a threat to dharma. Owing to the cyclical nature of Hindu dharma, the idea of a perfect man also changes accordingly.

*Shiva Purana* talks about the beheading of Brahma's fifth head. Brahma had fallen in love with the daughter- the first woman he had created. Four heads popped up as he wanted to look at her when she circled him. An enraged daughter was sickened by the father's incestuous act Rudra emerged and cut Brahma's fifth head that expressed his voluptuous desires. Pattanaik points out that, "Shiva seeks moksha by withdrawing from the paradigm, while Vishnu seeks moksha by staying within the paradigm" (50). Shiva follows the 'nivritti-marga' withdraws from the circumference to the center while Vishnu's is 'pravritti-marga' - an approach moving away

from the center while staying attached to it. After drawing similarities and differences between the Tantric approach of Shiva and the Vedic style of Vishnu, the author states that our perceptions of “perfection and possibility” are based on the paradigms construed by myths. Pattanaik avers that reasoning can alter our belief systems but also points that only in myth can we find solace to “profound questions.”

### **Coping Through Mythmaking**

Myth and Culture are symbiotic of each other. Mythmaking helps the individual to “capture and communicate” their worldview. Myth is invented to cope up with “reality, impersonality and ambivalence of nature” (57). Mythmaking is a resultant of visualising in erratic degrees the “fight, flight and freeze” reactions to varied situation.

## **2. Mythosphere**

In this chapter Devdutt Patanaik defines mythosphere as, “a mythical world populated by beings who enact the perceived realities of a people and with whom humans can communicate through symbols and rituals.” (64) Each religion has its own mythosphere which generates a set of belief system. The symbols and rituals associated with one mythosphere differs from another, one that signifies fertility in one religious mythosphere is associated with monasticism in another religion. Each mythosphere consists its own vocabulary.

### **The Idea of God**

The Idea of God and gods has been present in various religions. While Yaweh and Allah are Gods, Zeus, Jupiter, Horus, Odin and Indra are gods. They are either invented by the priest or are the emotional interpretations of the poet. Hindus believe in God and Goddessess & even gods and goddesses. Therefore Hinduism can be viewed as being Monotheistic, Polytheistic, Pantheistic, Animistic, Agnostic, Henotheistic, Deistic or Theistic.

### **Divine Principle –Divine Form**

In Hinduism a divine principle is attributed specific name and nature. This Divine Principal is realised as “Brahman in the Upanishads, Purusha in yoga, and Shiva in Tantra.” (71) Goddess is “known as Maya, Prakriti or Shakti” (71) which is material or is always in a state of flux,



whereas God is considered to be spiritual or constant with regard to time. While the male forms are considered to be active and envisaged as Brahma(creator), Vishnu(protector) and Shiva (destroyer), the female forms Saraswati (knowledge), Lakshmi(wealth)and Durga (power) are reckoned to be passive. Though the creation of God has different perspectives in the Vaishnava and Shakta manuscripts, Pattanaik firmly avers that it is impossible to explain “self-created or svayambhu” state of the Gods&Godessess.

### Children of the Creator

Brahma has a daughter Shatarupa and thousand mind born sons / rishis. Shatarupa marries Daksha and their children marry the sons of Brahma. These primal rishis inturn engender a group of people including the “gods, goddesses, demons, humans,nymphs, fairies, gnomes, gremlins, goblins, trolls, dwarves, giants, and pixies” (73). According to the Hindu mythology every god / demon / serpent is entangled within the cycle of birth and death.

| Humans  | Gods  | Serpents                 |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| Can live maximum for a span of hundred years after which they die only to be reborn | They live for a kalpa, Though they have consumed the elixir they cannot stand the pralaya | It regenerates its youth |
| Humans die when Indra blinks his eye  | When Shiva/Vishnu blink their eyes a god dies   |                          |

(73)

The transition from human to god and vice versa is explicated through the stories of “Harishchandra” and “The Past Life of Yashoda and Nanda”. Taken from The Bhagavata Purana, “Harishchandra” narrates the tale of the virtuous king who had to undergo various trials when he was put to test by the sage Vishwamitra. Hoodwinked by the rishi to give up his kingdom, he was forced to leave the palace with his wife Taramati and Rohita, his young son. As Harishchandra was leaving, Vishwamitra demanded that the King was obliged to give him thousand gold coins as a ritual gift for accepting the rights of the kingdom. The impecunious king had to sell his wife, son and himself at the slave market and offered the money to Vishwamitra. As a result of which he had to work as ‘a chandala’ the keeper of cemetery and his wife become a maid. Vishwamitra

tormented the altruistic Harishchandra by killing Rohita by snakebite. The distraught Harishchandra was traumatized, but a stickler of rules he was keen on doing his duty. Being in charge of the crematorium, he refused to cremate his son without getting paid. Despite Taramani explaining their impoverished condition, Harishchandra firm on his insisted her to give her clothes in exchange for the gate fee. As Taramani began disrobing, the gods flabbergasted by Harishchandra's adherence to dharma and righteousness descended and proclaimed he was equal to gods.

The story "The Past Life of Yashoda and Nanda" from Padma Purana narrates the story of Kashyapa and his wife Aditi were reduced to mortal from their immortal status. Kashyapa and Aditi did not have a cow for the ritual and therefore decided to steal one that belonged to rishi Vasistha. They were cursed for this act of theirs, they were reborn as Nanda and Yashoda members of the cowherd. They raised Krishna as their own son, without the knowledge that Krishna was actually the son of Vasudeva and Devaki who had been swapped with their girl child at the time of birth to escape the wrath of Kansa. They had to let go of Krishna once they knew the truth. This separation from their son was similar to the pain that Vasistha suffered when he his cow was stolen.

Pattanaik with aid of another folktale depicts how problems ensue while following Dharma. The story of the doorkeepers of Vishnu from Bhagavata Purana exemplifies that death can also accord liberation. When a group of sages wanted to pay their obeisance to Vishnu in Vaikuntha they were refused entry by the doorkeepers Jaya and Vijaya as Vishnu was relaxing. The sages irked by the behaviour cursed them to be born as asuras Hiranayaksha and Hiranakashipu on earth. Vishnu realising that they had been cursed for no fault of their, assured to liberate them. Vishnu took the avatar of a boar to kill Hiranyaksha and later transformed himself into a man-lion and killed Hiranyakashipu to save Prahalada. By dying in the hands of Vishnu, Jaya and Vijaya could return to Vaikuntha.

Unlike the Christian mythosphere, the Demons portrayed in Hindu mythology are not villains. Their devotion towards Gods is overwhelming. Ravana used one of his ten heads as the gourd & his nerves as string to create the Rudraveena and composed the Rudra-stotra. Shiva appeased by his act gifted him an invincible sword. Asuras/Demons exercise power on par with the Devas. The brighter season of the year is governed by the devas –Uttarayana, whereas the cold and dark parts of the year is controlled

by the demons – Dakshinayana. The astral bodies/navagrahas comprise of asuras (Rahu, Ketu), gods (Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Saturn) and rishis (Jupiter, Venus). Gods and yaksha together perform the duty of guardians of space/direction. Kshetra-pala and grama devi are provincial gods and goddesses. Pattanaik states that Hindus have “a hierarchy of god”

“Personal god -Family god- Village god-Nature spirits- Gods of life-giving and life-taking processes –Gods of space and time – Goddess embodying matter and God embodying spirit – Personal godhead – Impersonal divine principle.” (83)

### Devils and Demons

This section traces the manifestations of demons in various religious mythospheres. In ancient mythospheres there is no distinct traits between the god and demon. The author avers that “not all cultures needed the idea of evil to explain the undesirable.” (87). In Hinduism every act is regulated by one’s past action- punya (good things) /paap (bad things), therefore the concept of evil becomes superfluous. Pattanaik uses the tales of “Why Rama Went into Exile” (Ramayana), “The Curse of Gandhari” (Mahabharata) and “The Offering of Bel Leaves” (Linga Purana) to demonstrate the effects of boons and curses. “Why Rama Went into Exile” narrates in detail how Kaikeyi exploited Dasharatha’s boons. When Kaikeyi saved Dasharatha’s life in the battlefield he promised to grant her three wishes. She wanted Dasharatha to fulfil her wish on the eve of Rama’s coronation. Her desire was that Rama should give up the throne and live in exile for fourteen years while her son Bharata ruled the kingdom. Dasharatha had no choice but to fulfil her wish and eventually died. This state of Dasharatha was the result of his past action. On a hunting trip he had by mistake shot Shravana- a young boy. This dutiful son was the sole custodian of his blind parents. Distraught by Dasharatha’s action the couple cursed that the king too would suffer the pangs of being separated from his son and die.

“The Curse of Gandhari” recounts how Krishna who led the war made Pandavas emerge victorious while their cousins Kauravas were killed. Gandhari the mother of Kauravas unable to bear the death of her children cursed Krishna that he too would witness the demise of his own children and tribe. He further forewarned him that he would die in a despicable manner shot by a hunter.

*Linga Purana* states the story of a hunter who while finding asylum on a tree unknowingly shook it. The tree happened to be Bel Tree and the leaves fell down on the lings that was below the tree. This act of the hunter freed him from the cycles of rebirth.

In the epics, Devdutt Pattanaik categorizes the villains into “1. Asuras who fight gods 2. Rakshasa who fight humans 3. Pisachas who fight ancestors.” (90) Asuras like Prahalada, Virochana and Bali are associated with ‘devotion, justice and generosity’ respectively. In fact in the puranas, the devas are shown as deceitful and decadent. The war between asuras and devas is a recurring feature in Hindu mythology and balances the cosmic function. “Churning the Ocean to Find Shri” reinstates this idea. When Shri-the goddess of wealth, disappeared into the ocean of milk she had to be churned out. The Deva and the Asura joined hands to accomplish this task. As Vishnu suggested Mountain Meru was used as a spindle to churn and placed on the turtle king Akupara, who held it firmly thus preventing the mountain from sinking. The king of serpent Vasuki was tied around Meru. As the ocean was churned for aeons numerous treasures including Shri- goddess of wealth, kamadhenu- the divine cow, Kapataru- the tree that fulfils every wish and parasmani- magical gem. When Amrita – the elixir appeared, both the devas and asuras started fighting over it. To resolve the scuffle, Vishnu appeared in the form of Mohini – the enchantress and offered to divide the drink between the two parties. But, while the asuras were smitten by her beauty, she gave the elixir to the devas. Therefore all the treasures that emerged from the ocean became the possession of the devas.

This story indicates that the wealth of the devas rightfully belonged to the asuras and is seized by trickery. The devas benefit provide succour to the humans, while the asuras don’t and therefore they are considered ‘undesirable’. Ramayana mentions about rakshasha. Rakshasha are not personified as ‘evil’ rather their laws are ‘different’.

### **Creation with a Difference**

The process of creation described in the Judaic and Christian religious text are almost similar. It conveys the idea that the world was created “out of nothingness and its perfection was marred by human disobedience” (97). But, the Hindu religious texts have various versions of creations. The narratives of The Birth of Three Gods (Folklore), Brahma Opens His Eyes

(*Vishnu Purana*), Brahma's Mind-Born Sons (*Brahmavaivarta Purana*), Brahma Splits Himself (*Shiva Purana*), Creation of Death (*Mahabharata*) and Transformations of the Daughter (*Brihardarnyaka Upanishad*) are discussed in this section.

Excerpted from a folktale it is one of the primary stories of creation and has been transmitted orally. "The Birth of Three Gods" divulges how Adishakti had placed three eggs in a lotus from which appeared three worlds and three Gods – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The goddess besotted by the three gods asked them to make love to her, when Brahma and Vishnu rejected it claiming that she was their mother she burnt them down with her 'third eye'. Shiva assented to make love to Adishakti on condition that she would give him her 'third eye'. After he acquired the 'fiery third eye' he slashed down her to ashes and resuscitated Brahma and Vishnu.

Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva resolved to fill the world with living beings, but lacked a female counterpart. Therefore the three Gods then collected the ashes of Adishakti and divided it into three parts. They used the third eye to transform the ashes into three Goddesses Saraswati, Lakshmi and Gauri. Together the Gods and Goddesses began the creation of all being big and small.

The classical rendition of the process of creation can be located in the Vedas and the Upanishads. In "Brahma Opens His Eyes" we come across an account of a lotus blooming. Brahma is seated within the flower, on realising his solitariness he starts searching the origin of the lotus flower. It arose from the navel of Vishnu. As he grasped the presence of Vishnu, Brahma began creating living beings. This story expresses the need to be 'aware' and 'conscious'. "Brahma's Mind-Born Son" is an extension of this thought where Brahma is anxious when he opens his eyes and finds himself all alone. Therefore he creates four young men – Sanat- Kumars his mind born sons. But to his dismay they refused to multiply as they are unaware of the split – 'oneself and the rest'.

In the following story "Brahma Splits Himself" Brahma knew that his sons did not know the split. Inspired by Shiva whose left half was a woman, Brahma decided to split himself. From his left half emerged a beautiful woman. Enamoured by the beauty of the woman, desire rose among Brahma and his sons. They were sexually aroused and started proliferating. The story brings to fore the idea that the woman is the 'material reality' that has to be acknowledged by man/God the spiritual entity. In this

process of Samsara, Brahma fashions “Mrityu” – goddess of death and change. The story of Mrityu appears in Mahabharata, The multiplication of Brahma’s children was alarmingly high. In a means to put an end to the overflowing populace Brahma created Mrityu- the goddess of death. Myritu insisted that since people who she killed would be reborn, she would only kill material component of a living being. Brahma’s daughter Shatarupa /Saraswati is his first woman creation. Instead of viewing her as ‘a medium of realization’ he gazes her as an ‘object of pleasure’. Shatarupa flees from him by taking the form of a goose. This is explained in detail in “Transformations of the Daughter” in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. Brahma in the guise of gander chases her. When she becomes a cow he transforms into a bull and then when she shapeshifts into a mare he takes the form of a horse. Thus he followed her everywhere this is cited as the reason of how animals were created. Brahma incestuous behaviour is quelled by Shiva when he cuts Brahma’s fifth head that manifests the amorous nature.

### Heaven or Hell

Hinduism fosters a belief system that people die only to be reborn. After death they enter the Pitr-loka and wait to be reborn or go to Swarga-loka.

The stories “The Birth of Urvashi” (*Bhagavata Purana*), “Mahabhisha” (*Mahabharata*), “Agastya’s Ancestors” (*Mahabharata*), “Heaven for Markandeya” (*LingaPurana*), “The Death of Yama”( *Rig Veda*), “Vishnu Cursed” (*Padma Purana*), “Fish to the Rescue” (*Matsya Purana*) are employed to describe the various heavens in Hinduism including the Brahma-loka, Go-loka, Indra-loka, Satya-loka, Shiva-loka and Vishnu-loka

The chapter “The Birth of Urvashi” in *Bhagavata Purana* relates how Urvashi was created by the rishis Nara and Narayana. Gods wanted to test the asceticism of Nara and Narayana and sent down the nymph to tempt and distract their tapasya. The sages hit their thighs hard and this resulted in creating a beautiful damsel Urvashi who seduced the gods. The gods realised the mistake and deemed Nara and Naryana fit for heavens greater than Indra-loka.

Mahabhisha helped the devas to win the battle against the asuras which guaranteed him a position in the Indra-loka. While he was there, Ganga dropped in on. Inadvertently her garment slipped and the gods present in the Indra-loka turned away, but Mahabhisha gawked at her with lust.



Indra became furious revoked his stay in heaven and cursed him that he would be heart broken by Ganga on earth.

Yama-loka gains prominence in the story “Agastya’s Ancestors”. Agastya had given up worldly life for yogic practices. But, one fine day he had a vision of his ancestors dangling upside down in the Yama-loka over an unending abyss. Those childless people begged Agastya to have heirs so that they can be reborn and escape Yama-loka. Agastya obliged, fathered a son and went back to the life of an ascetic.

Unlike the sage Agastya, a householder cannot renounce worldly pursuits easily. Bhakti becomes the sole means to attain liberation. Markandeya’s parents prayed to Shiva for an offspring. Shiva asked them to choose wisely between a stupid child who will live long or a sagacious boy with a short life span. The couple opted for the latter and were blessed with a son Markandeya. The young boy was destined to die on his sixteenth birthday. He spent his birthday eve in a temple praying to Shiva. Yama- the lord of death appeared before the young boy with the noose. Markandeya was feeling suffocated, yet he clung to Shiva faithfully. Shiva unable to withstand the agony of the young boy, ‘appeared, kicked Yama and rescued him’. Not only did he rescue him but gave him salvation by sending him to Shiva-loka.

The land of dead Pitra-lok is located across the river Vaitarini. *Rig Veda* narrates the story of the son of god Surya, Yama, the first man. Yama refused to have a scandalous relationship with his sister Yami and produce a child with her, therefore he died childless. Yama, the custodian of Dharma along with his accountant Chitragupta weighs our actions and determines our rebirth (gender/health/nature of family etc)

The gods attacked the asuras when their guru Shukra was on a pilgrimage. The demons went to Shukra’s mother Kavyamata for advice. Kavyamata decided to recite a mantra that would put the devas to sleep till Shukra returned. Realising her intentions, Vishnu slit her throat with his discus. Shukra was furious when he came to know this and cursed Vishnu to get into the cycle of rebirth. By killing a woman, he had committed a grave mistake and had to suffer on earth as Rama and Krishna. Yama, the god of Dharma passed decree based on their actions irrespective of their divine stature.

In the story “Fish to the Rescue” one can draw uncanny similarities to the biblical story of Noah’s Ark. *Matsya Purana* strongly affirms that



during the Kali Yuga Brahma was tired. The Veda slipped out of his mouth when he yawned and was stolen by Hayagriva- the horseheaded asura. In the reign of anarchy there was one righteous saint Manu. He rescued a fish from a river and nurtured it in a pond. As days passed by the fish grew bigger and had to be left in the ocean. Days passed by and Pralaya came by, the fish had become gigantic and covered the horizon. It instructed Manu to place himself and seven rishis on his back. The fish killed Hayagriva, reclaimed the Veda intending to restore it to Brahma and rescued Manu from the pralaya and made him safely reach Mount Meru. Pattanaik states that the presence of common theme is due to the fact that,

“The stories were transmitted from one culture to another or they belong to a common past; The different cultures share imagery from the common human unconscious where symbols emerge as a reaction to basic human experiences such as birth, death, fear and insecurity” (113)

### 3. Mythopoesis: Transforming Myth

This chapter locates the rise of narratives, rituals and symbols within the framework of change and continuity. Any culture proliferates only when myth corresponds to reality.

#### March of Vedic Hymns

Mantras, Vedas and Yagnas are fundamental to the Hindu religious narrative. These rituals empowered the individual, granted privileges and solved ‘temporal problems.’ During the Vedic period Hinduism focused on performing rituals, even the gods were keen on the performance of the rituals in order to vanquish the asuras. He uses the short stories

The Beheading of Vishwarupa(*Mahabharata*), Durvasa’s Curse (*Padma Purana*), Mount Vindhya Bows(*Uttara Ramayana*), The Birth of River Kaveri (*Kaveri Mahatmya*), Repelling Taraka (*Ramayana*), Rama Befriends the Monkey (*Ramayana*), The Burning of Khandavaprastha (*Mahabharata*), Vishwamitra Becomes a Rishi (*Bhagavata Purana*), Eklavya (*Mahabharata*), Atoning for Killing Ravana (*Rishikesh Sthala Purana*) Ammaveru’s Husband (South Indian Folklore), The Birth of Krishna (*Harivamsa*)

“The Beheading of Vishwarupa” describes the importance of yagnas even in the lives of gods. Brihaspathi annoyed by Indra’s comportment refused Indra’s request to perform a yagna. This resulted in Indra losing

the war against the demons. An enraged Indra sought help from the sage Vishwarupa. Vishwarupa's mother was a demon, so he performed yagna that empowered both the gods and the demons. On knowing the truth Indra beheaded Vishwarupa.

The words of rishis -their mantra could be turned into curses or boons. When Indra flung the garland gifted to him by Durvasa, Durvasa grew angry and cursed that Shri- the goddess of wealth would forsake him. Subsequently, Indra's kingdom was doomed, everything waned and he was annihilated in his battles.

When Shiva proposed to give a treatise on the mysteries of the Vedas, all the sages rushed in, to listen to him at the Himalaya. This caused a tilt. Shiva restored equanimity in the North and asked Agastya to move to the South and do the same. The Sun god met Agastya on his way and told him that Mount Vindhya in an attempt to prove its superiority is growing taller every day. He was apprehensive that the mountain looming large would block his path. Agastya pledged to be of help. As he came near the mountain, the mountain bent to pay respect to the sage. Agastya asked Vindhya to remain in the same pose so that when he returns from the South there would not be any difficulty in crossing and Vindhya obliged. Agastya never returned to the North but the Vindhya remained in the stooping position thus making it easy for the sun. Vindhya became a marker of division between the north and the south

"The Birth of Kaveri" expresses there was severe drought in the South. Agastya who had descended from the North always carried with him the sacred water from Ganges in a pot. Vinayaka transfigured into a crow and knocked it when he was unaware. The water that gushed from that pot turned into the magnificent river Kaveri that made the land fertile.

The sages who migrated from the North to the South had different perspectives. They found many cultural differences between the Vedic and non-vedic cultures. This idea is presented "Repelling Taraka". Sage Vishwamitra's yagna was intruded by the rakshasas. They contaminated the proceedings of the ritual by throwing bones into the altar. The rishi vented his grievance to King Dasharatha. The King sent his son Rama to protect the ritual and get rid off the barbarians. Rama carried out his duty proficiently. This overwhelmed the sage Vishwamitra, who rewarded Rama with mantras that enabled him to switch his arrows into missiles when desired.

In Ramayana Sita is abducted by Ravana, the king of Rakshasas, while her husband was lured by a deer. Jatayu, a vulture who watched Sita being kidnapped, impeded Ravana's flight. The Rakshasas king was irked by this creature and severed its wings, the faithful jatayu held his breath till he met Rama and informed him the direction in which Ravana had taken Sita. As Rama set forth towards South in quest to find his wife, he encountered Sugriva and his band of monkeys who had been banished by King Vali. Rama defeated Vali and put Sugriva to power. Sugriva and his subjects (monkeys) helped Rama build a bridge to Lanka and rescue his wife Sita. The monkeys go by the term vanaras, they are not monkeys but tribes whose totem was a monkey. The same is applicable to jatayu.

Encroachment of the forest is validated in "The Burning of Khandavaprastha". The Pandavas planned to construct a city at Khandavaprastha. They sought the help of Agni, who agreed on condition that he must be permitted to devour the flora and fauna of the forest. As Agni's flame started to consume the forest, all the beasts tried to escape, but the Pandavas hunted them down. The vulnerable animals prayed to god Indra for rain, but the Pandavas obstructed the rain from entering by designing a canopy of arrows above the forest. They only spared the life of an asura Mara when he swore to build them a city.

The clearing of forest for progress was not an unusual thing during the Vedic period. But it had its own consequences. The *Bhagavata Purana* narrates the tale of the ten Prachetasa brothers. These siblings meditated under the sea for ten years to seek the divine vision of Vishnu. Once they realised their objective, they returned to earth and found it teeming with trees. In an attempt to clear the superfluous growth when the Prachetasa brothers began to spit fire, the trees gave Marisha, their foster daughter in marriage to them.

