

**Institute of Distance and Open Learning
Gauhati University**

**MA in English
Semester 4**

**Paper 16
Contemporary Indian Writing in English-I**



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Block 1: History of Indian English Literature

Block 2: Poetry

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Block 1:

History of Indian English Literature

Block Introduction

This block brings to you the literary history of Indian literature in English. As you read through this block you will read about many writers and their works. The numerous details may almost overwhelm you because unless you are familiar with the works the names by themselves will mean nothing concrete. The study of literary history can even be a fascinating subject if some ideas are explored.

Indian Writing in English creates its own enigma through the nomenclature. Why “Indian” writing? Is there something special about the way that Indians use the language? Such questions are difficult to answer but are enduringly fascinating. Critics have grappled with this problematic and have posed answers that need further refinement. When we consider the fact that Indians were ‘dubashis’ in the time of the East India Company, it signifies that native people were already competent enough to handle this two-way process. The category of ‘Indian Writing’ itself brings us back to the theoretical question of what constitutes a recognisable text of ‘Indian Writing in English’. In short, the unresolved questions are many and could keep any critic occupied for a length of time.

Another question that has to be confronted by anyone who studies Indian Writing in English is related to the problem of mimicry. Are Indian writers engaged in creating something resembling ‘English Literature’? Are they being merely derivative? The obvious answer is in the negative, but if this is considered in line with the notion that any national literature is a vehicle of cultural transmission, then how does the Indian writer shear the language of its cultural mooring and transform it into a tool for the utterance of another culture? Writers of significant skill and substance have fully understood this complex problem because our colonial past cannot be wished away. Nor can the raging politics behind it be wished away either. You may find it interesting to read more about this aspect of the status of Indian literature

and culture after the entry of the British into India. This history sets up as problems to be resolved all that it touches upon: culture, literature, languages, traditions, religious rites, administrative practices, and all other aspects of life in India.

It may be useful for you to keep in mind the fact that no matter how imitative English writing in India may be pronounced, it leads us to the study of a subject whose boundaries are not tied to the 'literary'. In order to fully understand the situation of the Indian writer in English it is perhaps necessary to go into psychology, history, anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, political history, and cultural history. This course which you are now engaged in studying is thus one of the most exciting ones to be with.

This block covers the more than a hundred-year long history through three units. We are confident that you will find this division convenient and informative. Our questions are meant to make you think of the many aspects of what you are learning. Make use of the cultural knowledge you are already in possession of. It will surely add to the understanding that is required to grasp the subtleties of Indian Writing in English.

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Unit 1

Beginnings

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1.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to make you aware of the complex history that lies behind the very discipline in which you are working to gain a master's degree – English literary study in India, and how it came to be. In one sense, this is not a purely 'literary' history as the impulses creating this discipline in India were explicitly 'non-literary'. Within the space of a few pages we cannot go over all the events and social currents that make up this 'history'. Our unit therefore proposes to help you to

- *read* critically Indian Writing in English
- *recover* the themes that animate this writing
- *explore* the scope of this area of literary studies.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

We have already gained, from the paragraph above, the range of ideas that are clustered together within the label 'Indian Writing in English'. We normally tend to accept without question the spread of English education in India and to think of English literary study as an extension of this phenomenon.

However, as we look more closely at the way in which English Literature was introduced in our educational institutions, it becomes clear that the subject always had a privileged position under colonialism. Indeed, for the colonial structures, English literary study was a powerful and apt tool for the consolidation of colonial authority in India. You will find it of particular interest to know that contrary to our familiar identification of 'literature' (in the English context, especially) with secular humanist movements, in the Indian context English literary study had an almost opposite role to play in keeping with missionary activity.

Some of this we have compiled below for your understanding. We should point out to you here that the study of Indian Writing in English necessarily embroils us in postcolonial theories. That is natural, given that the colonial stretch of Indian history brings up questions of power, domination, cultural inequalities, cultural conflicts, and therefore the status of Indian Writing in English in general. It is for this reason that the sequence of historical events from the end of the eighteenth century till the present is of such great importance. Below, you will find a brief glimpse of this troubled history.

Stop to Consider:

The term "Indian English literature"- From "Commonwealth" to "Indo-Anglian"

Indian English literature is generally defined as literature written originally in English by Indian authors by birth, ancestry or nationality. Indian English literature is both an Indian literature and a variation of English literature. Indians have started writing in English for communicating with one another and the outside world using English in an Indian way. The term 'Indian English' literature is also known as 'Indo-Anglian' literature or Indian writing in English. Anglo - Indian literature – the writings of the British or other Western authors regarding India cannot be a part of Indian English literature. Similarly literature in Indian languages translated into English cannot also become a part of Indian English literature unless they are not creative translations by concern authors themselves. Indian writing in English is greatly influenced by the writings in England and the Indians have had their own "Romantics", "Victorian", "Georgians" and "Modernists". However, Indian English literature has contributed to the field of world writing in English in its own way.

K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar writes in the “Introduction” to *Indian Writing in English*: the difficulties surrounding the name to be given to writing in English by authors of Indian birth, ancestry, or nationality, brings up several questions relating to race, and even politically-laden notions of what is meant by ‘Indian’. As is pointed out here, “Indian literature comprises several literatures –Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Maithili, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, not to mention Sanskrit, for people continue to write in it though the readers are few and far between – and Indian writing in English is but one of many voices in which India speaks.” He quotes from Sri Aurobindo: “It is not true in all cases that one can’t write first class things in a learned language. Both in French and English people to whom the language was not native have done remarkable work, although that is rare. What about Jawaharlal Nehru’s autobiography? Many English critics that it first-class in its own kind; of course he was educated in an English public school, but I suppose he was not born to that language. Some of Toru Dutt’s poems, Sarojini’s, Harin’s have been highly placed by good English critics, and I don’t think we need be more queasy than Englishmen themselves . . . If first-class excludes everything inferior to Shakespeare and Milton, that is another matter. I think, as time goes on, people will become more and more polyglot and these mental barriers will begin to disappear.”

1.3 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER

If we look closely at the history of English in India, we will find that it actually came here to our country before the East India Company did. The earliest instance of an Indian writing in

English is Din Muhammad, who migrated to England in 1784 and whose *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* appeared in 1794. It was not a great literary success but it was indeed subscribed to by a number of the elite in Cork, Ireland, where he lived.

The English language actually came to India twenty years before the East India Company came into existence. This is the case of a Roman Catholic, Father Thomas Stephens, who came to India to escape persecution in Elizabethan England, around 1578. There were other merchants and traders (John Newbury, Ralph Fitch, William Leedes, James Story) who came to India, too. Ralph Fitch’s account of India which appeared in Richard

Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* in 1599 is comprehensive. Both Stephens and Fitch are representative cases of the missionary and the merchant who first gave rise to what we think of as Indian literature in English.

English really came into circulation on Indian soil around 1660 when the factories of the East India Company along the Malabar and Coromandel coasts began to prosper. You should remember that in 1660, Charles II who had been restored to the throne sanctioned the East India Company with several powers as part of which it could exercise jurisdiction over all the English subjects in the factories and to make war or peace on native Indians. The interaction between the Englishmen on Indian soil and native residents was naturally regulated by practical needs such as the zone of employment in which the Company got its work done with the help of Indian assistants. This created a class of *dubashis* (or those who were bilingual, familiar with both local languages and English, or French, or Dutch, or Portuguese). This was more common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries during the time of small European trade centres. Through the fact of Indians working in European trading companies and conversely, Europeans working for Indian rulers, the linguistic transmission began to take place.

1.4 BEGINNINGS OF INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

The East India Company, which came to India for trade, gradually became the administrator of the country. Therefore, the company had to maintain offices for this purpose. As it was a costly affair to bring clerks for the office of the company from England, they decided to train some Indian people for the minor jobs of the company and established schools and colleges for this purpose. It was the Charter Act of 1813, which imposed an official responsibility upon the Company to educate Indian natives.

Gauri Viswanathan writes (in *Masks of Conquest*) that the English Parliament, fearing that a commercial company – the East India Company – should assume political importance, looked for a cause to interfere with its workings. This sought-for reason came only in the last quarter of the eighteenth century whence Parliament undertook to take “a serious and active interest in Indian political affairs.” [p.27] A visible cause for this turn of parliamentary interest was the moral depravity of those employed by the

Company. What it gave rise to was a concern to safeguard the Indian natives “against the wrongs and oppressions of British subjects resident in Bengal.” [p.27] You should remember that the East India Company, by 1757, had already established itself as the virtual ruler of Bengal. This stage of colonial consolidation of power (enmeshed as it was with a more benign concern for Indian culture), led to what has been called the “Orientalist” phase of colonial rule. “Orientalism was adopted as an official policy partly out of expediency and caution and partly out of an emergent political sense that an efficient Indian administration rested on an understanding of “Indian culture”.[p.28] However, as Viswanathan also reminds us, the real concerns behind Orientalism were far from scholarly. They, in fact, point to the infusion of “the worlds of scholarship and politics.” [p.29]

Orientalism came into conflict with a body of thought called ‘Anglicism’. This really means that there were those then who thought that the promotion of indigenous Indian languages and literatures in native education would lead to undesirable consequences. Warren Hastings was succeeded by Lord Cornwallis (1786–1793) as governor-general who thought that “the official indulgence toward Oriental forms of social organization, especially government, was directly responsible for the lax morals of the Company servants. . . . To Cornwallis, the abuse of power was the most serious of evils afflicting the East India Company, not only jeopardizing the British hold over India but, worse still, dividing the English nation on the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise.” [p.30]

Cornwallis’ successors were shrewd enough to see that support for Orientalism would help to preserve the feudal character of British colonial administration. Briefly, however, there were various compelling reasons for the promotion of native Indian culture and learning although there were also opposing reasons for carrying out such reforms as would bring Indians closer into the circle of western influences. This was related to the compulsions of British rule which was moving towards the greater consolidation of power. Partly as a result of these diverse negotiations by the British of the Indian situation, the Charter Act of 1813 opened up India to missionary activity which allowed scope for missionaries to carry out the reforms they thought were necessary in relation to native morals. What we should note is that English education was intricately linked with the British government’s policies of exerting and reinforcing its power and domination over India.

SAQ:

How would you describe the circumstances in which Indian writing came into existence? (100 words)

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The Anglicist-Orientalist controversy revealed the close involvement of Englishmen like James Harington, J.P.Larkins, W.W.Martin, John C.Sutherland, Henry Shakespear, Holt Mackenzie, Horace Wilson, Andrew Stirling, William B.Bayley, Henry Prinsep, Nathaniel Halhed, and John Tytler, with Indian political and cultural life. This was during the period from 1805 to 1820. Horace Wilson was probably the best known of the group. Wilson was secretary to the Committee of Public Instruction and in this capacity he advocated various reforms in the Indian curriculum to bring in the teaching of European science and English literature along with the Oriental languages. In this controversy the most prominent were people like Macaulay, Charles Trevelyan and Alexander Duff. The controversy itself was triggered off by the General Council of Public Instruction in Calcutta proposing to withdraw financial support to Oriental learning in favour of promoting the study of English and literature.[p.101]

According to the Charter Act of 1813, a sum of not less than one lakh rupees was to be kept aside for the improvement of native education, although there were no definite instructions in the Act regarding how the amount of one lakh should be spent. As Viswanathan continues, “The policy in the years immediately following the Charter Act was to establish institutions devoted to the teaching of Oriental languages and literature”. But this policy was not without its problems – “For as the British swiftly learned, to their dismay, it was impossible to promote Orientalism without exposing the Hindus and Muslims to the religious and moral tenets of their respective faiths—a situation that was clearly not tenable with the stated goal of “moral and intellectual improvement”. [p.37]

How does this story connect with that of English education in India? The introduction of English literature in India came as the solution to the “tension

between increasing involvement in Indian education and enforced noninterference in religion”. A clause within the Charter Act itself, mentioned the “revival and improvement of literature”. The term, “literature”, having been left vague, came to be later interpreted by Thomas Babington Macaulay (about twenty years later) as Western literature. In the wake of Macaulay’s well-known ‘Minute’ of 1835, William Bentinck, the Governor-General, adopted the English Education Act under which the teaching of English was taken out of “the Sanskrit College and the Madrassa and confined to institutions devoted to studies entirely conducted in English.” [p.41] William Bentinck, on 7 March 1835, declared that “the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India, and all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone”.