It is believed that Vedas were lost when the Vedic culture moved to the South. Sage Vyasa compiled and restored the Vedic manuals. The curator of the manuals was known as Brahmana. They tried to remain in a dominant position and eventually constituted the varna or fourfold division. "The Body of Society" in Rig Veda delineates that Society personified as Purusha has "for a head the Brahmanas, for hands the Kshatriyas, for the thighs and groin the Vaishya and for the feet the Shudra." (123) The varna system valued the priest /Brahmana at the top. The brahmanas who had the privilege to interpret the scriptures "equated themselves with rishis

even though one became rishi by effort and not by birth.” (124) One such incident of attaining the state of a saint is enunciated through the story of Vishwamitra. King Kaushika’s efforts to claim Vasistha’s cow was futile as the king couldn’t withstand the spiritual prowess and austerity of Vasistha. The King realised that he can conquer Vasistha only by becoming a greater saint than him. King Kaushika gave up his kingdom and secluded himself to a forest to master the Vedas. After aeons he became the master rishi Vishwamitra.

The story of “Eklavya” professes how Drona upholds the interests of his benefactors and his caste callously. Drona, the mentor of Kuru princes declined Eklavya’s request to teach archery for the latter belonged to a tribal caste. Eklavya determined to master the craft, built an effigy of Drona and trained himself to wield bows and arrows. He became adept in his craftsmanship and was a better archer than all the princes. When Eklavya attributed his success to his teacher Drona, Drona could not stomach it, he asked Eklavya to give his thumb finger as the fee. Eklavya was perturbed for he knew he will never be able to hold a bow without his thumb finger, but obeyed. When the Kuru princes asked for explanation, Drona confessed that a tribal should never rise to the status of a Kshatriya, if so that would collapse the varna system. Moreover he had promised Arjuna that he would never raise anyone better than him in archery. Thereby by destroying Eklavya, he has retained his promise.

Killing a Brahmana is deemed as a crime. “Atoning for Killing Ravana” narrates the aftermath of Ravana’s death. Ravana the son of rishi Vaishrava was a learned brahmana, therefore Rama had to go on a pilgrimage to expiate for the sin of having killed a brahmana. Pattanaik point out that Hindu mythology continually related divine beings and folk heroes with the ‘upper castes’. The South Indian Folk lore of Ammaveru states that she was married to a man believing that he is a brahmana, but when she spotted him consuming beef she knew he belonged to a low caste. Ammaveru felt resentful and took the form of a fierce goddess and slayed him.

Harivamsa throws light on the birth of Krishna. People wondered why Nanda and Yashoda’s son Krishna was dark. The truth was that Krishna was the eighth son on Vasudeva and Devaki. When kamsa was warned by the oracle of his impending death by Devaki’s son, he started to kill maniacally every child of Devaki. On the night that Krishna was born, a sleeping spell was cast on the entire city. Vasudeva surreptitiously exchanged his

boy child with Nanda's girl child. Kamsa believed that Devaki had given birth to a girl. But, when he tried to kill her, the child grew in stature and revealed herself as a goddess. She stated that Krishna was safe and the prophesy would come true.

Using these short stories, Pattanaik reiterates that though God cannot be confined within the casing of caste, "human manifestations of the divine are always visualized with the sacred thread of the brahmana hanging over the right shoulder". (127)

### **The Ascetic Ideal**

The conflict between the king and the brahmanas is exemplified using the following short stories, Parashurama Destroys the Warrior Race (*Vishnu Purana*), The Golden Mongoose (*Mahabharata*), Yagnavalkya Rebels (*Brahmanda Purana*), Nachiketa Questions Yama (*Katha Upanishad*), Vidura's Past Life (*Mahabharata*), Shiva Enlightens Matsyendra-nath (*Nav-Navth-Charitra*), The Destruction of Daksha's Yagna (*Skanda Purana*), Kapila's Fiery Glance (*Ramayana*), Trishanku (*Vishnu Purana*), Kumbhakarna's Asceticism (*Ramayana*), Dadhichi's Head (*Jaiminya Brahmana*), Dadhichi's Bones (*Mahabharata*), Vishwamitra and Menaka (*Bhagavata Purana*), The Seduction of Rishyashringa (*Mahabharata*), The Birth of Skanda (*Skanda Purana*), Shilavati's Chastity (*Brahmanda Purana*)

### **"Parashurama Destroys the Warrior Race"**

The Haihaiyas gifted the rishi Jamadagni with a miraculous cow (that granted every wish) for the services he rendered as a priest. Kartaviryarjuna, the king of the Haihaiyas clan wanted to reclaim the cow. Jamadagni insisted that the act of reclaiming alms was against dharma, but Kartaviryarjuna did not pay heed to the rishi. Parashurama who was witnessing the clash was forced to resort to violence by wielding his axe. In the duel that ensued Parashurama had hacked Kartaviryarjuna. Enraged by this, Kartaviryarjuna's son beheaded Jamadagni. Parashurama killed five generations of warriors.

Gradually the stories in Mahabharata tell us how people started questioning the hegemony of the brahmanas and the superiority of rituals. A poor man and his emaciated family sacrificed their food to a stranger knowing well they would starve to death. A mongoose accidentally fell

into the serving bowl and half of its body that touched the leftover food turned golden. The mangoose realised the power of sacrifice and went in search of an equally powerful sacrifice that would turn his other half into golden. He went to a ritual conducted by Yudhishtira. As part of the proceeding thousands of them were being fed. Once the yagna was over the mangoose went to the altar and rubbed the ashes from the sacrifice onto his body but to its dismay nothing happened. The mangoose realised that the yagna of such grand scale was meaningless in comparison to the magnanimity of the poor man's sacrifice.

*Brahmanda Purana* describes the birth of Black Yajur Veda. Rishi Vaisampayana told his students to conduct a yagna that will enable him to atone for his sin of having murdered his nephew. Yajnavalkya defied the order, for he believed that atonement can only be attained through remorse and not rituals. Visampayana was infuriated and insisted Yajnavalkya to return whatever he had taught him. As demanded Yajnavalkya vomited the Yajur Veda he had learnt from Visampayana. His fellow students transformed into black birds and consumed the Black Yajur Veda which Yajnavalkya had composed after learning scriptures from the Sun God.

Yajnavalkya was invited by the kings to give discourses and debate, which eventually came to be known as the Vedanta. Notions of samsara, karma, dharma & moksha were formulated. Nachiketa questioned Yama regarding what happens after death. Yama, the god of death too was clueless, he answered that only the body dies but soul is eternal. Humans caught up in samsara tend to believe that ego is one's real identity. Ordained by Karma, a person's present is regulated by his past actions. Moksha can be attained only when one realises that our true identity rests in our soul. This realisation can be achieved through yogic practices. Yoga trains the individual to adhere to dharma and control ego thereby repudiating transient pleasures.

Through "Vidura's Past Life" the relationship between karma and caste is explained. Mandavya, the sage was falsely accused for giving asylum to a thief and was tortured by the soldiers. After his innocence was proven, the sage went to Dharma – the god of justice seeking for an explanation. Dharma told Mandavya that as child he had tortured the bees and therefore he was subjected to severe punishment at the hands of the kingsmen. On hearing this, the sage grew furious, he considered that the innocent acts of children should not be judged punitively. He cursed that Dharma would



be born as Vidura, and owing to his inferior caste the wise man will never be able to ascend the throne.

As the ideas of karma and moksha began to gain momentum, there was a tendency to move away from ritualism toward monasticism. Yagna was replaced by meditation/prayer. In “Gyan Kanda - the age of speculation” stress was laid in understanding. Vedas advocated that, “asceticism was not merely the consequence of restlessness with ritualism but in fact a parallel movement” (131). This movement attached due importance to hermits and holy men whom the laymen relied on.

Shiva and Parvati were conversing on the river bank in solitude. While Shiva was diffusing his wisdom and cosmic secrets to his wife, a fish in the river overheard the conversation and attained enlightenment. The fish evolved into a sage – Matsyendra-nath and went in search of nine disciples – nav-nath (nine masters). They propagated Shiva’s wisdom to the rest of the humankind. This teaching was labelled as tantric tradition. The tradition of tantra renounced mainstream practices.

The narrative of “The Destruction of Daksha’s Yagna” registers the friction between mysterious Vedic rituals and esoteric tantric methods. King Daksha’s youngest daughter Sati had married Shiva. Daksha was unhappy about his daughter marrying a mendicant, who was an outlaw. When Daksha performed a yagna, invitations were sent to everyone excepting Shiva. Sati, on learning her father’s intentions marched in and sacrificed herself into the fire pit. This self-immolation of hers contaminated the ritual and brought everything to a standstill.

The news of Sati’s death infuriated Shiva, he along with his horde flattened the ritual ground. Daksha was beheaded by Virabhadra and Kali was overwhelmed by the carnage. The gods had to beg Shiva for forgiveness. Shiva later restored Daksha and even an offering was made to him.

The Vedic tapasvi’s were vested with power that could either heal or harm individuals. This is revealed in “Kapila’s Fiery Glance”. King Sagara had successfully completed 999 horse sacrifices, and was keen on performing one more to attain power. Gods devised a plan to prevent him from attaining power and hid the sacrificial horse in the sage Kapila’s cave. The Kings son accused Kapila of stealing the horse. Kapila who was immersed in tapas opened his eyes and his glance reduced Sagara’s sons to ashes.



The tapas facilitated the rishis to create powerful beings. A severe drought befell the land when Vishwamitra was meditating. Trishanku an outcast, took care of Vishwamitra's family. During the famine he kept them alive by feeding beef. When Vishwamitra returned, he agreed to return the favour by fulfilling Trishanku's wish of entering the heaven. Trishanku rose to the heaven but the gods forbade his entry since he was an outcast who ate cows. Vishwamitra wanted to uphold his promise, therefore he suspended Trishanku midair. Vishwamitra using his power fashioned an exclusive heaven for Trishanku. Finally gods agreed that Trishanku can 'hang his head downward' and remain as a constellation in the sky.

"Kumbhakarna Asceticism" stresses that caste is accorded by birth but anyone can attain the position of tapasvi irrespective of their birth or status. Kumbhakarna the rakshsas was too austere. He wanted to receive a boon from Brahma. The devas were petrified at this for Kumbhakarna was already quite invincible, so they pleaded with Saraswati the goddess of speech to twist his tongue. Brahma was pleased by Kumbhakarna's tapas, at the moment of asking for a boon, Kumbhakarna's tongue got warped, instead of soliciting more strength he wished for more sleep and Brahma granted him that he will sleep throughout the year. Kumbhakarna realised his mistake, and appealed to Brahma to salvage him. But a boon once given can never be retracted, it can only be amended. Accordingly Brahma modified his grant, and he declared the Kumbhakarna will wake up only once in a year and on that particular day he will be invincible. If he is forcefully awakened on any other day of the year, he would die.

Ascetics were oblivious of hierarchies. They helped people to access Vedic secrets. In Jaiminya Brahmana we come across instances where gods declined to share the Vedic secrets with the Ashwini twins. The gods also warned that a person's head would burst into splinters if he discloses the secret. Ashwini twins approached Dadhichi who was prepared to share the Vedic secret. He instructed them to swap his head with a horse's head. The twins followed his orders the moment he divulged the truth his horse head ruptured and the twins replaced it with human head.

Indra happened to kill the sage Vishwarupa. When Vishwarupa's father Tvastha heard of his son's death he performed a yagna and summoned the asura Vrita. Vrita's mission was to kill Indra's armies. When Indra learnt that Vrita was indomitable and could be killed only with a weapon made of Dadhichi's bones, he requested the sage to help him. Dadhichi left his mortal remains and gave his bones to Indra to engineer a weapon.

The power of the tapasya's was on a steady rise. The greatest threat to their ascetic power was sensual temptations. The gods used apsaras/nymphs to lure and distract the tapas of the rishis/sages. Bhagavata Purana gives an account of the conflict between Vishwamitra and Menaka. Vishwamitra was resolute to acquire the divine grace and practiced rigorous meditation. Indra was alarmed that Vishwamitra might gain spiritual power and came up with a plan. He sent Menaka, to seduce the rishi and distract him. Menaka carried out her job successfully. But, Vishwamitra never gave up, he again started meditation, this time too Indra sent nymphs to regale him. This time Vishwamita never yielded in, he was focused and obtained the mystical powers and came to be known as rishi Vasistha.

The rishi's during Vedic period (Brihaspati, Shukra, Kasyapa, Agastya) were married but the tapasya and yogi had to be celibates. Rishyashringa was raised by his didactic father who prevented him from even looking at a woman. The 'enforced chastity' bestowed him with great power that he cursed the sky when the rain drenched him. As a result it never rained again and the only means to lift the curse was to break his chastity. It so happened that when King Lomaharsha sent his daughter Shanta, Rishyashringa immediately fell for her beauty.

The notion of 'hypermasculine heroes' can be spotted in *Skanda Purana*. Skanda was an ayonija 'not born from the womb' and detached himself from women. In "The Birth of Skanda", we are told that Shiva's semen which hadn't been shed for many epochs was so powerful that it had to be shed outside a woman's body. It was so potent that it could neither be preserved by Agni, Vayu or Ganga. The seed was so vigorous it set a marsh ablaze. From the seed sprouted a Skanda, the six-headed child who was nurtured by six nymphs namely kritikas. The child who was barely six day old was powerful enough to slay the demon Taraka.

"Shilavati's Chastity" from Brahmanda Purana speaks volumes about how a woman was perceived to be acquiescent and her sole duty was to be faithful to her husband. Shilavati's husband was a leper. When he expressed his desire to visit a prostitute, she obliged and carried him to the prostitute's house. A rishi who witnessed this was repulsed by her husband's behaviour and cursed that he would die before sunset. Shilavati, the chaste woman commanded the sun from setting. Only after much persuasion did she agree to liberate the sun and eventually as the sun started to set her husband died.

Following the period of Vedic ritualism the people split into shramana/strivers (did not rely on Veda) and Brahmana (relied on Veda). The Buddhists and Jains emerged from Shramana revolution, “Buddhists prescribed meditation and contemplation to cope up with problems of life. Jains suggested austerity and nonviolence” (139)

### The Birth of God

The Brahmana claimed that to trust in Veda was to rely on God. There was a paradigmatic shift from ritualism to Hinduism. Buddhism and Jainism aimed to emancipate the individual from material existence. Pattanaik draws the difference between the classical and folk traditions of Hinduism

|                      | <b>Classical Tradition</b>                         | <b>Folk Tradition</b>   |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Worldview            | Maya – everything is transient & delusionary       | Shakti – everything is powerful   |
| Objective of rituals | Appease gods, preserve order and attain liberation | Channelize the abundance present in nature and derive positive energy from it |
| Methodology          | Cosmic   | Provincial  |
| Ideology             | From upper classes/ caste to below                 | From lower rungs of society to higher   |
| Attitude             | Vedic (Nigama)                                     | Tantric (Agama)   |
| Inclination          | Monasticism  | Esoteric  |
| Ultimate Intention   | To maintain order                                  | To seek pleasure  |
| Vision               | Attain moksha                                      | Earthbound  |

(140)

The age of speculation witnessed a shift in taste. This idea is driven home by using the short stories “Krishna Humbles Indra” (*Bhagavata Purana*), “Kali’s Tongue” (*Kalika Purana*), “Vishnu Enlightens Brahma” (*Vishnu Purana*), “Shiva the Dancer” (*Skanda Purana*), “The Return of Vyasa’s Son” (*Devi Bhagavata Purana*), “The Death of Parikshit” (*Bhagavata Purana*), “The Power of Rama’s name” (*Ramayana*), “The Idol in the Termite Hill” (*Temple Lore*), “The Marriage of Valli” (*Skanda Purana*), “The Descent of Ganga” (*Shiva Purana*), “The Pillar of Fire” (*Shiva Purana*), “Mohini to

the Rescue" (*Vishnu Purana*), "The Birth of Ayyappa" (*Sabarimalai Sthala Purana*), "God Turns for Kanaka Dasa" (*Udipi Sthala Purana*) and "The Hunter's Eye" (*Periya Purana*).

In the age of speculation or age of epic the discourses on ritual and celestial beings failed to enthrall the common masses as they were fascinated by the rise of insular myths and folk heroes. One such incident can be traced in "Krishna Humbles Indra", wherein Krishna (the folk hero) subdues Indra (celestial god). Bhagavata Purana describes the story in which Krishna tells his fellow cowherds to pay obeisance to Mount Govardhana rather than Indra. Indra was maddened by Krishna's act and sent down a deluge that washed away the entire village. Krishna lifted the Govardhana mountain with his little finger and the villagers and beasts found refuge under it to escape the flood. Bewitched by Krishna's omnipotence, Indra apologised.

An attempt was made to incorporate the monastic ideology within the day to day lifestyle of the commoners by following fasting and vegetarianism. Similarly the brahmana's and monks too adopted 'fertility rites' within their ideological premise. In the AGE OF RITUALS the priest sensed power flowed when he was conducting a yagna. In the AGE OF SPECULATION the sages credited the power to be 'brahman'. In the AGE OF DEVOTION, the brahman was regarded as God, "God, the embodiment of the absolute and ultimate divine principle, was greater than any other god, Vedic or tantric, that existed before." (143) It was only through worship one could attain moksha. The transition from 'elitist Vedic ritualism' to 'populist Hindu theism' witnessed the rise and fall of Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism – the worship of Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti respectively. They were deemed to be superior to any Vedic gods.

The story of Raktabija the demon is present in Kalika Purana. Whenever the gods tried to shoot an arrow at Raktabija, from every drop of his blood emerged a new Raktabija. The gods were no match in front of the clone army of Raktabija and asked Devi's help. The goddess transformed herself into the gruesome Kali, entered the battlefield and unfurled her tongue. She collected Raktabija's blood before it fell on the ground and thus killed him.

"Vishnu Enlightens Brahma" tells the birth of Brahma. At the beginning Brahma opened his eyes and found that he was sitting inside a lotus. This lotus emerged from the navel of Narayana/Vishnu who

gave a comforting smile. The 'mighty being' then chanted the Vedas into Brahmas ears. Brahma realised that the 'mighty being' Narayana was the creator and started his divine responsibility.

Not only Shiva's discourses on wisdom but also his ability to dance appealed to the commoner. In *Skanda Purana* the arrival of Shiva is described as following. A group of sages were meticulously performing rituals in a forest. An unclothed young man entered the forest, the wives of the sages were smitten by his charisma and followed him. The fuming sages created beasts (tiger, serpent and goblin) out of the sacrificial altar and set them on trial. The youngster flayed the tiger and swathed its skin around his waist, coiled the serpent around his neck, tamed the goblin, mounted on it and started dancing. Only then it dawned upon the sages that this youth was no ordinary person and it was Mahadeva himself, "he had through sensual dance overpowered the tiger of desire, the serpent of attachment, and the goblin of forgetfulness." (145) They understood that rituals will not be of any help and only by submitting themselves to the Mahadeva they will be able to escape the cycle of rebirth and attain self-realisation.

The following story reinstates the message that renunciation is not mandatory to attain spiritual power. Vyasa's son Suka did not have any leanings toward women, he was intent on renunciation. But Vyasa did not give up easily, he followed Suka and explained to him the grace of Krishna. The life narrative of Krishna made Suka realise that a person can break free of rebirth while being in a marital relationship and doing the duties of a householder.

Suka also went on to help King Parikshit overcome his fear of death. A sage cursed Parikshit that he would die of snakebite within a span of seven days. As Parikshit was haunted by the fear of death, he was advised to listen to Bhagavata Purana. Suka was summoned and he narrated the stories of god. On hearing these stories, Suka realised the transient nature of life.

Ratnakara was a notorious thief. He justified that he robbed people to feed his family. But when his wife refused to partake in the consequences of his crime, he became a reformed person. A sage advised him to chant Rama's name, but his past misdeeds obstructed him from pronouncing the name of the God. Therefore he was asked to chant Mara. . Mara (meaning death). But as time passed by the continuous chanting of ma- ra- ma – ra sounded into rama rama (god's name). By faithfully chanting Rama's name Ratnakara was acquitted of his sins and later became a famous saint.

Folk gods were manifestations of Shiva or Vishnu. In the village shrine mythopoesis still continues and the Kshetrapala's / guardians of village are envisaged as "transmitters of the grace of the other popular gods of the region." (147) Stories of milk flowing from a cow's udder over termite hill only to discover the presence of an idol is a common motif in India.

The appropriation of Murugan the Tamil god into the Shaiva tradition is registered in *Skanda Purana*. Murugan fell in love with Valli, a tribal girl when he saw her in a millet field. To win her over Murugan sought the help of his brother Vinayaka. Vinayaka transformed into a mad elephant and chased Valli only to be rescued by Murugan. Thus Murugan becomes a god of tribals.

Shiva's mellifluous voice melted the feet of Vishnu which came to be known as Ganga. Brahma collected this water in a pot. Later the sage Bhagirath requested Brahma to release Ganga. But the surge from heaven would wipe out the lives on earth. Therefore Bhagirath appealed to Shiva. Shiva broke the descent of Ganga and regulated the flow of water, she got entwined in his hair before she reached the earth.

Buddhism and Jainism started losing its significance once Buddha and Jina were associated with incarnations of Vishnu. The brahmanas successfully established that the philosophy of nastikas was 'taught by God to delude demons' (149). There was a strong dispute between Shaivas and Vaishnavas regarding who is superior.

"The Pillar of Fire" from *Shiva Purana* tells that Brahma and Vishnu vied for the title of Mahadeva. Out of nowhere there appeared a huge pillar between them, it seemed to have neither a beginning nor an end. While Vishnu transformed into a boar and dug the terrain to find the end of the pillar, Brahma assumed the shape of the swan and desperately searched for the top. As both of them miserably failed, Shiva arose from the pillar. This made them realise that Shiva is superior to both of them.

To complement this, *Vishnu Purana* comes up with a narrative to establish the supremacy of Vishnu. Shiva had granted a boon to an asura that anyone whom the asura touched would be reduced to ashes. When the ungrateful asura tried to test it on Shiva, Shiva had to seek help from Vishnu. Vishnu disguised himself as Mohini and lured the asura. She convinced him to dance and in the process made him touch his head thus killing himself. Thus Vishnu saved Shiva from the asura.



Both Shaivas and Vaishnavas claim the same god. For example, one such instance is found in “The Birth of Ayyappa” for the *Sabarimalai Sthala Purana*. It is a continuum of the earlier story. Shiva was enamoured by Vishnu in the form of Mohini and it resulted in the birth of the child Hari-hara-sutha (son of Vishnu and Shiva).

Theism gained prominence as the kings started patronising it. With the inception of Gupta period there was a rise in temples. These temples were managed by the brahmanas who again came to power as it happened earlier during the Age of Rituals. Caste hierarchies were established in the temples. In order to challenge the hegemony of ‘temple culture’ Bhakti Movement arose. Bhakti Movement of Alvars and Nayanars advocated, “direct communion with a personal god while rejecting all caste constraints.” (152)

*Udupi Sthala Purana* narrates how God himself turned for Kanaka Dasa. Kanaka a low caste shepherd was banned from entering the temple. When he wandered near the premises of the temple passionately singing to the God to appear, The deity in the sanctum sanctorum turned. The temple wall cracked so that Kanaka could see the God.

A story of similar strain can be spotted in *Periya Purana*. Shiva was worshipped by a priest and a hunter. Both the devotees adored him. While the priest performed rituals according to the rules of Agama, the hunter unaware of it daily offered a portion of his hunt. Shiva decided to test their faith, all of a sudden two eyes emerged on the image and they began to bleed. The priest fled the scene but the hunter gouged his eyes and replace it with the bleeding eyes. Shiva was moved by this gesture and blessed him with abundance.