Stop to Consider:

Macaulay’s “Minute” and the Indian renaissance

(from M. K. Naik’s *A History of Indian English Literature*)

The turn of events from Macaulay’s ‘minute’ to Sir Charles Wood’s despatches its after-effects is described thus: to begin by quoting from Macaulay -

“The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages in which by universal confession there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which by universal confession, whenever they differ from those of Europe, differ for the worse, and whether, when we can patronize sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance at public expense medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns 30,000 years long and geography made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter. . . .

. . . The logical outcome of Wood’s Despatch was the establishment of the three first Indian universities –those of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras—in 1857. These universities soon became the nurseries of the resurgent Indian genius, which within hardly a generation thereafter ushered in a renaissance in the political, social, cultural and literary spheres of Indian life.” [Naik, p.13]

K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar narrates that from 1835 onwards came a period of 'Anglicization' which also found eager support among Indians as it held out the apparent promise of "new life, opened new vistas of knowledge". In 1854, Sir Charles Wood's (a member of the Select Committee of the British Parliament in 1852-53) despatch to Lord Dalhousie (then Governor-general) took note of the problems arising out of this new situation. Today, Sir Charles Wood is remembered for the spread of English education in India, but his despatch was guided by colonial concerns and acknowledged the need to create a class of people who would "emulate us in the development of the vast resources of their country, . . .secure to us a large and more certain supply of many articles necessary for our manufactures and extensively consumed by all classes of our population, as well as an almost inexhaustible demand for the product of British labour." [Viswanathan, p.146]

During the twenty years between 1835 and 1855 – the period of Macaulay's 'Minute', the English Education Act of Bentinck and Wood's Dispensations – the number of English-speaking persons increased which contributed to the emergence of Indian English literature. Iyengar gives interesting details: "It is said that even in 1834-5, 32,000 English books sold in India as against 13,000 in Hindi, Hindustani and Bengali, and 1,500 in Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. The vogue for English books increased, and the demand came even more from the Indian than the Englishman in India. . ."

Gauri Viswanathan sums up the significance of these policy moves in relation to education in India: [p.44] "The English Education Act of 1835, proposed by Governor-General William Bentinck on Macaulay's advice, made English the medium of instruction in Indian education. But . . . Bentinck's resolution was not as revolutionary in the introduction of a new language (the English language was already being taught in India even before 1835) as in endorsing a new function and purpose for English instruction in the dissemination of moral and religious values. In withdrawing funds from support of Oriental studies in favor of English, the act dramatically reversed England's

commitment to a non-partisan, eclectic policy. Administrators preceding Bentinck, including Minto, Mountstuart Elphinstone, Charles Metcalf, Thomas Munro, and John Malcom, had instinctively advocated a classical approach to the study of language and literature as an end in itself, resisting both Utilitarian and missionary pressures to enlist literary as a medium of modern knowledge and as a source of religious instruction, respectively. With the Charter Act, the conflict between commitments to active intervention and neutrality pressed into existence a new discipline – English literature.”

Christianity first dug its deepest roots in South India. Missionary centres of education sprang up alongside Hindu or Native Schools and colleges. (KRSI41) Rabindranath Tagore’s father, Maharshi Debendranath, implored Hindu parents to send their children to native schools and not the missionary schools. But western education carried the mass of popular support: “It was the ‘open sesame’ to knowledge, freedom, power; it cut the old bonds of convention and tradition; it let in light into the old dark rooms of an obscurantist faith; and it made a new world and a new life possible for its beneficiaries.” Surendranath Banerjea’s words explain this cultural transformation:

“Our fathers, the first fruits of English education, were violently pro-British. They could see no flaw in the civilization or culture of the West. They were charmed by its novelty and its strangeness. The enfranchisement of the individual, the substitution of the right of private judgment in the place of traditional authority, the exaltation of duty over custom, all came with the force and suddenness of a revelation to an Oriental people who knew no more binding obligation than the mandate of immemorial usage and venerable tradition.”

Such a description catches the impulses behind the social acceptance of new ways of conducting the business of life. The prejudices derived through Hindu traditions, the old superstitions, all became targets of cultural change. This was the core of the process subsequently understood as ‘Westernization’.

Stop to Consider:

Literary ferment in India

K.R.S. Iyengar calls the years from 1835 to 1855 the “phoenix-hour that bred Indo-Anglian literature”. The imposition of English-centred education in India led to “the literary renaissance in India.” “The study of English literature stimulated literary creation in Bengali, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Gujarati, and the other languages, and some of the greatest writers of the last 100 years have been men and women educated in English, even if they didn’t seek creative expression through English; and . . . some have been unrepentant bilingualists, writing in two languages, English and their mother tongue, with equal facility, and if necessary translating their English into their mother tongue or their Bengali or Marathi or Tamil into English. The filiations between the modern Indian literatures (including Indo-Anglian literature) and English literature have been close, and the links have been renewed”.

The eminent critic, Meenakshi Mukherjee, gives some important insights into this phenomenon in her book, *The Perishable Empire*, as regards the writing of novels in English after 1835. To what extent English had already made inroads into the thoughts of Indian writers can only be gauged by taking into account how such individuals were using the colonial language for diverse purposes. You will find it interesting to read her chapter, “Nation, Novel, Language” in the book named above.

1.5 IMPORTANT WRITERS & MAJOR TRENDS

Raja Rammohan Roy is generally considered to be “the morning star of the Indian renaissance”. Indian writing in English in India is a manifestation of the new creative urge in India which is referred to as the literary ‘Renaissance’ in India. In terms of imparting western education and bringing a literary Renaissance to India, Raja Rammohan Roy played a very significant role. His ‘Letter on English Education’ (of 11 December 1823) is almost equated with being a manifesto of the Indian Renaissance. Well educated, and proficient in many languages, he wrote extensively in Bengali, Persian, Hindi, Sanskrit and English. He was the first Indian master of English prose who wrote and spoke forceful English long before Macaulay’s minute was published. Roy wrote almost thirty essays in English on various subjects. “A Defense of Hindu Theism” (1817) is regarded as the first significant piece of writing in English by an Indian. For his iconoclastic views, he suffered expulsion from his parental home at the age of sixteen, although he was

restored to his father's favour in 1794, and took to service with the East India Company in 1804. Most of his writings were on religious, social, historical and political subjects. In the field of journalism, he edited periodicals in English, Bengali and the Persian languages. His writings included articles on religion (Hinduism and Christianity) as well as politics. His contribution as a social reformer is also remarkable. He was concerned with the sad plight of women in orthodox Hindu society and raised his voice of protest against it and various other superstitious beliefs and customs existing in Indian society.

Rammohun Roy's writings

You can read about Rammohun Roy's writings in any standard literary history. However, some of these are especially notable: his political writing as contained in the two "Petitions Against the Press Regulations" (1823) and the 'Exposition of the Practical Operation of the Judicial and Revenue Systems of India' (1832). Such examples show the extent to which Roy was prepared to oppose British policies. About thirty-two essays by him are on various subjects. His compilation "Precepts of Jesus" (1820-21) is remarkable for his knowledge of the scriptures in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

He is recognised as probably the first Indian master of English prose. He created a valuable impression of himself on leaders of English opinion in his final sojourn in England in 1831-33. Significantly, he started the practice of Indian leaders writing their autobiographies with his own brief, commissioned sketch which was published in the *Athenaeum* and the *Literary Gazette*.

His social reform

K.R.S.Iyengar remarks that "Rammohan, although he could be named as the first of the Indian masters of English prose, was great in so many fields that he belongs to Indian history more than to mere Indo-Anglian literary history." His reform activities began around the time he left the service of the Company and returned to Calcutta. In the period 1823-33, Rammohan Roy undertook reforms within a religious direction which ultimately led to the setting up of the Brahma Samaj in 1828. This Samaj is important in the history of Indian culture in the 19th century.

You should find out about the social reforms carried out by reformers like Keshub Chunder Sen (1838 – 1884) and Dayanand Saraswati (1824 – 1883) who founded the Arya Samaj, Kashinath Trimbak Telang (1850 – 1893) and Mahadev Givnd Ranade (1842 – 1901). K. R. S. Iyengar points to the obvious differences between such leaders and the 'Derozio men' in terms of their final goals. Other figures include Dadabhai Naoroji (1825 – 1917), and Phirozeshah Mehta (1845 – 1915).

Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) known as ‘the Grand Old Man of India’ also contributed to the field of Indian English prose through his numerous speeches on various matters which have been collected in ‘Essay, Speeches, Addresses and Writings’ (1887) and Speeches and Writings (1961). Known as ‘Rishi Ranade’ Mahadev Govinda Ranade (1842-1901) was a patriot, a social and religious reformer and an influential thinker of the 19th -century Indian intellectual scenario. *Religious and Social Reforms* (1902), *Miscellaneous Writings* (1915) and *The Wisdom of Modern Rishi* (1942) are three collection of his speeches and writings which were published posthumously.

As Iyengar points out, despite the many reformist organisations which came into existence at this time (the Brahmo Samaj, Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant’s Theosophical Society, the Arya Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj) nothing could turn back the tide of the challenge of the ‘West’ and it is in this context that we have to place the significance of figures like Ramakrishna. The Ramakrishna Mission was established by Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna’s chief disciple, a movement that undertook spiritual and humanitarian enterprises.

Henry Derozio was important in expressing a viewpoint which we can, today, identify as the moment of the cultural turmoil caused by the increasing ‘westernisation’ that took place with the prolonged presence of the British in India. He was fired by the revolutionary principles of Romantic poetry and with his influence on his friends – the ‘Derozio men’ – gave voice to feelings of iconoclasm brought about through the cultural encounter with western values. Into this mental space stepped the missionaries who were thus enabled to carry on their mission of proselytisation. The new converts to Christianity thus became deployed western values in challenging older forms of Hindu orthodoxy. “The Babu became anglicized overnight in name, dress, manners, speech; in Professor Radhakrishnan’s words, the Babu’s voice now became an echo, his life a quotation, his soul a brain, and his free spirit a slave to things”. . . The new education took long and rapid strides in Western and South India, and Christianity made deep inroads into the former preserves of Hinduism...”

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss the significance of Macaulay's "Minute" in terms of (i) its objectives, and (ii) its impact on Indian education.
2. Discuss the course taken in Indian English writing in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century.
3. Write short notes on:
 - (i) Raja Rammohan Roy, writer and reformer
 - (ii) Nativism
 - (iii) 'Self' and 'Nation' in English writing in India
4. Give a brief sketch of the major features of English education in India from the nineteenth- to the twentieth-century.

The history of Indian English poetry in the early period started with Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) who was the first Indian poet to write notable verse in English. He was a teacher of English literature in Hindu college. A poet as well as a teacher of poetry, Derozio had deep love for the world of Nature. In his short poetic career he published two volumes of poetry, *Poems* (1827) and the *Fakeer of Jangheera: a metrical tale and other poems* (1828). As a poet, he was influenced by the English Romantics like Byron, and Scott besides others, and his shorter poems bear witness to this influence. The satirical poems and long narrative poems also clearly indicate his special affinity with Byron. Another noteworthy feature of Derozio's poetry is its burning nationalistic zeal which gets reflected in poems like "To India - My Native hand", and "The Harp of India". He is also a pioneer in the use of Indian myth and legend, imagery and diction in poetry.

Three years after Derozio signalled the birth of Indian English poetry, Kashiprasad Ghosh, who was a poet of pure Indian blood, published a volume of verse entitled *The Shair or Minstrel and other poems* (1830). He was one of the first Indians to publish a regular volume of English verse. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the epoch-making writer in Bengali also wrote verse in English like Derozio. M.M.Dutt was also influenced by the English Romantics. His long narrative poem *The Captive Ladie* (1849) reveals

the influence of the English Romantics, especially Byron. *Vision of the Past* (1849) is another long poem in English by him dealing with the Christian theme of temptation, fall and redemption of Man.

However, it was the writer Toru Dutt (1856-77) with whom Indian English poetry really developed from imitation to authenticity. The third and youngest child of Govin Chunder Dutt, Toru Lata, born a Hindu, was baptized along with the other members of the family in 1862. She was educated in France and England which enabled her to translate French lyrics - one hundred and sixty-five in all, by about a hundred different French poets - into English. The translated poems were published under the title *A Sheaf Gleaned in the French Fields* (1876) which was the first collection of her poems. Her second collection of poems, *Ancient Ballads & Legends of Hindustan* (1882) was published posthumously. The poems in this collection show her rootedness in the soil of Hindu thought and tradition as well as her attempt to interpret the spirit of the East to the West. The ballads of this collection are replete with Indian myths and legends and show her understanding of the spirit underlying them like Derozio. She was also a Romantic at heart and (like many Romantic poets) she died of tuberculosis when she was 21 years. But she was not a conscious imitator of the English romantics like Derozio and her other predecessors. Her poetry bears the witness of her basic originality and she never attempted to anglicize her 'Oriental' themes. She is an objective poet who avoids conscious comments. She describes events, scenes and persons clearly without over-elaboration. She is a narrative poet of rare charm. 'Savitri', one of the narrative poems by Toru Dutt, reveals her skill in wonderful narration. Her poetry also reveals a keen sensitiveness to nature, specially to colour and her powerful observation of the world of nature, specially the trees and flowers. The elements of story-telling, romantic longing for the past are also noticeable in her poetry.

English Romanticism and Indian poetry

It may be fruitful to consider the influence of English Romanticism on Indian poets. M.K.Naik comments that "An inevitable product of the contemporary Indian situation, it was not a false romantic dawn that coloured the Indian English literary horizon during early and mid-nineteenth century. During the next phase (1857 – 1920) the dawn grew into the high noon of Indian English romanticism,

producing some of its finest works like the lyrics of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu and masterpieces like “Gitanjali” and “Savitri”, though as in every age, there was no dearth of derivative verse trying desperately to appear like the authentic article.” Naik goes on to consider the works of Govin Chunder (Toru’s father), Ram Sharma (Nobo Kissen Ghose 1837-1918), B.M.Malabari, R.C.Dutt, Manmohan Ghose (elder brother of Sri Aurobindo) and speculates on their failure. He observes, however, “the best work of the major Indian English romantic poets shines by its strong authenticity. It was an inevitable product of the post-Revolt age, when the awakening ushered in by Rammohun Roy in the earlier phase had become a vigorous revival of the Indian spirit. The rise of the new Indian intelligentsia, the spread of movements of religious and social reform and the commencement of organized political activity with the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 led to a re-discovery of the Indian identity. It was a time of hope and expectation, of the birth of a national consciousness, of a new-found strength to accept the challenge of the present and overcome it, and of a feeling that one stood on the threshold of tremendous possibilities. The spirit of an age like this finds its natural expression in a predominantly romantic art . . . It was not a product of the mere aping of the available British masters who happened to be romantics; it was at its best the voice of the contemporary Indian Time-spirit. True, it did not always ‘speak out, loud and bold’, but when it did so, it was an utterance authentically Indo-English.” [M.K.Naik, *Dimensions of Indian English Literature*]

Toru Dutt

Toru Dutt is described by her father in a sonnet: “Puny and elf-like, with dishevelled tresses/Self-willed and shy”. Many aspects of her personal history (the family transfer to France and then to England, for instance) and her private, intimate personality provide interesting reading. A French novel she wrote – *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers* - was published posthumously by her father, Govin Chunder, in 1879. The reception it was given in Paris testifies to the rare talent that Toru Dutt had been endowed with. A sonnet with which she ended the volume, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, begins with the lines –

“The flowers look loveliest in their native soil
 And their kindred branches; plucked, they fade
 And lose the colours Nature on them laid . . .”

Ramesh Chunder Dutt, (1848-1909) a cousin of Toru Dutt’s, was an Indian civil service official who took voluntary retirement in order to devote himself to scholarly and creative writing. He translated the two great Indian epics,

the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* into English along with selections from the *Rig Veda*, the *Upanishads* and other important texts. His *Ways Of Ancient India* (1894) is a collection of his verse translations from Sanskrit and Prakrit classics into English.

SAQ:

(1) Why, do you think, did Indian writers find it almost natural to turn to English Romantic poetry? Do you think the assessment made by M.K.Naik is apt? (60 + 30 words)

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(2) How would you judge the significance of translations into English of texts in Indian languages? (70 words)

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Manmohan Ghosh (1869-1924) was the elder brother of Aurobindo Ghosh. He was taken to England by his parents, along with his other brothers, where he had his early education at Manchester and London. English became his first language; it became his mother tongue. But he had to return to India, despite his unwillingness to do so. Returning to India, he felt alien in his surroundings. Unlike Toru Dutt and Sir Aurobindo Ghosh, Manmohan found no inspiration in Indian life and culture. Therefore, he continued the tradition of nineteenth- century English poetry in his work. His poetry includes themes and images which are Western and universal. His sense of exile, loneliness, love for solitude and intense sorrow caused by his wife's death deepens the meditative mood of his poetry. In 1890, came *Primavera* which is a collection of poems by Manmohan, Stephen Phillips, Arthus Cripps and Binyon. *Love Songs and Elegies* is a collection of poems by Manmohan which was published during his own life-time (1898). His short

lyrical poems were published posthumously in 1926 under the title *Songs of life and death*. Manmohan had a strong inclination towards Greek literature, Greek art and Greek mythology as well as an intense passion for the world of nature and beauty. However, hovering between two worlds – the one of England, and the other of India – he could not fulfill the early promise of *Primavera*.

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950), a younger brother of Manmohan Ghosh, is a unique figure in the history of Indian English poetry. He had a multitalented personality combining poet, a revolutionary, a thinker, a writer, a playwright, and a sage. Like his brother Manmohan, he was also educated in England. In 1893, Aurobindo returned to India, Aurobindo discovered his roots in Indian culture and thought which inspired his poetry. During his long poetic career, spreading from 1880 to 1900, Aurobindo tried his hand at different kinds of verse such as lyric, narrative, philosophical and epic. The influence of Milton, Keats, Shakespeare and Tennyson is noticeable in his poetical works. His *Songs to Myrtilla* appeared in 1895 which was followed next year by his narrative poem *Urvasie*. His early short poems are mostly minor verse celebrating familiar poetic themes of love, sorrow, and death in a typically romantic style. But his later poetry is mystical and meditative expressing his originality. Sri Aurobindo's later poetry includes *Six Poems* (1984), *Poems* (1941), *Last Poems* (1952). *Savitri: A Legend and a symbol* is a major epic poem by him dealing with the well-known legend of Prince Satyavan and Savitri, his devoted wife who rescued Satyavan from death. The poem remains a landmark in the history of Indian English poetry. Both Manmohan Ghosh and Sri Aurobindo Ghosh started writing poetry in the nineteenth century and continued it to the early twentieth century.

The beginning of Indian English fiction is attributed to the publication of *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) in English by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who became the first Indian novelist in English. It was followed by Raj Lakshmi Devi's *The Hindu Wife* in 1876, and Toru Dutt's *Bianca* in 1878, which were also written in English. Romesh Chunder Dutt, whose verse has already been considered, translated two of his own Bengali novels into English namely "The Slave Girl of Agra" and "The Lake of Palms". Although the real beginning of Indian English fiction took place in the 19th century, its real development was seen in the early twentieth when the Indian English novel

was deeply influenced by the Gandhian movement of Indian English fiction will be discussed in the second unit.

Check Your Progress:

1. Comment on the 'Romantic' features of Derozio's poetry.
2. Discuss Toru Dutt as a narrative poet writing across Indian and European cultures.
3. Elaborate on the 'Indian' themes in Manmohan Ghose's poetry.
4. Discuss the 'mysticism' attributed to the poetry of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh.

1.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have come to know how to react to the history of Indian writing in English. Set in the period of British Colonialism and 'Orientalism', the history of Indian English literature provides scope for a meticulous understanding of the reasons behind the development of what we call the Indian Writing in general. Issues implicitly discussed in this unit include the ideas like-the British possession of India, the spread of the English language, the colonial education policies and the role of English literature, the responses of the nationalist social reformers and its impact on Indian English literature in its early phase. However, for a better understanding of the beginnings of Indian Writing in English, please refer to the books enlisted in section 3.9 of Unit 3 of this block.

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Unit 2

Early Twentieth Century

Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Major Thoughts: Nation, Language, Aesthetics
- 2.4 The Trends in Prose
- 2.5 The Trends in Poetry
- 2.6 Other Major Categories of Indian Writing in English
 - 2.6.1 Indian English Fiction
 - 2.6.2 Indian English Drama
 - 2.6.3 Short Story
- 2.7 Summing Up

2.1 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to enable you to get an overall picture of the background of Indian Writing in English. By the end of this unit you should be able to

- *sketch* the outlines of the development of Indian Writing in English
- *identify* the issues that have provided the themes of this canon
- *trace connections* between the writing itself and the larger history
- *describe or narrate* the body of writing called Indian English Literature

2.2 INTRODUCTION

M.K.Naik [p.25] “The first period of Indian English literature may be said to end in the 1850s, a few years before the Indian Revolt of 1857 – that great watershed in the relationship between India and Britain. During this period British rule in India was generally accepted by most Indians as a

great boon divinely delivered. The holocaust of the Revolt ushered in different ideas. Winds of change soon began to blow over the land, affecting accepted attitudes. It was ultimately as a combined result of these changes that Indian English literature slowly struggled during the next two generations from psittacism to authentic artistic utterance.”

The paragraph given in full here is from M.K.Naik’s literary history. We have quoted it in full so that you can appreciate the brevity with which Naik sums up the salient features of this history. There was the great Revolt (now also referred to as the First War of Indian Independence); Indian attitudes towards British presence; the entanglement of aesthetic sensibility with political circumstances. We can take various positions on this stretch of time within which Indian English literature took its shape – either politically, or anthropologically, or as literary historians, to name only a few. As students, we can find much of great interest here because it relates so closely to our own lives at this point of time. But we should remember that “Literatures and literary cultures are located in history most often at the intersection of multiple, crisscrossing histories, but the contextual complexity of Indian writing in English may be peculiar to it and other literatures of its kind. The source of the complexity lies in the double relation of literature to language and of language to its users . . . The writing of literature in language and of literary history in linguistic history becomes more elaborate, however, when the language in which a particular population composes, circulates, and consumes a literature is historically alien to it.” [V.Dharwadker]

SAQ:

What are the ways in which we can distinguish the writing of the first phase of Indian Writing in English from the second phase? (80 words)

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You would surely find it interesting to read the account of the changes and the debates in the Indian education system given by G. Viswanathan. Several questions come to mind as we read her account: why was the introduction of English literature so important to the colonial enterprise? What does it show of our acceptance of this discipline as a part of our own intellectual training? Could it have been otherwise? Most of all, can literary activity ever be differentiated from political agendas? You will note that English literary studies were introduced in India ahead of their inclusion in educational curricula in England. Schools in Britain began to teach English literature only in 1871 whereas in India the demand for the adoption of English literary study comes as early as 1816, in the setting up of the Hindu College.

Some of the thinking that lay behind English literary study in colonial India can be grasped by looking at the “Observations on the State of Society Among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain” written by an official of the East India Company in 1792, Charles Grant. Grant realised the importance of morality or cultural superiority in the reinforcing of British hold over Indian subjects. It was later felt by succeeding British officials that moral education of Indians was as important as material control. It began thus to be seen by such administrators that English literary study was a useful tool of carrying forward of religious ideals through this educational means. This happened most clearly in the case of [GV86] the committee comprising Alexander Duff (missionary), Charles Trevelyan (administrator), and W. H. Pearce who undertook to select and prescribe particular literary texts for Indian libraries and schools. What happened was almost “fortuitous” because the colonial administration faced difficulties in keeping apart the religious and the secular aspects of the British presence in the country. It is revealing to note that English literary texts (Shakespeare, Addison, Bacon, Locke, for example) were found to be infused with religious elements. Thus what had been proposed by Charles Grant (to undertake the moral education of Indians) became possible through the adoption of the study of English literary texts. In this manner English literary study was definitely instrumental in the teaching of the tenets of Christianity in India.