### **Invasions and Immigrations**

Each dynasty, religion and philosophy had its own influence on Hindu mythologies. The battle between asuras and devas was looked on as dharma vs. anarchy. Naraka the subterranean depicted in Hindu myths was conceived to be akin to the biblical hell. “The Death of the Pandavas” (*Mahabharata*) depicts the scene where Yudhishtira reaches ‘swarga’ after death. Yudhishtira is not able to find any of his brothers instead is shocked to find Kauravas. He finds out from Indra that the Kauravas died in the battle and had done their duty as upright warriors, this had secured them a position in Swarga. Whereas the Pandavas were secluded in dark place, “Bhima was suffering



of his gluttony, Arjuna for his pride over being the greatest archer, Nakula for being vain about his beauty, and Sahadeva for being haughty about his intelligence.” (155) The idea of Messiah descending to earth, punishing the wrongdoers and rewarding the meek surface in Bhavishya Purana in the story of Kalki, the last incarnation of Vishnu on a white horse. In order to disseminate communal harmony there are also stories of goodwill between the Hindus and Muslims. The friendship between Manikantha (Ayyappa) and Vavar, a Muslim warrior who accompanied him during his mission is still celebrated. The idol of Ranganatha was carried away by a Muslim invader. When saint Ramanuja retrieved it from Delhi, the warlord's daughter who had fallen in love with the idol/ranganatha followed him all the way to Shrirangam and breathed her last in the temple. Known as Manavala Mangai she is still revered.

Today's Hinduism is totally different from the Hinduism of the past. Narrative, rituals and symbols change over time. Pattanaik states that, “Innumerable transformations have been organic enough to offer a sense of continuity. New ideas did not replace old ones; they were assimilated to generate better ideas.” (159)

#### **4. Mythography: Interpreting Myth**

The purpose of Mythography can be viewed variedly. One school of philosophy considers that belief in myths will wane when one discovers the truth, while the other creed on mythography firmly believes that all truths are fashioned by myths. The former considers myth as, “a medium for or a flawed version of an immutable, eternal reality created by or for unsophisticated minds” (161) whereas the latter credits mythmaking as “an essential function of the mind (conscious or unconscious) to express repressed needs and desires or to make sense out of life and resolve all conflicts.” (161)

#### **History and Prehistory**

Most of religious narratives are rendered sacrosanct for they are believed to have happened in the past. Epics or legends too are bestowed with an element of credibility for they are considered as part of our community's history. Hindu scriptures distinguish between ‘traditional beliefs and historical data’. The “Itihasas’ and ‘Puranas’ chronicle the evolution of gods, demons and the rise and fall of the world but the historians dismiss it as cock and bull story.

Pattanaik enunciates that the representations of Indian history is itself confounding. For the depiction of Indus Valley civilisation as brick laden contrasts itself with the Vedic hymns. There are hardly any material remnants of period following the decline of city civilization, founding of Maghadan Empire and Alexander's incursion. In this chapter the author explicates how myth serves as the protohistory that documents the lives of nomads, agriculturists and forest dwellers.

|                          | <b>Nomad</b>     | <b>Settled Community</b>      | <b>Forest Dweller</b>             |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Occupation               | Rearing Animal   | Agriculture                   | Hunting                           |
| Identity                 | Arya             | Dravida                       | Nishada                           |
| Mythological Description | Deva, Manava     | Asura, Naga, Rakshasa, Yaksha | Vanara, Garuda                    |
| Doctrine                 | Vedic Philosophy | Tantric                       | Energy/power present in all being |
| Ritual                   | Yagna            | Puja/vrata                    | Trance                            |

(Pattanaik 167)

*Mahabharata* relates the story of "The Sons of Kadru and Vinata". Kadru was the mother of naga's (serpent) and Vinata was the mother of Garuda the eagle. On seeing the Uchhaishrava – the heavenly horse, Kadru commented that the horse sported a black hair in his tail and Vinata refuted it and her freedom was her stake. Kadru wanted to win the wager and instructed her children to latch onto the horse's tail. The next day when Vinata viewed it from a distance Uchhaishrava's tail seemed to appear black, Vinata realised that she had lost the bet and worked as Kadru's slave. Vinata could attain freedom in exchange for a pot of amrita – the elixir of immortality. Her son Garuda went to Amaravati, confronted the devas and snatched the jar of nectar only to give it to nagas. Having delivered his mother from slavery, Garuda requested the nagas to consume the nectar only after bathing. When the nagas were bathing Garuda asked Indra to reclaim the amrita. Garuda's strength and ingenuity impressed Vishnu who made him his mount and insignia. Vishnu also granted Garuda a boon that each time an eagle ate a serpent it would not be committing a sin for serpents were made as the natural preys of eagles. This story

can be located within the historical contexts wherein the agriculturalists- the devout worshippers of serpents had imprisoned the eagle-totem tribes and pilfered cows. The chieftain of the eagle tribe made friends with the nomads and collectively they freed the tribes and stolen cows. The same idea recurs in various contexts.

Some historians also perceive that the Indo European nomads invaded the settler communities that had earlier driven away the tribal population. The historians cogitate that the aryas who came into India annexed the land by means of Ashwamedha- letting their horse loose and claim land. A similar anecdote “Yudhishtra’s Horse Sacrifice” is present in the *Mahabharata*. After the war when Yudhishtra ascended the throne, he performed the Ashwamedha - horse sacrifice. A royal horse was let loose and whichever land the horse crossed came under the sovereign rule of the Pandavas. Arjuna steered the army that followed the horse. The supremacy of the Pandavas was unchallenged and through the horse they annexed many territories, but as they approached the border of Manipura, they were stopped by Babruvahana, who challenged Arjuna to a duel. Babruvahana aimed a fatal poison tipped arrow that pierced Arjuna’s chest. When Babruvahana’s mother Chitrangada saw Arjuna lying down she wept for he was her husband and Babruvahana’s father. Uloopi a naga woman who was once been married to Arjuna had taught Babruvahana archery. Arjuna had forsaken Uloopi after the marriage and through Babruvahana she had avenged him. Later when Chitrangada and Babruvahana requested her, Uloopi using a sacred serpent gem as antidote revived Arjuna. This tale using the relationship between Chitrangada and Babruvahana hints at the presence of the matrilineal structures. Only with the inception of Vedic Cultures, matriarchy was replaced with patriarchal cultures. In contradiction to the Aryan invasion theory, Hindu narratives staunchly affirm that the nomads were never outsiders and they descended from Kashyapa.

The story of Krishna indicates the rural and bucolic shades of the hero. The pastoral setting and his carefree early life is expounded in Harivamsa. Krishna grew up in a village. He was fond of dairy products and was mischievous. Raised by the cowherds the young boy could play the flute and enamoured women. Krishna was no ordinary child, he was the protector of the village. He fought rakshsas, saved the people from torrential rain and whirlwind. When the news of popularity reached Kamsa, he was bothered. Kamsa planned to kill Krishna by inviting him to

a wrestling match. But, Krishna defeated all the wrestlers and finally killed Kamsa. Only then it was known that Krishna was Kamsa's nephew and as the oracle had prophesied he took the life of Kamsa.

Kamsa's father in law Jarasandha was upset on hearing Kamsa's death. He attacked the city of Mathura seventeen times and Krishna defended it and defeated Jarasandha. Krishna ruminated over this issue and decided that his subject the Yadavas should be sent to Dwaraka- a safehaven. Then later he was instrumental in the Pandavas building Indraprasta. With the aid of Pandavas he killed Jarasandha. By chance of events Pandavas gambled their kingdom and had to go into exile. When the Kauravas refused to return the Pandavas their kingdom, Krishna stepped in but all his efforts to negotiate went futile. This led to the gruesome war that took place in Kurukshetra. Even though the war was over the debate over righteousness of the Pandavas vs. Kauravas was still raging and this paved way for a skirmish among the yadavas. Krishna had to witness the death of his own clan and died an unheroic death at the hands of a hunter. The entire city was submerged, his subjects were raped and killed. Only a few of the yadavas survived. Krishna's story seems to fuse the narratives of two different individuals. He enjoys the life of a blithe cowherd in the early phase and later becomes the undisputed king of Mathura. His story is a saga of "the transformation of the amalgamated hero into a manifestation of God." (168)

Using the story, "The Sacrifice of Sunahshepas" from *The Mahabharata* one can understand that human sacrifice was very much prevalent in the Vedic culture. King Harishchandra beseeched God Varuna for a son. Varuna agreed to fulfil his desire on condition that Harishchandra must sacrifice his son in his sixteenth year. But the King could not keep up his word, he struck another deal with Varuna. Instead of demanding the Prince as the sacrifice, Varuna agreed for the sacrifice of any 16 year old Brahmana boy. The father of Sunahshepas agreed to offer his son as a sacrifice in exchange of hundred cows. Sage Vishwamitra was requested to preside over the sacrifice. On reaching the sacrificial altar he was appalled to see a human sacrifice. Vishwamitra taught the boy a hymn to please Varuna and thus escape death. Sunahshepas father was not worried about his son's plight rather he was keen on setting a price for his son's life. Sunahshepas felt dejected at his vulnerable condition and started to recite the hymn Vishwamitra had taught him. His voice was so mellifluous that the Gods descended from heaven and halted the sacrifice and the

boy was adopted by Vishwamitra. Gods henceforth decided not to accept human sacrifice. The story “The Children of Vichitravirya” suggests that sage Vyasa was requested by Vichitravirya’s mother Satyawati to make love to Vichitravirya’s widows Amba and Ambalika in order to produce an offsprings for the kingdom. Another tale “Oghavati’s Obedience” speaks about sex-hospitality which was prevalent during the Vedic culture.

The Historical School of Myth and the Antediluvian School / Atlantis school seem to believe that myths though inaccurate are the manifestations of ‘real events that occurred in the distant past’. This advocates of Antediluvian school consider rishis as the custodians of Atlantian wisdom. The ancient wisdom of rishis and their scientific temperament can be deduced through the “Gandhari’s Children”. *The Mahabharata* carries the story of the birth of Kaurava. Sage Vyasa told Gandhari that she would be blessed with hundred sons. But Gandhari gave birth a mound of stillborn flesh. When she approached Vyasa, he instructed her to cut the flesh into hundred pieces and place it in a pot filled with ghee. Vyasa performed rituals and blessed the jars, after nine months a male child was present inside each jar.

“Krishna Curses Ashwathama” tells how the ancient Vedic philosophy had wisdom about nuclear technology. Pandavas had won over the Kauravas and the war had come to an end. Only three of them remained alive in the enemy’s camp. Ashwathama in an attempt to avenge the death of Kauravas turned his bow into the powerful brahmastra missile and shot it. On seeing this Arjuna too aimed a similar astra as counterattack. Vyasa who was witnessing this clash of missiles feared that this collision obliterate ever form of life on earth and advised them to reverse the formula. Arjuna paid heed to Vyasa, but Ashwathama unaware of the reverse formula redirected it to Uttara’s womb. Krishna protected Uttara’s child, but this incident made him so livid he cursed that Ashwathama would live forever in a diseased state.

Elements of science-fiction can be located in “Shiva Destroys Tripura”. Three asuras had obtained a boon to erect three aerial cities of gold, silver and iron which could only be demolished by a single arrow. When they grew powerful and created problem for everyone, the devas requested Shiva to quell down this asura. Vishnu transformed into Mayaymoha Buddha and tricked the asuras to forsake Veda. Shiva went to the battle, “the earth was his chariot, the sun and moon served as its wheels, the Veda were its horses, and Brahma was its charioteer. Mount Meru was his bow, Ananta

Sesha was his bowstring, and Vishnu himself was his arrow.” (173) Shiva waited for many aeons so that the three cities aligned in a straight line and shot the missile that razed them down. The asuras were his devotees, so Shiva felt miserable. His wail filled the universe as he cried profusely. He came to be known as Rudra and his tear drops turned into the Rudraksha beads. As a remnant of this event, ‘Shiva smeared three horizontal lines of ash on his forehead.’(174)

### Strategic Charters

Narratives are influential in creating and sustaining hierarchies. They consciously fashion an ideology. Vedic Ideology instituted on the basis of varna-ashrama-dharma ascertained that those who did not abide by it as ‘barbarians’. A story from *Bhagavata Purana* explains the fate of King Vena who disregarded the varna-ashrama-dharma. Due to the king’s insolent behaviour, the sages killed him. In an effort to churn his corpse, they separated his ashes into polluting remnants and pure leftovers. The evil residue transmogrified into an evil creature, while from the pure residue arose the perfect king Prithu. King Prithu asked earth for wealth and she took the form of a cow. King Prithu tamed her and promised to espouse dharma.

The varna was applicable only to the man and for the woman regardless of caste had to pay respect to a man – stridharma. The idea of imposition of ‘female chastity’ is unravelled in “Shvetaketu’s Law”. Shvetaketu was shocked when his father passed a statement, “All women are free to do as they wish” (175) and was keen on imposing an order that a woman must have relationship only with her husband. Whenever a story defying the notions of the patriarchy was narrated, conscious attempts are made to rationalise it. Draupadi’s marriage to five men is represented as a story that ratifies ‘a man’s absolute obedience to his mother’ (176). Draupadi’s polyandry is substantiated with the story of how Shiva granting her a boon. Draupadi prayed to Shiva for a husband who is ‘noble, strong, skilled, handsome and wise’, but Shiva misconstrued her plea and granted her five men with each quality.

The idea of woman as the chaste wife and the need to be domesticated also recurs in *Shiva Purana*. Vrinda’s chastity makes her husband Jalandhara invincible. In order to defeat Jalandhara Vishnu masquerades as Jalandhara and seduces Vrinda. This results in Jalandhar’s death and Vrinda becoming a widow. A woman’s reputation and life is at stake when



her chastity is questioned. To prove her innocence and chastity, Sita had to jump into a pyre even though she was unharmed by the flames the people of Ayodhya refused to accept her as the queen. Rama did not want to offend his subjects and so deserted her. Pattanaik states that, the strategic narratives that praise female chastity have played a major role in the imprisonment of Hindu women 'within the household, bound by marriage and maternity' (178). Strategic narratives contribute in 'social engineering' – the relationship between Dashratha and his son Rama. Rama's deific personality is revealed when he meekly obeys Dashratha. Strategic narratives also try to explain the natural phenomena/ evolution of mountains. *Bhagavata Purana* mentions that when Hiranyaksha hid the earth under the sea, Vishnu transformed into a boar and restored it. As Vishnu arose from the sea holding the earth passionately, a few folds emerged on earth which later came to be known as mountains. The story of Dhruva -young boy's faith in God that transformed him into a polestar too is a strategic narrative from *Bhagavata Purana*.

*Tirumalai Sthala Purana* explains the relation between the deity and his devotees. A folklore explains how the work of a man gets a divine touch. When Jayadeva wrote *Gita Govinda* he was hesitant to portray Krishna subservient to Radha. Krishna entered the house when Jayadeva was not present, pen down the verse and left. People in Puri did not accept this and as a result along with other verses Jayadeva's manuscript was left all night in the sanctum sanctorum. In the morning Jayadeva's manuscript was on the top of all the other books.

### **This In terms of That**

There are many narratives that try to validate the abstract and complex things. The following story establishes the relationship between the moon and the twenty seven nakshatras. *Somnath Sthala Purana* tells that Chandra, the moon god had married King Daksha's twenty seven daughters. Chandra did not treat all the wives equally, he was only fond of Rohini. This partiality led Daksha to curse Chandra. Eventually Chandra started withering away, he prayed to Shiva who restored his powers. Once a month Chandra started visiting his wives, whenever he comes in contact with Rohini he shines and diminishes every time he moves away from her. Rohini is considered as the 'celestial doe' chased by Mrigashiras the 'celestial buck'/ This liaison is expressed in "Rudra and the Prajapati". When Brahma fell in love with the first woman (Ushas) he created, she



was revolted at licentious approach of her father. She assumed the form of a doe and fled away but, Prajapati transforming himself into a buck followed her. All the devas invoked Rudra, Rudra the hunter raised his bow and shot Prajapati. Pattanaik registers that in narratives concur with vedic astronomy for, “the belt of Orion is considered to be the arrow shot at Mrigashiras with by the deer hunter, by Mrigavadhya or the bowman Dhanu.” (184)

The significance of the seven stars of the Great Bear Constellation is delineated in “Sapta Rishis and Their Wives” from *Mahabharata*. The sapta rishis, the mind born sons of Brahma, were married to faithful women. Though Agni desire those women, their chastity guarded them from the sensual advances of Agni. On a winter morning they women decided to warm themselves in front of the fire, Arundhati, the wife of seer vashistha advised the other six women to wear ‘emblems of marriage’ before going near fire. But the rest of them snubbed her and in the heat of the moment yielded to Agni. When all the other women became pregnant excepting Arundhati the exasperated seers drove them away. The six women /Pleiades/krittika left the home of the seven rishis/ great bear constellation and meandered aimlessly. The krittikas discarded the embryo contracted from Agni which metamorphosed into Skanda /Kartikaya– the warlord. Their anger vanished at the sight of the young boy, Kartikaya directed that mothers of new born children have to offer prayers to Krittikas/Matrikas (mother).

Hinduism stresses that self-realisation must occur. The coalition between jiva-atma and parm-atma is established in the “Krishna’s Ras Leela” from *Gita Govinda*. Krishna played his flute and danced with milkmaids on full moon nights. Each milkmaid thought that Krishna danced with her alone. Krishna vanished when the maids stated he belonged to them and only returned when they gave up the possessive feeling. He made the maids realize that they jiva-atma gain meaning only when placed within the fame of Krishna/God the Param-atma. “The Rescue of the Elephant King” from *Bhagavata Purana* describes how God delivers a person from misery of samsara when he totally surrenders to God. Gajendra the Elephant king was incapacitated by a crocodile. When Gajendra picked up a lotus from the pond and prayed to Vishnu for Vishnu used his discus to rescue the mammoth.

## Metaphors of Mind

In this section, Pattanaik uses the theoretical framework of Freud, Jung and Staus to interpret and comprehend myths. Stories of “Kunti’s Magic Formula” is used to expound the point that things which are forbidden in reality is attainable in myths. The story narrates how Kunti was blessed by rishi Durvasa to invoke any God and bear a child with him. Kunti prayed to Surya and had a son with him. The unmarried young woman was afraid of the social stigma and left the baby in a river. After marrying Pandu, they were unable to have children, Kunti therefore summoned the gods Dharma, Vayu, Indra and bore sons with them. Though “the story is seen as a metaphorical interpretation of premarital and extramarital childbearing” (189), within it is deeply embedded subtexts of taboos.

Freud opined that, myth and ritual are, ‘unconscious expression of repressed dreams of a community’ (190) which prohibits illegitimate sexual practices and patricide. Freud’s conceptualisation of the Oedipal complex stresses on the son’s desire to compete with the father for maternal love. He applied this argument to understand the rise of Judaism by killing its founding father Moses and usurping the Promised Land that was originally Moses’. The psychoanalyst drew parallels between religion and neurosis and insisted that problems lay in the unconscious. Unlike the Greek myths abounding with the Oedipal traits where the son kills his father /grandfather or is the reason for their death, in Indian mythologies we find reverse oedipal quality. A reverse Oedipal complex can be spotted in the story of Yayati. Puru, yayati’s son sacrificed his youth for the sake of his father. Puru’s descendant Devavrata also for the sake of his father’s bliss complied with the wishes of his mother Satyawati and remained a celibate lifelong. Unlike the Greek narrative where the hero is a rebel who defies order and authority, in the Hindu narratives the hero is obedient and virtuous.

Freud’s interpretation of myth reverberates with sexual tonalities and therefore reduces as being phallogocentric and misogynistic. Jung’s psychology relates the individual unconscious with the collective unconscious through archetypes. His unconsciousness comprises Ego, Shadow, Anima/Animus and Self. He came up with individuation- a process by which Ego with the help of Anima/Animus challenges shadow to realize the ultimatum – the Self. Pattanaik gives a Jungian reading of Arjuna’s Exile where he meets different women. Uloopi who rapes him, Chitrangada a warrior princess whose father forcibly separated her and her child from Arjuna

and Subhadra, Krishna's sister with whom he fell in love and abducted. He further analyses the Shri Chakra (using Jungian reading) whose symbols play a major role in conveying ideas that cannot be verbally expressed.

Structuralist Claude Levi Strauss deemed the, "every myth had a structure that established the relationship between the various units of myth" (195) What was archetypal images for Jung serves as mythemes for Strauss. Myths have to be place within a larger framework of collective unconscious to regulate order. Strauss considers myths as "devices to think with and ways of classifying and organizing reality." (195) Myths get entrenched in a man's psyche and leave a deep imprint in his unconscious.

Using the Hindu narrative of Ramayana Pattanaik foregrounds the chain reactions the govern life and how one event/karma influences the other. He also draws comparison of Rama and Ravans, their deeds and its consequences. Hindu mythology approves the acceptable and auspicious within the construct of culture and situates it inside nature. The violent and undesirable are consciously situated outside culture. Pattanaik contends that only through different interpretations 'narrative, symbol or ritual acquires its mythic power'.

#### 5.4. Short Notes

1. What according to Devdutt Pattanaik is the difference between myth and science

Pattanaik claims that myth provides a 'traditional culture-specific' comprehension of the world whereas science focuses on a 'universal understanding'. Faith is the sole basis on which myths exists, it needs no proof. Science hardly relies on faith rather needs proof.

2. What are the components of mythology?

Understanding myth through 'logos' is mythology. It involves (i) methodical compilation and cataloguing of myth and contrasting one mythosphere with another (ii) Recording the existence and transformation of myth in different cultural and historical contexts -mythopoesis (iii) subjecting a myth to various interpretation -mythography and understand how they become sacred.

3. How did mythography get established as a subject in European Universities?

During Enlightenment, the travellers established contacts all around

the world. When they came into contact with the Native Americans, Africans and Asians the myths of those regions startled them. They felt the urge to rationalize the savage narratives. The Christians were coerced to corroborate the 'absurdity of false gods'. They applied a scientific approach to understand the rituals, narratives and symbol of the savage, but while doing this they deliberately did not scrutinize the story of Christ.

4. How does a mythical narrative become sacred ?

A myth becomes sacred when it is accorded with a 'divine plot'. A sacred narrative is different from a parable, a story, history or literature. Rather a sacred narrative resonates with mythic power by endeavoring to respond to elemental and intense queries on life.

5. How does Devdutt Pattanaik distinguish a sacred narrative from a parable with reference to Renuka's Story in Mahabharata?

A sacred narrative reverberates with insightful questions of life. Three different instances & renditions from Mahabharata regarding the narrative of the chaste Renuka, wife of Jamadagni and mother of Parashuram is taken for discussion. The first incident "Renuka's Umbrella" narrates how Renuka, the doting wife was habituated to running after and collecting the arrows which her husband Jamadagni shot. On a sunny day when she suffered the pangs of heat and couldn't return home on time, Jamadagni threatened to shoot an arrow at the Sun. Sun apologised and presented Renuka with an umbrella that would protect her. The second narrative on "Renuka's Infidelity" too has its source in Mahabharata. Renuka developed adulterous thoughts as she watched the King and Queen indulge in carnal passion. Jamadagni was irked by her sinful behaviour and order her sons to kill her. While the four sons refused, the fifth son – dutiful Parashurama (an avatar of Vishnu) obeyed his father and axed his mother. However later when Parashurama requested his father to resurrect Renuka, Jamadagni obliges. The last narrative taken from Yellamma Mahatmya "Renka's Head" is a reinterpretation of the former story. When Parashuram tries to kill his mother, she finds asylum in a lower caste woman's house. A furious Parashurama not only beheads his mother but also shears the lower caste woman's neck. When Jamadagni vests his magical power in Parashurama to restore Renuka to life using holy water, the anxious boy interchanges the heads and the bodies of the two women. The low caste woman's head with Renuka's body was accepted by Jamadagi

whereas the person with Renuka's head and the lower caste woman's body became deified as Yellama.