English literary study in India also had other uses for the colonial administration: the training of administrators. With this aim in sight, Lord Hardinge, governor-general from 1844 – 1848, declared that Indians who distinguished themselves in European literature would be preferred for public office.

The end of the great Revolt of 1857 and the declaration of peace on 8th July, 1858, brought an end to the activities of the East India Company in India. During the period from 1857 to 1947, the Indian spirit underwent a radical transformation from a sense of inferiority and frustration to a newly aroused self-confidence and self-awareness. It was the period when India rediscovered her identity as well as learnt from the West to Indian English literature also. This period witnessed a remarkable development. We have already discussed a little the important writers and major trends of Indian English literature in the first unit starting from the very beginning to the end of the 19th century. In this unit, we will cover the early 20th century of Indian English literature which includes the period from 1900 to 1947. But at the same time it is also notable there were some writers who started writing in the 19th century and continued it to the early 20th century.

2.3 MAJOR THOUGHTS: NATION, LANGUAGE, AESTHETICS

The East India Company lost its hold over the Indian subcontinent with the proclamation of peace on 8 July 1858 at the end of the Great Revolt. On 1 January 1874, the Company was formally dissolved. There were now radical changes in relations between Indians and the British. Among the great changes that were visible now came the spread of ideas from a generation which had received its higher education. A common language now spread among the people – English – even as, interestingly, the vast network of the Indian railways also began to expand over the subcontinent. The culture of print had by now grown in the bigger cities. A period of religious, social, and political reform now began similar to 1828 when Raja Rammohun Roy had first established the Brahmo Samaj. After his death, this movement was further propagated by Keshub Chunder Sen while similar organisations like the Prarthana Samaj were set up by M.G.Ranade and R.G.Bhandarkar in 1867 in Bombay. Swami Dayanand Saraswati set up the Arya Samaj in 1875 in the cultural turn towards an earlier, purer form of Hinduism. Another kind of support to this wave of revivalism came from the Theosophical Society founded in New York by Madame H.P.Blavatsky, Col. H.S.Olcott, W.O.Judge besides others. This movement moved its base to India in 1878 but it was an eclectic creed combining the teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, ancient Egyptian thought, early Christianity, the teachings of Plato and Pythagoras.

Swami Vivekanand, following the teachings of his leader, Swami Ramakrishna, led the movement that brought back life to ancient Hindu thought. This movement has come to be better known as the Ramakrishna Mission. Among the Muslims the climate of resurgence led to the establishment of the Anglo-Arabic College at Aligarh in 1875 by Syed Ahmed Khan. This later became the Aligarh Muslim University. Even earlier, Abdul Latif had founded in 1863 the Mohammedan Literary and Scientific Society of Calcutta. The National Mohammedan Association had been started in 1878 by Ameer Ali.

At the political level change came in the form of the founding of the British India Association in 1839, the founding of the Bengal British India Society in 1843, and the British Indian Association of Calcutta in 1851. In 1876, Surendranath Banerjea founded the Indian Association “which was intended to be the centre of an All-India movement based on the ‘conception of a united India, derived from the inspiration of Mazzini’” The Indian National Congress, following upon various protests against the Arms Act, the Vernacular Press Act, the Ilbert Bill and for the lowering of the age limit for entry into the civil services, came into existence in 1885 with the support of liberal Englishmen like A.O.Hume, Sir William Wedderburn and Sir David Yule. Political events of that time both in India (as the sense of resentment caused by the partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon) and elsewhere in the world (the fall of Russia to Japan in 1905, revolutionary movements in China and Turkey, the Persian liberal movement) helped to reinforce the strength of the Congress. With World War I came the increasing realization that British imperialism can be validly challenged, a challenge probably made possible with the force of American democracy, according to Percival Spear. As M.K.Naik observes, the turn towards more positive attitudes in this period made possible a more confident mode of writing.

What was the effect of this period on the way that the writers wrote?

Stop to Consider:

The ‘authentic’ Indian voice, according to M.K.Naik, comes into its own around this time. We do not see it in M.M.Dutt’s *Visions of the Past* of the mid-century. In Ram Sharma (the *nom de plume* of Nobo Kissen Ghose), it appears in a brief glimmer. But it is with Toru Dutt, according to Naik, that the authentic Indian

voice makes its first utterances. Manmohan Ghose (1869-1924) underwent tragic events in his life but it was English which became his first language. He made friends with “poets of the Decadent school” and his poems appeared in *Primavera* edited by Laurence Binyon. His poetry thus shows influences of the English poetry of the 1890s. The notable fact about Manmohan Ghose’s work is that his mind is split over the experiences of the two worlds of India and England with no settled sense of allegiance.

Manmohan Ghose’s younger brother, Aurobindo Ghose (Sri Aurobindo), appears as the next prominent voice of Indian poetry in English. His poetic career spanned sixty productive years with lyrical verse, epic, narrative and philosophical poems. His great epic poem, *Savitri*, remains a remarkable work.

Sri Aurobindo is to be compared with Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore’s literary bilingualism is remarkable. His reminiscences of the 1880s in Calcutta (in *Jibansmriti*, 1912) in relation to the poetic scene, is that:

“At that time English literature provided us with more intoxication than nourishment. Our literary gods were Shakespeare, Milton and Byron. What moved us most in their work was the predominance of passion, something that remained concealed in British social behaviour, but surfaced with intensity in literature. Excess of emotion culminating in a passionate explosion: this seemed the characteristic feature of this literature. At least what we learnt to think of as the quintessence of English literature was this unbridled passion

Our society, all our petty spheres of work are hedged in by such dull enclosures that upheavals of heart have now way of entering there. These areas were as still and quiet as possible. Consequently, when the sudden and velocity and violence of the heart’s impulses as found in English literature struck us, it was a welcome jolt. The pleasure was not the aesthetic joy of literature; what appealed to us was the disturbance of the state of stagnation. Even if in the process slime from the bottom got churned up, it was acceptable.”

[Quoted in Meenakshi Mukherjee’s, *The Perishable Empire*]

In his *Dimensions of Indian English Literature*, M.K.Naik emphasises the point that after the Revolt of 1857 there was a perceptible change in the way writers wrote. In poetry, for instance, it the period saw the “high noon of Indian English romanticism”. This was clear in the poetry of Toru Dutt and Sarojin Naidu, masterpieces like “Gitanjali” (Tagore) and “Savitri” (Sri Aurobindo). Naik’s comments are useful to note:

“It was an inevitable product of the post-Revolt age, when the awakening ushered in by Rammohun Roy in the earlier phase had become a vigorous revival of the Indian spirit. The rise of the new Indian intelligentsia, the spread of movements of religious and social reform and the commencement of organized political activity with the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 led to a re-discovery of the Indian identity. It was a time of hope and expectation, of the birth of a national consciousness, of a new-found strength to accept the challenge of the present and overcome it, and of a feeling that one stood on the threshold of tremendous possibilities. The spirit of an age like this finds its natural expression in a predominantly romantic art, as the story of Elizabethan literature shows. The poetry of Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, and Sarojini Naidu could not therefore but be romantic if it had to express the ethos of their age. It was not a product of the mere aping of the available British masters who happened to be romantics; it was at its best the voice of the contemporary Indian Time-spirit. True, it did not always ‘speak out, loud and bold’, but when it did so, it was an utterance authentically Indo-English.” [p.5]

SAQ:

How does the question of ‘Indianness’ or ‘identity’ and ‘authenticity’ become a part of the problem of the history of Indian English literature?
(80 words)

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2.4 THE TRENDS IN PROSE

Indian English Prose of the early twentieth century

The rediscovery of the Indian past and a strong awareness of the current problems of India influenced the prose writings of this period. The Indian Renaissance of the 19th century produced different kinds of prose writings like religions, historical, cultural and political which were continued in the

early twentieth century also. The prose writers of the 19th century including Rammohan Roy, M.G. Ranade, K.T. Telang, Vivekananda, and others were worthily followed by others during the last part of the 19th century and the early part of the twentieth century. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Sir Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, A.K. Coomaraswamy, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Jadunath Sarkar and Radhakrishna are some of the distinguished prose-writers of this period. Some of these writers started writing in the 19th century and continued it to the early 20th century while some others started writing in the early 20th century and continued it to the post-independence period.

Some names stand out in the field of prose-writing: Dadabhai Naoraji (1825-1917), the “The Grand Old Man of India”; Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901); Kashinath Trimbuck Telang (1850-1893); Pherozezshah Merwanjee Mehta (1845-1915) and Sir Dinsha Edulji Wacha (1844-1936); Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), “Lokamanya Tilak”; Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915); Kristo Das Pal (1834-84); Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94); Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909); and Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925). In this mass of detail, we can observe that major impulses behind the literary output in prose by the figures we have named here, as well as their contemporaries, were “the re-discovery of the Indian past and a strong awareness of the problems of the day.” All the names we survey above lay claim to the English language through their mastery over it combined with the acute consciousness of Indian history and culture and the simultaneous resistance to British administrative and economic policies. The generation belonged mostly to the Presidency towns of Bombay and Calcutta and this is to be seen more in the case which was the birth-place of the Indian National Congress.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, better known as “Lokamanya”, was a mathematician, a scholar and a researcher, who contributed to Indian English prose writing as in *The Orion : Researcher into the Antiquity of the Vedas* (1893) and *The Arctic Home of the Vedas* (1903) are two books written by him. His English speeches were collected in *Writings and Speeches* (1922).

Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1951), the younger contemporary of Tilak and the disciple of Ranade, also contributed to Indian English prose through

his various speeches which have been collected in *Speeches* (1908-1916) and *Speeches and Writings: 3 Vols*, (1962). His prodigious memory, careful preparation, balanced and fair presentation, reasonable argument made him a famous speaker who was highly praised by Lord Curzon after his death.

Surendranath Banerjee (1848-1925) was one of the founding fathers of the Indian National Congress. He was acclaimed as the most powerful orator in English of this period, who delivered numerous speeches on various contemporary issues. His autobiography *A Nation in Making : Being the reminiscences of fifty years of public life* (1925) is more public than a private document tracing the growth of the Indian National movement.

According to Naik, the “most noteworthy prose of the period” came from the trio in Bengal-Tagore, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Rabindranath Tagore is the most outstanding figure of modern Bengali literature who wrote primarily in Bengali, but had a mastery over English also. He was a versatile genius whose achievements were many-sided. His active literary career spread over a period of 60 years in which he produced numerous lyrics, poetic plays, social plays, short stories, essays, autobiographical fragments, novels, and letters. Tagore’s career as a writer of English prose began many years after he had established a name in his mother tongue. His prose writings in English establish him as an internationalist and a humanist spreading the gospel of universal harmony between Man and Man, Man and Nature and Man and the Divine, Tagore wrote prose both in English and Bengali. His prose writings in Bengali had been translated in English by others and hence they cannot be considered as a part of Indian English prose. However, his prose writings in English were delivered as lectures. *Sadhana* (1913) was the earliest collection of his lectures delivered at Harvard University which reveals his philosophical views. *Personality* (1917) and *Nationalism* (1917) are his other two collections of speeches. *Personality* includes various subjects including the relationship between Man and Art, Man and Woman, Man and Nature and Man and God. In *Nationalism*, Tagore makes a distinction between society and nation and denounces western imperialism. His ten lectures collected in *Creative Unity* (1922) analyses the East-West relationship. *The Religion of Man* (1930) is a collection of his lectures delivered at Andhra University in 1937 which deals with issues like the basic duality of man’s nature, the essential unity of all religions, and related themes.