Among the three narrative Renuka's Umbrella seems like a mere parable. The second one "Renuka's Infidelity" has mythic powers as it tries to uphold 'social order' and patriarchal values'. It also elevates Parashurama's disposition and exalts Renuka's status. The third narrative is packed with rich mythic power. As it balances the tensions of an adulterous wife and chaste lower class woman, it also opens the manifold possibilities of the severe patriarchal system, caste structures, notions of morality & punishment. Interestingly the story of Yellamma is not present in the Sanskrit texts. Anthropologist have documented the tale and it has been preserved orally from one generation to other. Folk theatre, small priest, ceremonies and rituals have been instrumental in "freezing" this sacred narrative over time.

6. What are the fundamental symbols in Hinduism and what is their significance?

In Hindu narratives symbols can be broadly distinguished into fertility symbols and monastic symbols. Fertility symbols have a great role in all the rituals connected with the women. On auspicious occasion every household is adorned with fertility symbols like the conch shells, fish and tender mango leaves. Fertility symbols denote worldly pleasure, they are linked with materialistic pursuits, fulfilling desires, begetting children and craving for power/money. Fertility symbols that recur in myth include elephant, fish, parrot, serpent, mango leaf, sugarcane, turmeric, red powder, Venus, water, mirror, circle. While the fertility symbols embody carnal pleasures they are grounded in worldly affairs. The monastic symbols aim at deliverance from worldly quests. Its objective is to find 'eternal spiritual bliss.' Monastic symbols are concomitant with ideas of renunciation, longevity and aspire for immortality/moksha. Monastic symbols comprise bull, man, swan, banyan, pipal, rudraksha, ash, staff, square.

7. How does Pattanaik illustrate the indivisible pairing of man and woman using the myth from Tamil Temple Lore?

Pattanaik uses the story of Ardha-nari "The Half-Woman God" from the Tamil Temple Lore to drive home the message Hindu

mythology grants equal share to both the sexes and man cannot exist without the woman. The story revolves around sage Bhiringi, who wanted to encircle Shiva and worship him. Shakti wanted to teach Bhiringi that both the male and the female are inseparable and sat on Shiva's lap thereby hindering his progress. Bhiringi was keen on only paying obeisance to Shiva and therefore took the form of a bee. He intended to fly in between the couple and thereby fulfil his wish. But to his dismay, Shakti infused herself into Shiva, thus becoming part of his body – the ardha-nari. Bhiringi did not give up easily, he turned himself into a worm that would go across the two and eventually separate them. This enraged Shakti and she cursed him that his narrow intention of not obeying a woman would deprive him of the faculties a man begets from a woman. Subsequently Bhiringi was reduced to a skeleton and eventually realized his mistake. Using this lore Pattanaik expresses that man embodies nature and 'stillness' while woman represents culture and 'flux'.

8. Define ritual and discuss the different types of rituals?

Rituals are means through which an individual connects with the cosmos. Rituals are powerful proceedings that combine the narrative and the symbol. Christian rituals of baptism, Islamic rituals like circumcision or Hindu rituals of placing red footprints become meaningful only when placed within the knowledge of the larger belief system. Rituals may be contagious, invocatory, social, sympathetic and transactional. Contagious rituals implicate acquiring the desired quality by associating with a particular object, ex. Collecting ash from the offering made to god. In invocatory rituals, people offer prayers, chant gods name in order to attain their desire. Social rituals facilitate the switch from one phase to another. While sympathetic rituals involve in creating an environment to protect the family, transactional rituals connect itself with havan, bali, daan & dakshina a barter system where the individual gives up and craves for something in return.

9. How does Hindu mythology construct binary opposites between the female form of Chinnamastika and the feminine form of Lalita-Tripurasundari?

Pattanaik draws parallels between the paradigms of Goddess, Chinnamastika – the headless god who embodies aggressive sexual



passion and violent bearings with Lalita-Tirupurasundari – the coy and divine. While the former is acceptable the latter is considered unacceptable. Accordingly “the part of the paradigm that is desirable is accepted within the society and the rest is rejected.” (p.41) In art Brahma’s paradigm is represented by a circle. The circle epitomises the “untamed” mindscapes and within the circles is the present a square that manifests the idea of culture. The coarse mind is domesticated by dharma that governs culture.

10. What are the two opposing approaches of Shiva and Vishnu?

Pattanaik points out that, “Shiva seeks moksha by withdrawing from the paradigm, while Vishnu seeks moksha by staying within the paradigm” (p.50). Shiva follows the ‘nivritti-marga’ withdraws from the circumference to the center while Vishnu’s is ‘pravritti-marga’- an approach moving away from the center while staying attached to it. Shiva and Vishnu are described as poles apart. While Vishnu’s Vedic style of life restraints senses Shiva’s arouses senses. Vishnu is keen on imparting harmony but the faculty to revel in happiness is granted by Shiva. After drawing similarities and differences between the Tantric approach of Shiva and the Vedic style of Vishnu, the author states that our perceptions of “perfection and possibility” are based on the paradigms construed by myths.

11. What are the three responses to challenge Nature?

Nature is the ultimatum, everyone has to succumb to its might. Fight, Flee and freeze are the three ways of coping with nature. A person who fights envisions nature as a force that can be manipulated or tamed. Occult rituals/practises by offering sacrifices or chating spell is used to conquer nature ex. Age of Rituals. In the second scenario, one who flees envisages nature as a fascinating delusion that draws humans away from petty things to realise greater bliss. Meditation and monastic practices are exploited to appreciate this momentary break from reality – Age of Speculation. Believes in the intelligence of a person rather than performing rituals. Finally a person who freezes considers nature as an impasive force and independent entity- Age of Devotion.

12. According to Pattanaik what are the three phases of Hinduism?

Age of Rituals (Karma Kanda), Age of Speculation (Gyan Kanda) and Age of Devotion (Upasana Kanda) are the three phases of



Hinduism. The Age of Rituals is located roughly between 1800-800 B.C.E, during the Vedic Age which witnessed the rise of brahminical supremacy and emphasis was laid on rituals/yagnas that aimed to combat the powers of cosmos. The period between 800 B.C.E –A.D. 800 is considered as the Age of Speculation, in which there was a tendency to challenge the hegemonical narrative of brahmanas. The agitation against Vedic ritualism gave rise to a penchant among people for yogic and tantric approaches. They yearned to flee to a superior transcendental realm rather than being caught in a state of delusion. The Age of Devotion can be traced from A.D.800 onwards. This period witnessed the decline of Buddhism and the arrival of Muslim and Christian invader into the country. In this phase there was a propensity to accommodate folk histories, alternate traditions, tantric and yogic practices into the Vedic Narratives. Prayers, puja and bali replaced rituals and tapas. The attitude of the believer was to submit unconditionally to the will of the superior power.

### 13. Define Mythosphere

A mythosphere is heavily influenced through narrative, symbols and rituals. A mythosphere is a 'mythical world' inhabited by people who 'enact the perceived realities of people' and with whom individuals can commune through symbols and rituals. Each culture /religion has its own mythosphere and differs from each other.

### 14. How does Pattanaik explicate that a human can attain the status of god and vice versa by being righteous and upholding dharma?

The transition from human to god and vice versa is explicated through the stories of "Harishchandra" and "The Past Life of Yashoda and Nanda". Taken from The Bhagavata Purana, "Harishchandra" narrates the tale of the virtuous king who had to undergo various trials when he was put to test by the sage Vishwamitra. Hoodwinked by the rishi to give up his kingdom, he was forced to leave the palace with his wife Taramati and Rohita, his young son. As Harishchandra was leaving, Vishwamitra demanded that the King was obliged to give him thousand gold coins as a ritual gift for accepting the rights of the kingdom. The impecunious king had to sell his wife, son and himself at the slave market and offered the money to Vishwamitra. As a result of which he had to work as 'a chandala' the keeper of cemetery and his wife become a maid. Vishwamitra tormented

the altruistic Harishchandra by killing Rohita by snakebite. The distraught Harishchandra was traumatized, but a stickler of rules he was keen on doing his duty. Being in charge of the crematorium, he refused to cremate his son without getting paid. Despite Taramani explaining their impoverished condition, Harishchandra firm on his insisted her to give her clothes in exchange for the gate fee. As Taramani began disrobing, the gods flabbergasted by Harishchandra's adherence to dharma and righteousness descended and proclaimed he was equal to gods. The story "The Past Life of Yashoda and Nanda" from Padma Purana narrates the story of Kashyapa and his wife Aditi were reduced to mortal from their immortal status. Kashyapa and Aditi did not have a cow for the ritual and therefore decided to steal one that belonged to rishi Vasistha. They were cursed for this act of theirs, they were reborn as Nanda and Yashoda members of the cowherd. They raised Krishna as their own son, without the knowledge that Krishna was actually the son of Vasudeva and Devaki who had been swapped with their girl child at the time of birth to escape the wrath of Kansa. They had to let go of Krishna once they knew the truth. This separation from their son was similar to the pain that Vasistha suffered when he his cow was stolen.

15. Write a brief note on Kshetra-pala and Grama-devi.

In the Indian context, every village has a dynamic protector/custodian known a kshetra-pala or vira. This guardian is epitomised as being, monstrous with 'large bloodshot eyes, fangs and an appetite for blood and entrails' (81). The village is embodied as the Grama-devi, the goddess who fosters the village dwellers. Every other year the goddess is appeased with gory sacrifices failing she afflicts them with epidemics and famine. The Kshetra pala is likened to Shiva/Vishnu while the Grama-devi is worshipped as the incarnate of Kali/Lakshmi. While the former protects the latter nurtures.

16. What is the significance of a temple in Hinduism?

Pattanaik considers the Hindu temple as 'an architectural expression of Hindu metaphysics' (85). A temple is different from the prayer hall of the Christians or Muslims where only the faithful convene to offer invocations. The patron god is usually sculpted out of a rock/stone/metal. The piece of rock becomes deified through

rituals and consecrations. The devotees gather in hordes to get a glimpse of the god. Due to constant exposure the sanctity of the deity gradually fades away and it is restored by performing rituals. Admission into the inner *santum sanctorum* / *garbha griha* of the temple is restricted. The dark and cramped space is accessible only to the 'ritually cleansed' priests. High walls were erected around the temple to safeguard it from looters and to 'retain the sacred power'. In the southern India, the gates are adorned with myths and legends to ward off evil spirits. The temple also becomes a signifier of the nation's wealth. Smaller shrines are constructed around the presiding deity. They also have 'communal kitchens, marriage halls, dance halls and houses for priests' within the temple premises. The temple tower is 'pyramidal' in the South, whereas in the north it is 'curvilinear' and a sacred pot is placed on it. The devotees circumbulate the shrine to seek the deity's blessings. Rituals are performed and visitors are allowed only during 'special' hours.

17. How do ancient mythospheres conceive the idea of devils and demons?

According to ancient mythosphere one cannot clearly demarcate a character as being harmful or helpful to humankind. In the pre-Christian mythologies the idea of God as omniscient is challenged by the presence of various beings. In the Norse mythosphere one comes across 'Olympians, Titans, giants, styrs, fauns, nymphs, dryads and Neries'. The Celtic mythosphere is rife with 'fairies, gnomes, pixies, gremlins, leprechauns and goblins' is akin to the Hindu mythosphere which abounds with the presence of 'asuras, gandharvas, apsaras' etc. In the Hindu context yakshas are described as 'spirits who love riddles and guard treasures' (86), the king of yakshas is Kubera, who has distinctive attributes, he can either be helpful or harmful. Every incident in life is a consequence of the intervention of these creatures. Pattanaik tracing the mythospheres of Nordic, Irish and Greeks declares that the conceptualisation of good and evil never existed. The idea of evil can be tracked only from the inception of the Judaist, Christian, Islamic and Zoroastrian accounts. They attribute the idea of 'evil' to things which cannot be associated with the 'divine'. The Hindus considered that all events are regulated by a person's good deeds- *punya* or bad deeds- *paap*, the notion of evil becomes redundant in the Indian context.

18. How does Pattanaik rationalise boons and curses in the Hindu narratives?

Pattanaik uses the tales “Why Rama Went into Exile” (Ramayana), “The Curse of Gandhari” (Mahabharata) and “The Offering of Bel Leaves” (Linga Purana) to demonstrate the outcomes of boons and curses. “Why Rama Went into Exile” narrates in detail how Kaikeyi exploited Dasharatha’s boons. When Kaikeyi saved Dasharatha’s life in the battlefield he promised to grant her three wishes. She wanted Dasharatha to fulfil her wish on the eve of Rama’s coronation. Her desire was that her son Bharata should rule the kingdom while Rama must give up the throne and live in exile for fourteen years. Dasharatha had no choice but to fulfil her wish and eventually die. This state of Dasharatha was the result of his past action. On a hunting trip he had by mistake shot Shravana- a young boy. This dutiful son was the sole custodian of his blind parents. Distraught by Dasharatha’s action the couple cursed that the king would suffer the pangs of being separated from his son and die.

“The Curse of Gandhari” recounts how Krishna made Pandavas emerge victorious while their cousins Kauravas were killed. Gandhari, the mother of Kauravas unable to bear the death of her children cursed Krishna that he too would witness the demise of his own children and tribe. She further forewarned him that his death will be insignificant.

Linga Purana narrates the story of a hunter who while finding asylum on a tree unknowingly shook it. The tree happened to be Bel Tree and the leaves fell down on the linga that was below the tree. This act of the hunter freed him from the cycles of rebirth.

19. How are the villains classified in the Hindu mythology?

- (i) Asuras who fight gods
- (ii) Rakshasas who fight humans
- (iii) Pisachas who fight ancestors

The Asura kings like Prahalada, Virochana, Bali are depicted as being just and virtuous while in a few stories the devas are portrayed as treacherous and immoral.

20. How does Pattanaik relate the story of creation?

“The Birth of Three Gods” divulges how Adishakti had placed three eggs in a lotus from which appeared three worlds and three

Gods – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The goddess besotted by the three gods asked them to make love to her, when Brahma and Vishnu rejected her wish, claiming that she was their mother she burnt them down with her 'third eye'. Shiva assented to make love to Adishakti on condition that she would give him her 'third eye'. After he acquired the 'fiery third eye' he slashed down her to ashes and resuscitated Brahma and Vishnu. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva resolved to fill the world with living beings, but lacked a female counterpart. Therefore the three Gods then collected the ashes of Adishakti and divided it into three parts. They used the third eye to transform the ashes into three Goddesses Saraswati, Lakshmi and Gauri. Together the Gods and Goddesses began the creation of all being big and small.

The classical rendition of the process of creation can be located in the Vedas and the Upanishads. In "Brahma Opens His Eyes" we come across an account of a lotus blooming. Brahma is seated within the flower, on realising his solitariness he starts searching the origin of the lotus flower. It arose from the navel of Vishnu. As he grasped the presence of Vishnu, Brahma began creating living beings. This story expresses the need to be 'aware' and 'conscious'. "Brahma's Mind-Born Son" is an extension of this thought where Brahma is anxious when he opens his eyes and finds himself all alone. Therefore he creates four young men – Sanat- Kumars his mind born sons. But to his dismay they refused to multiply as they are unaware of the split – 'oneself and the rest'.

In the following story "Brahma Splits Himself" Brahma knew that his sons did not know the split. Inspired by Shiva whose left half was a woman, Brahma decided to split himself. From his left half emerged a beautiful woman. Enamoured by the beauty of the woman, desire rose among Brahma and his sons. They were sexually aroused and started proliferating. The story brings to fore the idea that the woman is the 'material reality' that has to be acknowledged by man/God the spiritual entity. In this process of Samsara, Brahma fashions "Mrityu" – goddess of death and change. The story of Mrityu appears in Mahabharata, The multiplication of Brahma's children was alarmingly high. In a means to put an end to the overflowing populace Brahma created Mrityu- the goddess of death. Mrityu insisted that since people who she killed would be reborn, she would only kill material component of a living being. Brahma's

daughter Shatarupa /Saraswati is his first woman creation. Instead of viewing her as 'a medium of realization' he gazes her as an 'object of pleasure'. Shatarupa flees from him by taking the form of a goose. This is explained in detail in "Transformations of the Daughter" in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. Brahma in the guise of gander chases her. When she becomes a cow he transforms into a bull and then when she shapeshifts into a mare he takes the form of a horse. Thus he followed her everywhere this is cited as the reason of how animals were created. Brahma incestuous behaviour is quelled by Shiva when he cuts Brahma's fifth head that manifests the amorous nature.

21. How does the story of Daksha's yagna document the tensions between Vedic Rituals vis-à-vis tantric practices?

The narrative of "The Destruction of Daksha's Yagna" registers the friction between mysterious Vedic rituals and esoteric tantric methods. King Daksha's youngest daughter Sati had married Shiva. Daksha was unhappy about his daughter marrying a mendicant, who was an outlaw. When Daksha performed a yagna, invitations were sent to everyone excepting Shiva. Sati, on learning her father's intentions marched in and sacrificed herself into the fire pit. This self-immolation of hers contaminated the ritual and brought everything to a standstill.

The news of Sati's death infuriated Shiva, he along with his horde flattened the ritual ground. Daksha was beheaded by Virabhadra and Kali was overwhelmed by the carnage. The gods had to beg Shiva for forgiveness. Shiva later restored Daksha and even an offering was made to him.

22. The position of tapasvi can be attained irrespective of a person's birth – Discuss using the stories in the text

The tapas facilitated the rishis to create powerful beings. A severe drought befell the land when Vishwamitra was meditating. Trishanku an outcast, took care of Vishwamitra's family. During the famine he kept them alive by feeding beef. When Vishwamitra returned, he agreed to return the favour by fulfilling Trishanku's wish of entering the heaven. Trishanku rose to the heaven but the gods forbade his entry since he was an outcast who ate cows. Vishwamitra wanted to uphold his promise, therefore he suspended Trishanku midair. Vishwamitra using his power fashioned an exclusive heaven for



Trishanku. Finally gods agreed that Trishanku can 'hang his head downward' and remain as a constellation in the sky.

"Kumbhakarna Asceticism" stresses that though caste is accorded by birth anyone can reach the position of tapasvi irrespective of their birth or status. Kumbhakarna the rakshsas too was too austere. He wanted to receive a boon from Brahma. The devas were petrified at this for Kumbhakarna was already quite invincible, so they pleaded with Saraswati the goddess of speech to twist his tongue. Brahma was pleased by Kumbhakarna's tapas, at the moment of asking for a boon, Kumbhakarna's tongue got warped, instead of soliciting more strength he wished for more sleep and Brahma granted him that he will sleep throughout the year. Kumbhakarna realised his mistake, and appealed to Brahma to salvage him. But a boon once given can never be retracted, it can only be amended. Accordingly Brahma modified his grant, he declared the Kumbhakarna will wake up only once in a year and on that particular day he will be invincible. If he is forcefully awakened on any other day of the year, he would die.

23. Discuss the hypermasculine hero described in the folklore"

The notion of 'hypermasculine heroes' can be spotted in Skanda Purana. Skanda was an 'ayonija' - 'not born from the womb' and detached himself from women. In "The Birth of Skanda", we are told that Shiva's semen which hadn't been shed for many epochs was so powerful that it had to be shed outside a woman's body. It was so potent that it could neither be preserved by Agni, Vayu or Ganga. The seed was so vigorous it set a marsh ablaze. From the seed sprouted a Skanda, the six-headed child who was nurtured by six nymphs namely krittikas. The child who was barely six day old was powerful enough to slay the demon Taraka.

24. How is female chastity upheld in the strategic narratives?

Narratives are influential in creating and sustaining hierarchies. They consciously fashion an ideology. Vedic Ideology instituted on the basis of varna-ashrama-dharma ascertained that those who did not abide by it as 'barbarians'. A story from Bhagavata Purana explains the fate of King Vena who disregarded the varna-ashrama-dharma. Due to the king's insolent behaviour, the sages killed him. In an effort to churn his corpse, they separated his ashes into polluting remnants and pure leftovers. The evil residue transmogrified into



an evil creature, while from the pure residue arose the perfect king Prithu. King Prithu asked earth for wealth and she took the form of a cow. King Prithu tamed her and promised to espouse dharma.

The varna was applicable only to the man and for the woman regardless of caste had to pay respect to a man – stridharma. The idea of imposition of 'female chastity' is unravelled in "Shvetaketu's Law". Shvetaketu was shocked when his father passed a statement, "All women are free to do as they wish" (175) and was keen on imposing an order that a woman must have relationship only with her husband. Whenever a story defying the notions of the patriarchy was narrated, conscious attempts are made to rationalise it. Draupadi's marriage to five men is represented as a story that ratifies 'a man's absolute obedience to his mother' (176). Draupadi's polyandry is substantiated with the story of how Shiva granting her a boon. Draupadi prayed to Shiva for a husband who is 'noble, strong, skilled, handsome and wise', but Shiva misconstrued her plea and granted her five men with each quality.

The idea of woman as the chaste wife and the need to be domesticated also recurs in Shiva Purana. Vrinda's chastity makes her husband Jalandhara invincible. In order to defeat Jalandhara Vishnu masquerades as Jalandhara and seduces Vrinda. This results in Jalandhar's death and Vrinda becoming a widow. A woman's reputation and life is at stake when her chastity is questioned. To prove her innocence and chastity, Sita had to jump into a pyre even though she was unharmed by the flames the people of Ayodhya refused to accept her as the queen. Rama did not want to offend his subjects and so deserted her. Pattanaik states that, 'strategic narratives that praise female chastity have played a major role in the imprisonment of Hindu women 'within the household, bound by marriage and maternity' (178). Strategic narratives contribute in 'social engineering' – the relationship between Dashratha and his son Rama. Rama's deific personality is revealed when he meekly obeys Dashratha. Strategic narratives also try to explain the natural phenomena/ evolution of mountains. Bhagavata Purana mentions that when Hiranyaksha hid the earth under the sea, Vishnu transformed into a boar and restored it. As Vishnu arose from the sea holding the earth passionately it led to a few folds on earth which came to be known as mountains. The story

of Dhruva -young boy's faith in God that transformed him into a polestar too is strategic narratives of Bhagavata Purana.

## 5.5 Glossary

Asura : Demons, enemies of devas

Ayonija : A person not born from the womb

Brahman : Divine being

Dharma : Social order based on the doctrine of duty instituted and maintained by Vishnu

Hanuman : Monkey God, a disciple of Rama

Hari-Hara-Sutha : Another name of Ayyappa meaning the son of Vishnu and Shiva

Indra : The King of devas

Kandarpa : God of love and lust

Kartikaya : The son of Shiva, the hypermasculine hero also known as Murugan in Tamil culture

Krishna : Human incarnation of Vishnu

Manu : Father of humankind

Paap : Actions against dharma

Rakshasa : Demon or wild spirit

Shiva : The cosmic hermit who destroys evil

## 5.6 Self Assessment Questions

1. Explain in detail the role of Mythosphere in construing myths and cultures
2. How can narratives, symbols and rituals be interpreted using mythography?
3. What does Pattanaik refer to as Strategic Charters?

## 5.7 References

Pattanaik, Devdutt. *Indian Mythology: Texts, Symbols and Rituals from the Heart of the Subcontinent*. Simon and Schuster, 2003.