Sir Aurobindo Ghosh contributed to Indian English prose producing a considerable number of prose writings on religion, metaphysical, social, political, cultural subjects and so on. His earliest prose writings were a series of nine essays published in *Induprakash* under the caption ‘New Lamps for Old’, the publication of a revolutionary brand of politics. He was followed by a series of articles on the art of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee showing his attempt at literary criticism. In 1905, Aurobindo wrote *Bhavani Mandir* – a handbook for revolutionaries dedicated to the service of Goddess Bhavani. His unsigned articles in *Bandemataram* dealt with current politics. In 1909, Aurobindo started a new weekly *Karmayogin* in which he published essays dealing with science, philosophy, religion, literature etc. In 1914 Sir Aurobindo launched a monthly philosophical journal dedicated to the revelation of an integral view of life and existence. The various series of essays published in the journal which were re-issued in book-form were *The Life Divine* (1939-40), *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1948), *The Ideal of Human Unity* (1919), *The Human Cycle* (1949), *The Future Poetry* (1953), *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (1953), *The Renaissance in India* (1920), *Heraclitus* (1941) and so on. The last of Aurobindo’s prose writing was *The Supramental Manifestation* comprising eight essays. *The Future Poetry* is the collection of Aurobindo’s essays on literary criticism in *Arya*. You may find it of particular interest to read M.K.Naik’s remark:

“The most remarkable feature of Sri Aurobindo’s literary criticism is that he studies poetry in general and British poetry in particular, not by employing second-hand tools borrowed from Western critics – the bane of much Indian English criticism, but as one steeped in ancient Indian literature and aesthetics and at the same time at home with the European tradition as well. This enables him to adopt a comparative approach and makes his survey of British poetry refreshingly original.”

Swami Vivekananda’s oratorical brilliance which came into sparkling display in 1893 at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, earned for him the American sobriquet of “the Hindu hurricane” dedicated to spreading the message of India’s Hinduism through the Western world. His speeches and lectures are contained in the *Complete Works*.

There were many prominent names from the south of the country like Sir Subramania Iyer (1842-1924) who was also known as the “grand old man of South India”. Of these names one of the best remembered is V.S.Srinivasa Sastri, one of the Southern Moderate leaders.

V.S. Srinivasa Sastri (1869-1946) contributed to Indian English prose mainly through his biographical writings. He was a disciple of G.K. Gokhale and was known as ‘the silver-tongued orator of the Empire’. His biographical writings include – *Life and Times of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta* (1945), *My Master Gokhale* (1946) and *Thumb-nail Sketches* (1946). Sastri’s *Lectures on Ramayana* delivered in 1944 have been included in his *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. II. Naik considers Sastri as a biographer of much import who declared: “Let our sense of human values be robust. Let us be to our children in the pages of biography and autobiography no better and no worse than they see us in everyday life.”

Sarojini Naidu, mainly famous for her poetical work, was also one of the most notable orators whose speeches have been collected in *Speeches and Writings* (1919).

A.K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) is another Indo-Sinhalese writer of Indian English prose whose principal works include – *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (1908), *Essays in National Idealism* (1909), *Art and Swadeshi* (1911), *Introduction to Indian Art* (1913), *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (1916), *A New Approach to the Vedas* (1933), *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (1933) to name only a few. Among his many articles are some like “Some Pali Words”, “Symbolism of Archery”, “Indian Coins”, and “Sati”.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) who was a humanist, a man of religion, nationalist and a patriot influenced the language and literature of his period, both directly through his writings in English and Gujrati and indirectly through the movements aroused by his revolutionary thoughts and practices. However, his English writings fall into three periods – London period, the South African period and the Indian period. The London period (1888-91) includes – the *London Diary* which chronicles his sojourn in London, and is in addition to ten brief essays, and *Guide to London* dealing with his own experience in London. The South African period (1893-1951) establishes Gandhi as a journalist, disputationist and author. His writings of

this period include ‘An Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa’ (1895), ‘The Indian Franchise’ (1895), and ‘Grievances of the British Indians in South Africa (1896). During this period Gandhi launched a journal called *The Indian Opinion* which was published both in Gujarati and English.

Hind Swaraj is Gandhi’s first major work expressing the Gandhian doctrine of soul-force, passive resistance, and non-violence. It was originally written in Gujarati which was later translated into English with the title *Indian Home Rule* by Gandhi himself. In the Indian period (1915-48), Gandhi ran two well-known journals namely *Young India* (1919-32) and *Harijan* (1933-48). His writings of this period appeared in these two journals since, most of these writings were originally written in Gujarati and later translated into English by others, therefore, legitimately they cannot be considered as a part of Indian English Literature. His autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* was also originally written in Gujarati. But at the same time he delivered many historic speeches, published several articles and letters in English during this period.

SAQ:

What are Gandhi’s thoughts on colonial rule, Western civilization, and Indian culture? (60 + 70 + 75 words)

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When we study Gandhi’s contributions towards Indian writing in English, we have to keep this fact firmly in view that he was first and foremost a reformer and that he was primarily interested in the practice of politics, and social reform. He did not consider himself to be an erudite scholar or a brilliant thinker capable of giving sharp new insights. He declared: “I have presented no new principles, but tried to restate old principles”. The values that he formulated as principles of practice were adopted both within the

country and abroad. He had also judged for himself that “What I have done will endure, not what I have said or written”. He saw the purpose of his writings as the propagation of his ideas. His singular, unique world-view, however, ensured that his writing be coloured by a strong sense of individualism. In line with this, you will find his writing characterised by a simple, direct clarity, a “transparent and energetic style” without any rhetorical ornamentation. As Naik sums up – “Gandhi’s place among modern Indian English prose writers is as distinctive as his role in the life of modern India has been.”

Stop to Consider:

“The Gandhian Whirlwind”

Again, we must take note of what Meenakshi Mukherjee points out: “No discussion of Indo-Anglian fiction dealing with the independence movement would be complete without an assessment of the function of Mahatma Gandhi in these novels. The most potent force behind the whole movement, the Mahatma is a recurring presence in these novels, and he is used in different ways to suit the design of each writer. He has been treated variously as an idea, a myth, a symbol, a tangible reality, and a benevolent human being. In a few novels he appears in person, in most others his is an invisible presence.” [*The Twice Born Fiction*, p.66]

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) the first Prime Minister of India, was also a prolific writer of Indian English prose. His writings, like Gandhi’s, have to be seen as extensions of his public career as a nationalist whose life was devoted to the movement for India’s independence from British colonial rule. His first book, *Soviet Russia* (1928) is a collection of sixteen articles delineating his impressions of Russia, *Letters from a Father to his Daughter* (1934) is a collection of thirty one letters written by him to his ten years old daughter. *Glimpses of World History* (1934) also consists of letters written by him to his daughter from prison during 1930-33. *An Autobiography* (1936) is a unique creation of Nehru presenting a vivid picture of both the man and his milieu. The autobiography is also a living account of the eventful course of Indian history. The *Discovery of India* (1946) is a vision of the past seen through the eyes of Nehru. Moreover, he

has contributed numerous speeches, essays, letters and press-statements to Indian English prose. Undoubtedly, he is one of the most outstanding figures of Indian English prose.

Nationalist leaders who contributed to the struggle against colonial rule expressed set down in English many of the debates and thoughts that they were involved in. Among those who were associated with Gandhi's struggle and whose works have been compiled are included figures like Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950), Pattabhi Sitramayya (1880-1959), Rajendra Prasad (1884-1963), K.M.Munshi ((1887-1971), J.B.Kripalani (1888-1982), A.K.Azad (1888-1958), J.C.Kumarappa (1892-1952), R.R.Diwakar, Morarji Desai, G.Ramachandran, and U.R.Debdhar. Subhash Chandra Bose (1897-1945) who was a prominent Congress leader who rebelled against Gandhism, also contributed to Indian English prose writing extensively on political, economic and religious subjects.

The retrospective glance at Indian political history was another theme of Indian prose in English. In the field of historical prose, Jadunath Sarkar contributed a lot with his *The History of Aurangazeb* (Vols. I – V, 1912-24), *Shivaji and His Times* (1919) and *The Fall of the Mughal Empire* (Vols. I –IV, 1932-50). Besides, Sarkar's contribution, there were some other notable contributions made by H.C. Ray Chaudhari, S.N. Sen, K.M. Pannikar among so many other writers.

Sarvepally Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) was a leading figure of religious and philosophical prose in the twentieth century. He was a teacher of philosophy who became the President of India later on. *The Reign of Religion in contemporary Philosophy* (1920) was his first major work examining western philosophical thought. *The Hindu View of Life* (1926) is a forceful defense of Hinduism as a way of life. His early writings include – *The Philosophy of Rabindra Nath Tagore* (1918), *East and West in Religion* (1933), and *Eastern Religion and Western Thought* (1939). His later works include – *Religion and Society* (1947), *The Principal Upanishads* (1953), and *Religion in a Changing World* (1967). Like Vivekananda, he also achieved recognition in the West and for interpreting Indian philosophy and thought to the west.

Apart from the religious, historical and philosophical prose contributed by the makers of Indian English prose, biographies, autobiographies, travel

books, essays on art and criticism also contributed to the bulk of Indian English writing. You can read the account by M.K.Naik for a summary idea of these categories of writing. It may be of help to read the books on your own since we cannot find any sustained discussion of them.

Check Your Progress:

1. Recount the impulses behind development of Indian English Prose in the early twentieth century.
2. Whose names are prominent among the early twentieth-century writers of Indian English prose? What were the themes that they generally focused on?

2.5 THE TRENDS IN POETRY

Indian English Poetry of the Early Twentieth Century

You have already seen that among the Indians who have made a substantial contribution to Indian English poetry, the names of Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya may be mentioned.

In the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore we see the work of one of the versatile geniuses of his age who played the role of a poet, dramatist, novelist, painter, short story writer, educationist, nationalist and internationalist, and philosopher, during his long literary career. He wrote poetry primarily in Bengali which he himself, and others, later translated into English. *The Child* (1931) is the only poem which he wrote in English. God, Nature, Love, Life and Death, and the Child are some recurring themes of his lyrics. Tagore's *Gitanjali*, which is considered as a masterpiece of Indian English poetry, was published in England with an introduction by W.B. Yeats. It is made up of more than a hundred pieces strung together by a unifying theme of the devotional quest expressed through a variety of forms. The *Gitanjali* was followed by *The Gardener* (1913), *The Crescent Moon* (1913), *Fruit Gatherings* (1916), and *The Fugitive* (1921). Some of these works were translated into English by Tagore himself and others were written originally in English by him. In the year 1913 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for

literature. His poetry in English is essentially lyrical in quality and its most significant feature is the one to be pointed out by Naik: that he wrote primarily in Bengali and except for *The Child* and few other verse epigrams, his work in English consisted of the creative translations he did of his own verses. The other point to be noted about Tagore is his ambivalence towards his own English verse. His reputation in the English-speaking world is discoloured by having “swung to the two opposite extremes of temporary adulation and unthinking condemnation”. With this sad histories are entangled the names of W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. All these factors, as Naik points out, make the assessment of Tagore as an Indian English poet extremely difficult.

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), like Tagore and Aurobindo, was more than a mere poet. However, it was as an English poet that Sarojini Naidu first drew the attention of the Indian public. But in the course of time she came to occupy some of the highest positions in the public life of India. Her career as a poetess began with the publication of *The Golden Threshold*. It was followed by *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). *The Sceptred Flute* (1946) and *Feather of the Dawn* (1961) are two other collections of poems by her. Her poetry was essentially lyrical which had been strongly influenced by British romanticism. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, her younger brother, was also a prolific poet whose volume of work was far greater than Sarojini's. He published numerous volumes of verse among which *The Magic Tree* (1922), *Poems and Plays* (1927) and *Spring in Winter* (1955) are more significant.

Apart from the poet mentioned above, there were number academicians who also published several collections of Indian English poetry. For example, G.K. Chettur (1898-1936) published five collections of verse including *Sounds and Images* (1921) *The Temple Tank and Other poems* (1932), *The Shadow of God* (1934). V.N. Bhushan published eight verse collections in English including *Silhouettes*, *Moon Beans*, *Flute Tunes* and so on. There were many other writers of this category whose contributions are also noteworthy. You may find it interesting to read, in this category, the poems of Joseph Furtado, Raj Lakshi Debi, Jitendra Mohun Tagore, T.Ramakrishna, Nizam Jung, A.M.Modi, Ananda Acharya, Roby Dutta, R.B.Paymaster, P.Seshadri, A.F.Khabardar, N.V.Thadani, and M.B.Pithawalla.

The poetry of this period was religious, mystical, philosophical, reflective on the one hand and romantic on the other hand. But at the same time it was divorced from contemporary problems and reality unlike the poetry of the post-independence period.

Check Your Progress:

1. Outline the major changes in Indian poetry after the Great Revolt of 1857.
2. Enumerate the various English poetic influences on Indian poets writing in English in the early twentieth-century.

Stop to Consider:

You might find it useful to consider Prof. Meenakshi Mukherjee's analysis of the early Indian literary scene. She writes in "The Literary Landscape" in *The Twice Born Fiction* (2001):

"Historical and political circumstances combined to give the educated nineteenth century Indian a certain proficiency in the use of the English language – in fact, as the century wore on, being educated came to mean knowing English.

Most of the early Indo-Anglian experiments in literature were done in verse. Prose of a non-fictional variety existed in abundance, but it was motivated mostly by extra-literary impulses like political protest or social reform."

2.6 OTHER MAJOR CATEGORIES OF INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

2.6.1 INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

Although the beginning of the Indian English novel was with the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* in 1864, its real development was seen in the 20th century. The Gandhian movement for freedom influenced the Indian English novels of the early part of this century. Of the Indian writers of English fiction who came into prominence during this period, KS Venkataramani (1891-1951) was one of the earliest novelist of the period. The influence of Gandhian thought is quite evident in his first

two novels namely *Murugan, The Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, The Patriot*. A.S.Panchakapekasa Ayyar wrote historical novels in which he enlivened ancient Indian history. *Baladitya* (1930) and *Three Men of Destiny* are such two novels by him. Another novelist of this period was Krishnaswamy Nagarajun whose *Athawar House* and *Chronicles of Kedaram* are two novels reflecting the changing aspects of the contemporary society.

The most significant contribution to Indian English fiction was made by the appearance of Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan and Raja Rao on the scene. The fiction of Mulk Raj Anand was influenced by his experience of the European tradition as well as the Indian past. His first five novels appeared in the following sequence: *The Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939) and *Across the Black Water* (1940). In his novels the portrayal of Indian social life comes with a sense of sympathy for the down-trodden. For example, in his first novel ‘*Untouchable* (1935), he describes the story of a young sweeper, Bakka, who represents a whole class of social outcasts and the exploited poor. Similarly, his second novel *Coolie* also deals with the story of Munoo who lives a life of poverty, exploitation and starvation. His other novels include – *The Sword and the Sickle*, *The Big Heart*, *Private Life of an Indian Prince* etc. A concern for the social problems of the Indian Society and an attempt to eradicate the social evils are noticeable in his writings. Anand’s later works belonged to the post-independence period.

R.K.Narayan published his first novel *Swami and Friends* in 1935 which is an Indianised version of Richmal Crompton’s ‘William’ novels. It was followed by his other two novels namely *The Bachelor of Arts* (1936) and *The Dark Room* (1938). *The Bachelor of Arts* deals with the story of Chandran, a sensitive youth caught in a conflict between the western ideas of love and marriage and his traditional social set up in which he lives. *The Dark Room* is a tale of silent suffering undergone by Savitri – a traditional, middle class Hindu wife. *The English Teacher* (1946) was the last novel by Narayan written before independence like Anand, he also continued his writings in the post-independence period. His art achieved its maturity in the post-independence period with the appearance of novels like *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1962) *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) and *The Painter of Signs* (1976). Narayan’s fiction is imbedded with a

sense of place. Most of his novels have their setting in an imaginary town named Malgudi. Therefore, his novels are generally described as the 'Malgudi novels'. In his novels he depicted the conditions of life which he experienced around him with any feelings of indignation. He gave much importance of character-portrayal who has created many memorable characters like Swami, Sampath, Margayya etc. A blend of humour, irony, sympathy, quite realism and fantasy can be perceived in his novels.

Raja Rao was the youngest of the Trio (Anand, Naryan and Rao himself) whom we can not consider as a prolific novelist. He has written only four novels of which *Kanthapura* (1938) was the first one. The novel presents a vivid, realistic and graphic picture of the Gandhian freedom struggle movement of 1930 and its impact on the Indian masses. The whole story of the novel is narrated by an old grandmother named Achakka. The foreword or preface, added to this novel, has become a critical document revealing the novelist's views on style, the art of story telling and the use of English by the Indians. However, it was the best novel written by Raja Rao as well as the only novel written before independence. This other three novels include – *The Serpent and The Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) and *Comrade Kirillov* (1976). Raja Rao's most significant contribution to the Indian English fiction is his development of a suitable medium for expressing essentially Indian sensibility by using English in an Indianised way.

Apart from these three major novelists of this period, there were some other novelists such as Ahmed Ali, Dhan Gopal Mukherji, and D.F. Karaka among others who also contributed to the history Indian English fiction in their own ways.

Check your progress:

1. Critically examine the impact of 'Gandhian Movement' on Indian English fictions produced in the early 20th century.
2. Assess the contribution of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and RK Narayan to the field of Indian English fiction.
3. Comment on R.K. Narayan's use of irony in his novels.

2.6.2 INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

The beginning of Indian English drama dates from 1831 when Krishna Mohan Banerji wrote the first Indian English play '*The Persecuted or Dramatic scenes of the present state of Hindu Society*'. It was a social play depicting the conflict between Indian orthodoxy and the new ideas which came from the west.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the poet, translated his play *Ratnavali* (1958) and *Sermista* (1859), originally written in Bengali, into English. He also wrote a play in English '*Is This Called Civilization?*' in 1871. Indian English drama made a humble beginning in the 19th-century Bengal but could not make much headway in the local setting. More prevalent were plays in local languages and where plays in English were likely to succeed were ones by foreign authors. Since actual performance could not feed a dramatic tradition, early Indian English drama was closet drama.

The most significant contribution to the Indian English drama of this period is made by Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. Of the verse plays written by Sri Aurobindo, two belong to his student days in London and show the fascination the Elizabethan drama held out for him. Sri Aurobindo's plays reveal his knowledge of and his fascination for a wide variety of periods and locales, from ancient Greece to many foreign lands such as Spain, Iraq, Syria, Norway, India, and Britain. His poetic plays have not been considered to be best suited to the stage. He wrote a total of eleven verse-dramas of which five are complete and six are incomplete. The five complete plays by Aurobindo include – *The Viziers of Bassora*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Rodogune*, *Eric* and *Vasavadatta* of which four are comedies and *Rodogune* being a tragedy. All the five plays are full-length five act plays in blank verse. The influence of Elizabeth drama was strong on him. He was also given us a few unlimted plays namely, *The Maid in the Mill*, *The House of Brut*, *The Witch of Ilni*, and *Prince of Eduri*.

Tagore wrote almost more than forty plays of all kinds including social comedies, allegorical plays, and symbolic plays and so on. Among those that he himself translated into English, Tagore's plays include – *Chitra* (1913), *The Cycle of Spring* (1917), *Red Oleanders* (1924), and *Sacrifice and Other Plays* (1917). All these plays were translated into English by

Tagore himself even though critical acclaim for these has been reluctant. Moreover, his plays as a whole, have failed to be successful on stage because of being too symbolic and lyrical. Naik notes that Tagore made extensive textual changes while translating his verse plays into English so much so that they are virtually re-done in prose. *Sanyasi*, *The Cycle of Spring*, *Chitra*, *Malini*, *Sacrifice*, *Natir Puja*, and *Red Oleanders* are labelled as 'thesis' plays by Naik. *The King and the Queen*, *Kacha and Devayani*, *Karna and Kunti*, and *The Mother's Prayer* are categorised as 'psychological' dramas.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya was more eminent as a poet than as a dramatist. His first play is *Abu Hassan* (1918). The most significant social plays of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya have been included in *Five Plays* (1937). The plays of this collection reveal the playwright's socialist sympathies. Sympathy for the exploited, revolt against the evils of imperialism, are among the themes of his plays. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar describes his plays as 'manifestoes of the new realism'. But these plays were failures owing to the failure of characterization.

The history of early Indian English drama in Bombay was primarily limited to staging performances of visiting European theatre companies. In Madras, the situation was more productive and centred on the Madras Dramatic Society founded in 1875. This was followed by the Oriental Drama Club founded in 1882 and The Sarasa Vinodini Sabha founded by Krishnamachary of Bellary in 1890. In this period the most productive dramatist was V.V.Srinivasa Aiyangar (1871-1954).

Another playwright T.P. Kailasam has also occupied a secure place in the history of Indian English drama. His English plays include – *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfilment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *Karna or The Brahmin's Curse* (1946), *Keechaka* (1949). Despite his long stay in England, he was not indifferent to the ancient cultural heritage of India. The Indian epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* provided the plots for his plays. His plays reveal his conscious attempt to idealise the characters of his epics. As he himself was a performing artist, his plays show a greater stage sense than the plays of Tagore and Aurobindo. A.S.Panchapakesa Ayyar was another prolific writer who wrote almost half a dozen plays on various themes. *In the Clutch of the Devil* (1926) was his first play. *Sita's Choice and other*

plays (1935) and *The Slave of Ideas and Other Plays* (1941) were two collections of his plays. *The Trial of science for the Murder of Humanity* (1942) was the last play by Ayyar. All his plays deal with contemporary problems and situations and they are written with a reformist zeal.

Bharati Sarabai is another eminent dramatist of the pre-independence period. She wrote plays under the influence of Gandhian thoughts and ideas. Her two plays – *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952) reflect the influence of Gandhi on his writings. *The Well of People* has dramatic strengths which make it a memorable and significant contribution to the development of Indian English drama in this period.

Apart from the important playwrights mentioned in the above account, there were many other minor playwrights who also tried their hand at drama, though with no recognizable success.

SAQ:

What could have been, in your opinion, the main impediments to the development of drama in English in India? (80 words)

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2.6.3 SHORT STORY

The history of Indian English short story began with the publication of *Realities of Indian Life : Stories collected from the Criminal Reports of India* by S.C. Dutta and *The Times of Yore : Tales from Indian History* by S.C. Dutta and S.M. Tagore in 1885. But the real development of the Indian English story, like the Indian English novel, took place in the early twentieth century or the Gandhian age.

At the beginning of this century Cornelia Sorabji, a Parsi lady educated in Britain, published her four collections of short-stories. They include – *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), *Subabies : Studies in the Child Life of India* (1904), *Between the Twilights : Being Studies of Indian Women by one of themselves* (1908) and *Indian Tales of the Great ones among Men, Women and Bird People* (1916).

T.L. Natesan is another notable short-story writer of this period who wrote under the pen-name, “Shankar Ram”. *The Children of Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All* (1933) are two collections of his short stories most dealing with the rustic life in Tamil Nadu. A.S.P. Ayyar, the playwright and the novelist, also published three collections of stories namely, *Indian After Dinner Stories* (1927), *Sense in Sex and Other Stories* (1929) and *The Finger of Destiny and other Stories* (1932). The short stories also, like his plays, reflect his concern for social reform. Manjeri Isveran is another productive short-story writer of this period who authored *The Naked Shingles* (1941), *Siva Ratri* (1943), *Angry Dust* (1944), *Fancy Tales* (1947) and many more short stories. Her stories are filled with fantasy and supernatural elements.

The most significant contribution to the Indian English short story was made by the three major novelists of this period, namely, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Mulk Raj Anand has published seven collections of short stories including *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934), *The Barber’s Trade Union and other Stories* (1944), *The Power of Darkness and Other Stories* (1959) and so on. His short stories are wide-ranging in mood and tone with a strong sense of social awareness inherent in them. R.K. Narayan started writing short stories almost a decade after Mulk Raj Anand wrote *Cyclone and other Stories* (1943), *Dodu and other Stories* (1943) and *Malgudi Days* (1943) are his three collections of short stories written before independence. Like his novels, his short stories are also filled with irony and humour. Raja Rao has also published a dozen stories which have been collected in *The Cow of the Barricades and other Stories* (1947) and *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978).

2.7 SUMMING UP

The history of Indian Writing in English during the period after the Great Revolt displays some characteristics different from what was typical of the writing in the earlier period. We have given you here a brief sketch of what shape this writing took. Unless you add to this sketch your own reading of the actual works themselves, the outline narrative must appear very abstract. From the earlier unit you have learnt that Indians took up the colonisers' language from a very early moment of the cultural encounter. By the time of the Great Revolt and its aftermath this cultural transaction became heavily burdened with political conflict. We cannot thus study Indo-Anglian literature without a clear awareness of the political events that gave to this literature its characteristic colours.

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Unit 3

Post- Independence Period

Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 New Possibilities
- 3.4 The New Phase in Indian English Writing
- 3.5 Poets and Poetry
- 3.6 The Rise of the Indian English Novel
- 3.7 Mapping Modern Times:
 - 3.7.1 Indian English Drama in the Post-Independence Period
 - 3.7.2 Indian English Prose in the Post-Independence Period
- 3.8 Summing Up
- 3.9 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit brings to you the third part of our short literary history of Indian English literature. As before, we cover the ground in much the same way as we have done by observing all the important milestones on the journey. By the end of the unit you should be able to

- *sum up* this history in brief terms
- *name* the important figures who gave it shape
- *describe* the relations among the different elements of this history

3.2 INTRODUCTION

A new period of Indian life started with the achievement of independence by India on 15th August 1947. Many challenges and changes occurred in different spheres of Indian life. For example, in the political sphere, the most traumatic transformation was the partition between India and Pakistan.

For various the economic sphere, also, many developments came into view including the implementation of Five-Year Plans, the opening of large industrial projects in the public sector, community-development projects and the nationalization of Life Insurance and the banks, multi-purpose river projects, agrarian reforms, and so forth.

Boundaries of states were re-drawn on a linguistic basis in 1956. In the social sphere, traditional social inequalities and superstition were sought to be eradicated by means of progressive measures such as the Untouchability Offences Act of 1955, The Hindu Code Bill, etc. Moreover several schemes were launched to look into various issues related to social development. Consequently, there were some social gains as the rise in national literacy rates by 75% between 1951 and 1971.

SAQ:

Enumerate the various legislative measures that were introduced to give the new Indian nation a polity different from the preceding colonial set-up. (80 words)

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3.3 NEW POSSIBILITIES

The growth and continuity of Indian English literature remained intact in the post-independence period with an increased number of readers in English. There were many factors which contributed to this growth. For example, the English journals in India encouraged the publication of Indian English verse and fiction during the early years of Independence. *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, and *Quest*, belong to this category. Besides, the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award started covering Indian English literature from the year 1960, which also became a source of inspiration for the writers of

Indian English literature. The achievement of a national identity in the Post-Independence period, provided the Indian English writers with greater self-confidence.

We can understand the situation for the Indian writer in this period with the help of what Prof. Meenakshi Mukherjee says: “The independence movement in India was not merely a political struggle but an all-pervasive emotional experience for all Indians in the nineteen-twenties and ‘thirties. No Indian writer, writing in those decades or writing about them, could avoid reflecting the upsurge in his work. Thus many of the English novels written in India in the twentieth century also deal with this national experience, either directly as theme or indirectly as significant public background to a personal narrative. This was an experience that was national in nature. It traversed boundaries of language and community and, since Indo-Anglian novels aim at a pan-Indian readership, this unifying experience has served to establish Indo-Anglian writing as an integral part of Indian literature.”

3.4 THE NEW PHASE IN INDIAN ENGLISH WRITING

There have been some comparisons of the Indian nationalist movement, its climax, and its aftermath with the situations following upon the French Revolution and its Napoleonic after-phase in France, and the American Civil War and the subsequent changes in the United States of America. While the national differences are too crucial to be easily passed over, we can describe what happened in India in terms of what it meant - “it certainly demanded of all Indians a radically new approach to life. It was an emotional as well as an ideological experience spread over a much longer period of time than any nationalist revolution in world history.” (M.Mukherjee)

The political decision to retain Indian membership of the British Commonwealth meant the continuity of the cultural trends already in place through the colonial era. For Indian English Literature this meant the institution of the Sahitya Academy awards for English writing in the year 1960. The period after the achievement of political independence from colonial rule, in 1947, brought gains for the Indian English writer in affirming the sense of identity, the capacity for self-scrutiny, and the widening of his/her vision. There was a growth in the readership and even though the role of English in

post-Independence India was sought to be circumscribed in various ways, the recognition that English is a world-language further led to greater study of English language and literature. Naik’s description of these new changes goes thus:

“The post-Independence Indian scene with its curious criss-cross of rapid socio-political changes in a country where tradition still remains a strong force has presented a stimulating spectacle, which has naturally evoked a variety of reactions from its writers, including nostalgic idealization of the immediate past of the days of the freedom struggle, a strong desire to re-discover one’s roots in the ancient Indian ethos as also to examine this ethos afresh in the light of westernization, and satirical comment both on the darker side of the freedom movement and its aftermath and the decline of values in all spheres of life in the present.” [191-92]

SAQ:

What new themes emerged as the preoccupation of Indian writers of English after 1947? (60 words)

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3.5 POETS AND POETRY

Indian English poetry in the Post-Independence period

The poetry of this period is remarkable for its experimentation and clear presentation of contemporary Indian reality and consciousness. But at the same time, the continuation of Indian English Romantic tradition was also noticeable in the works of the poets belonging to the school of Aurobindo and many other poets. However, by the fifties, the new poetry imbued with a sense of protest, made its appearance in the world of Indian English poetry. The organization of the ‘writers workshop’ in Calcutta in 1958 by P. Lal

and his associates, soon became an effective forum contributing to the growth of new poetry or modernist poetry.

The first of the new poets to publish a collection was Nizzim Ezekiel whose first volume of poetry '*A Time to Change*' appeared in 1952. It was followed by his other collections namely *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965) and *Hymns in Darkness* (1976). Being the first major Indo-English poet of the post-Independence period, he has become a living legend in his life-time and modern Indian poetry in English is very much indebted to him. He is of Bene-Israel origin which makes him a natural outsider in the Indian scene. But he tries to connect himself with contemporary India and regards himself essentially as an Indian poet writing in English. His poetry embraces a wide range of themes including life in the city, sexuality, the problems of marriage, poverty, search for identity, parody of the Indian colloquial English idiom, and a shift towards morality and alienation. Nizzim Ezekiel is known as a city poet as the city of Bombay occupies a very significant position in his poetry. The city, Bombay, becomes the 'locale' of most of his poems indicating his sense of belonging to this city. Here, Bombay has become a symbol for any modern city submerged by ugliness, inhumanity and wickedness. The dehumanizing influence of the city on human beings gets reflected in some of his poems such as 'A Morning Walk,' and 'Urban'. One of his famous poems 'Background Casually' reveals his commitment to India and to Bombay as well his cultural and social alienation for having a Jewish origin. The 'Very Indian Poem in Indian English' 'The Truth About the Floods' and 'The Railway Clerk' show the many-levelled functioning of irony in Ezekiel's poetry. The superstitions and folk-beliefs are found reflected in poems like 'The Visitor', 'Night of the Scorpion' and 'Cow'. He frankly writes about sex and human body in 'At Hotel' expressing the sexual motives of men. In 'A Woman observed', Ezekiel gives a graphical depiction of the sexuality of a pregnant woman. Marriage is another dominant theme of Ezekiel's poetry. Being a critical observer of marital life, Ezekiel deals with the various problems of marital life in poems like 'Marriage' and 'To a Certain Lady'. It is with Nissim Ezekiel, that postcolonial poetry came into existence which starts representing the voice of the urbanized, western educated Indians.

Dom Moraes was the first ‘new’ poet to win recognition in England. He was the son of Frank Moraes, the well-known Indian journalist. Dom Moraes adopted British citizenship in 1961 after living in England for many years. From his childhood, he was passionately interested in writing poetry. Don Moraes has published many volumes of poetry which include – *A Beginning* (1957), *Poems* 1960), *John Nobody* (1968), *Collected Poems* (1969), besides others. He had a very troubled and insecure childhood and adolescence which finds expression in his poetry. That is why his poetry is considered as highly personal and has a confessional tone. The poetry of Dylan Thomas influenced him deeply. Loneliness and insecurity are two recurrent themes of his poetry.

SAQ:

How does the poetry of this period reflect both a sense of continuity and the sense of change ? (80 words)

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Purushottam Lal, the organizing spirit behind the organization of Writers’ Workshop in Calcutta in 1958, has been a pioneer and a popularizer of the new poetry. He has published many collections of verse which include ‘*The Parrot’s Death and Other Poems* (1960), “*Change!*” *They Said* (1966), *Draupadi and Jayadratha and Other Poems* (1967), *The Man of Dharma and the Rasa of Silence* (1974), and *Calcutta: A Long Poem*. He is a lyrical and a romantic poet, who is at the same time, careful to avoid romantic excess. Like the poetry of Don Moraes and Nissim Ezekiel, Lal’s poetry also conveys a confessional note.

Adil Jussawalla is another new poet who has also made a significant contribution to the Indian English poetry of post-independence period. *Land’s End* (1962) is his first collection of verse which contains poems written in England and some parts of Europe. *Missing Person* is his another collection of poems which was published in 1974. Like Dom Moraes,

Jussawalla also spent more than a dozen years in England. But, unlike Dom Moraes, he decided to return to India and his poetry reflects his conscious involvement with the Indian ethos.

Stop to Consider:

Post-Independence poetry, according to M.K.Naik, rounded a fresh turn in its development. Leaving behind the earlier Romantic strain, the poets now turned to a more modernist technique.

However, some earlier romantic writing was published after 1947 – Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* appeared in its final form in 1950-51. Others who followed in his footsteps included Dilip Kumar Roy, Themis, Romen, Prithvi Singh Nahar, Prithvindra N.Mukherjee, V.Madhusudan Reddy, K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, and V.K.Gokak.

The 'new' poetry made its presence felt from the fifties onwards. Against this background, P.Lal and others founded the Writers Workshop which declared in its manifesto that the present group of writers held that English as a language could henceforth play a creative role in Indian literature. In 1958, P.Lal and K.Raghavendra Rao brought the first modernist anthology, *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry*, where they repudiated the school of Aurobindo's romanticism and asserted that "the phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojini Naidu".

Poets like Nissim Ezekiel belong to the new generation of poets who can be identified with this fresh poetic turn.

A.K. Ramanujan (1929 -), an Indian expatriate in USA is another outstanding poet of the post-independence period. Born in India, he went to the University of Chicago in 1962 where he was a professor of Dravidian linguistics. He enjoyed teaching there and unlike Jussawalla, did not choose to return to India. Living in USA Ramanujan looked back to his past life in India for the themes of his poetry.

Ramanujan's poetry is a combination of his 'outer' and his 'inner' forms. The 'outer' forms of his poetry include — "linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience, and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and field trips, my personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and Folklore give my substance, my 'inner' forms, images, symbols." The 'inner forms' of his poetry include thus his first thirty years' experience in India, his preoccupations with Kannada and

Tamil, etc. Thus his poetry can be said to express an 'Indian' sensibility encouraged by his 'American' experiences. His poetic output is very thin containing only two volumes namely *The Striders* and *Relations*. But what he has written in these two volumes is remarkable for their inherent poetic worth. In most of his poems, his themes centre round the family, relations, insects and Tamil traditions.

Another modern Indian English poet is Keki.N. Daruwalla (1937 -) who has enriched the field of Indian English poetry in a variety of ways. He was a police officer by profession and the very fact influenced his poetry. His poetry is dominated by the images of violence, disease, fire, corruption, etc. Daruwalla's poetical works include – *Under Orion* (1970), *Apparition in April* (1971), *Crossing of Rivers* (1976), *Winter Poems* (1980), *The Keeper of the Road* (1982). In 1984, he was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for *The Keeper of Road*. A sense of concern for the socio-political conditions of India gets expressed in his poetry. Landscape occupies a dominant place in Daruwalla's poetry covering the vast countryside of North India with its widespread network of rivers, hills, plains, and so on. His poetry also deals with the theme of love and sex. A celebration of love and sex is found in his poetry. However, it is his excellence in the realistic, vivid and striking use of imaginary which gives him a unique position in the world of Indian English poetry.

Jayanta Mahapatra (1928 -) is the first Indian English poet to win the Sahitya Academy Award for his book of verse *Relationship* in 1981. Mahapatra started his career as a poet at the age of forty for which he is called 'a late bloomer' in the world of Indian English poetry. *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* is Mahapatra's first volume of poems containing forty-nine poems on a wide variety of themes. His other poetical works include – *Swayamvara and Other Poems* (1971), *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *The False Start* (1980), *Life Sings* (1983), and *Dispossessed Nests* (1986). His personal experience influenced his poetry. Mahapatra's poetry is remarkable for its exploration and vivid portrayal of the Orissa landscape. The physical landscape of Orissa represents the deeper levels of Indian consciousness and psyche which have been shaped by India's cultural and religious past. Alienation, rootlessness and emptiness in modern existence, human relationships, love, sexuality, prostitution, poverty and socio-political reality of contemporary India form the subject matter of his poetry. Like the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla, Mahapatra's poetry is also filled with realistic images and symbols.

Arun Kolatkar (1932 -) is a bilingual poet writing both in English and in his mother tongue Marathi. He wrote many short poems in English some of which still remain uncollected. His long poem, *Jejuri*, was published in 1970 which won the Commonwealth Poetry prize. The poem contains thirty-one short sections describing a visit to Jejuri, a famous temple near Pune.

One of the most leading figures of the new school of poetry is Kamala Das. She is a bilingual poet like Arun Kolatkar, who writes both in her native Malayalam and English with equal mastery. She has published three books of verse in English – *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967) and *The Old playhouse and other poems* (1973). Her poetry is an expression of her feminine sensibility, its exploitation, its suppression in a male-dominated society. Her frustrations want of love and sufferings as a woman and wife are frankly portrayed in most of her poems. Therefore, her poetry is called confessional and autobiographical to a great extent. Love and sex, rebellion against the conventions and restraints of society, loneliness and incompleteness, disease and decay are some of the recurrent themes of her poetry. The images and symbols of her poems are drawn from the familiar and the commonplace and they are suggestive of her own personal experience.

Apart from the above mentioned writers of Indian English poetry, P. Parthasarathy, Gieve Patel, A.K. Mehrotra, Pritish Nandy, Shiv K. Kumar, Monika Verma, Mary Erulkar, Eunice de Souza and many others have contributed to the enrichment of Indian English poetry in the Post-Independence period.

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss the poetic technique with which Nissim Ezekiel as a 'city poet' highlights the theme of modern 'isolation'.
2. A.K. Ramanujan's poetry is the product of the combination between his 'outer forms' and 'inner forms'. How does the poet achieve this combination?
3. Describe the poetic response to Indian nationalism around 1947 in terms of theme and technique.
4. Comment on the 'confessional' tone in the poetry of Kamala Das.

3.6 THE RISE OF THE INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL

Indian English fiction in the post-independence period continues to retain the honour and popularity which it had achieved during the Gandhian age. Many novelists of the pre-independence period such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and many others have continued their writing in the post-independence also. These novelists, at the same time, become a source of inspiration for the upcoming novelists of this period. The prominent figures of Indian English novel who started their career after independence are Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar and Kushwant Singh. These novelists made their appearance during the nineteen fifties and the early sixties. Chaman Nahal and Arun Joshi are two other outstanding figures of Indian English novel making their appearance in the late sixties and the seventies. Moreover, a group of women novelists emerged in the post-independence period which includes the prominent figures such as Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai.

Stop to Consider:

The descriptions given by Meenakshi Mukherjee may be used once more to understand the growth of the Indian English Novel:

“Just as the essential predicament of the nineteenth century American novelist was a sense of isolation, the essential condition of the twentieth century Indian novelist, until recent years, was his involvement and concern – involvement with the changing national scene, concern for the destiny of the country.”

She also writes of the influence of Gandhism on Indian novelists: “Any novelist dealing with these turbulent years had to impose an order upon the splendid chaos and thus discern a pattern in it to illuminate the human situation.”

Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906 -), a social realist of this period, made a significant contribution to the world Indian English fiction of the post-independence period. In his theory and practice of fiction-writing, Bhattacharya shares a close affinity with Mulk Raj Anand. Like Anand, he also believes that a novel must have a social purpose. *So Many Hungers* (1947) is his first novel. Later novels include *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He who Rides a Tiger* (1952), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) and *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978). Among these novels,

Shadow from Ladakh was selected for the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in 1967. His fiction has been translated into many European languages.

Manohar Malgonkar (1913-) is another eminent novelist of this period who believes that the main purpose of art is to provide pure entertainment. His novels present a limited view of human life and nature. Malgonkar started his novelistic career with *Distant Drum* in 1960 which depicts a story of army life. *The Princes* (1963), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) and *The Devil's Wind* (1972) are some of the novels authored by him. The male characters occupy a dominant position in his novels while the women characters appear to be nothing more than the objects of masculine pleasure.

Khushwant Singh's (1918 -) first novel was *Train to Pakistan* (1956) depicted the impact of Partition on a small village on the Indo-Pakistan border. His other novel namely *I shall not Hear the Nightingale* (1959) presents an ironic picture to the freedom struggle movement. *The Company of Women* (1999) and *Delhi* (1992) are two new novels by him. *Delhi* seems to be a chronicle covering more than eight hundred years in the life of the city Delhi. *The Company of Women* deals with the story of Mohan, the protagonist and his adulterous relationships with eight women.

Besides Bhabani Bhattacharya, Malgonkar and Khushwant Singh, there were S. Menon Marath, Balachandra Rajan, S.N. Ghose, G.V. Desani and K.A. Abbas, whose contributions to the Indian English fiction of early post-independence period are also remarkable. Sudhindra Nath Ghose (1899-1965) is the remarkable case of an Indian writer whose work was not discovered until recently on account of misinterpretation by early reviewers. His main work consists of a tetralogy (*And Gazelles Leaping*(1949), *Cradle of the Clouds* (1951), *The Vermilion Boat* (1953), and *The Flame of the Forest* (1955)).

Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal's novelistic output made its appearance in the late sixties and the seventies. Joshi wrote three novels namely *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strong Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) and *the Apprentice* (1974). The theme of alienation in its different aspects is predominant in his novels. He wrote two more novels before his untimely death in 1993. This two novels are – *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) and *The City and the River* (1990). *The Last Labyrinth* won Sahitya Academy Award in 1982. In this novel also Joshi seems to be preoccupied with his

common theme of alienation. As a novelist, Joshi is seriously interested in the existential dilemmas faced by man in the modern world.

Chaman Nahal started his novelistic career with *My True Faces* in 1973. His most outstanding creation *Azadi* appeared in 1975 which was one of the most prominent novels of Partition. The same novel won the Sahitya Academy Award in the year 1977. His other novels include – *Into Another Dawn* (1977), *The English Queen* (1979), *The Crown and Leincloth* (1981), *The Salt of Life* (1990) and *The Triumph of the Tricolor*.

Stop to Consider:

In *The Twice Born Fiction*, Meenakshi Mukherjee provides refreshing insights into the making of the Indo-Anglian novel. The earliest Indian novels were written in Bengali and this new genre came to be established with the historical novel form. Tracing the forms in which the Indian novel, as a whole, went on to develop, she mentions three stages: historical romance, then social or political realism, and then psychological novels. Indo-Anglian fiction, too, began with one kind of historical fiction of which we can take the examples of S.K.Ghose's *The Prince of Destiny* and S.K.Mitra's *Hindupur*, both appearing in 1909. After an interval of about two decades, we find historical novels by A.S.Panchapakesa Ayyar, beginning with *Baladitya* (1930). This was followed by Umrao Bahadur's *The Unveiled Court* (1933).

Similar trends could be seen in novels in the Indian languages as well. Social realism combined with patriotism. We can see this reflected in novels like *Murugan the Tiller* and *Kandan the Patriot* by Venkatramani and the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao.

Meenakshi Mukherjee also comments: "The Indo-Anglian novelist has sometimes attempted to solve the problem of heterogeneous audience by choosing themes and situations that have more or less the same validity all over the country. These recognisably "Indian" themes are not many in number because there is a great deal of regional variation in social structure, values and customs and problems in different parts of India, but it is interesting to see how many Indo-Anglian novelists have chosen subjects where the basic pattern is equally familiar to all Indians. Take for example the theme of social change: the disintegration of the old hierarchical and agrarian society or the breakdown of the large joint family. This is a change that is taking place all over the country . . . the underlying situation is real to all Indians, and lies very close to their immediate experience.

Several such 'Indian' themes have emerged to form recurrent patterns in Indo-Anglian fiction, and the patterns are more easily discernible today . . ." [p.35]

A significant development in the literary world of post-independence period is the appearance of a group of new novelists and their new fiction. Born and brought up in the post-colonial world, the new novelists have established their fame by winning several major literary awards, prizes and distinctions in the international level. The writers of this new fiction do not feel self-conscious in handling the English language unlike the older Indian novelists such as Anand, Raja Rao R.K. Narayan and many others. The new novels are more globalised in comparison to the novels produced by the older novelists.

The first of the new novelists to appear in the scene was Salman Rushdie. His best novel '*Midnight's Children*' won the Booker Prize in 1981. It is the story of Saleem Sinai which is narrated in first person by Saleem himself. Here, Saleem, who was born on the midnight of 15th August, 1947, the time and year of the birth of modern Indian nation, becomes the representative of the new born Indian nation. *Grimus* (1975), *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verse* (1988) and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) are some other famous novels authored by him.

Vikram Seth also contributed to the spread of this new fiction by producing novels on social realism. *A Suitable Boy* (1993) and *An Equal Music* (1999) are two best known novels by him. His *The Golden Gate* (1986) is a novel in verse set in contemporary American society. The entire novel is in the sonnet form. Rohinton Mistry, who lives in Canada, is the author of the award winning novel '*Such a long Journey*' (1991). In his novels the Parsi character plays a dominant role. *A Fine Balance* (1995) is another of his novels dealing with the theme of hope and despair.

Amitav Ghosh, one of the most outstanding figure of Indian English fiction, has written many novels such as *Circle of Reason* (1986), *In an Antique land* (1992), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), *The Glass Palace* (2000) etc. His novels stand as testimony to his versatility. For example, in *The Shadow Lines*, the novelist that divide people and nation causing a lot of misery among human beings, while his another different one dealing with the imaginative reconstruction of history.

Another notable development in the history world of post-independence period is the emergence a number of women novelists. Ruth Praver Jhabvala (1927 -), one of the leading figures of Indian English fiction by women has

produced many novels such as *To whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *The Householder* (1960), *A New Dominion* (1973), *Heat and Dust* (1975), *poet and Dancer* (1993) and so on. But there is a problem regarding whether Jhabvala can legitimately be considered as an Indian English writer. Naik observes that “She herself has declared that she should not be considered an ‘Indian writer’ but ‘as one of those European writers who have written about India’. Born in Germany and educated in England, she got married to an Indian and lived in India for many years. The novel which she wrote during her stay in India clearly reveals her preoccupation with Indian social life. But she herself refuses to be considered as an Indian writer. In 1975, she left India for good and went to the USA. In her recent works she makes use of her American experience, but at the same time her preoccupation with India continues to be dominant.

Kamala Markandaya (Purnaiah Taylor, 1924 -) is an expatriate who has been living in England for a number of years. Her novels deal with a wide variety of themes that include – the East-West encounter, different roles played by women in society and so on. *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) is her first novel which deals with the story of Rukmani, a rustic woman, and her hard peasant life. *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *Possession* (1963), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *The Coffer Dams* (1969) are some other novels by her. She has produced only one novel after 1980, namely *Pleasure City* in 1982. It is one of her best novels dealing with the cultural confrontation between tradition and modernity. *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977) is her longest novel, which is an attempt at historical fiction, being a chronicle of three generations of the princely family of Devapur.

Nayantara Sahgal (1927 -) is generally associated with political fiction, politics being one of her major concerns – inevitable, given that she is the daughter of Vijayalakshmi Pandit, and the niece of Jawaharlal Nehru. Her first novel, *A Time to be Happy* (1958), seems to be a chronicle dealing with two north Indian families during the last phases of the Indian freedom struggle movement as well as with the advent of Independence. *The Time of Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *A Situation in Delhi* (1977) are three novels by her dealing with different political matters. *The Day in Shadow* is another novel by her which was inspired by personal experience. Here the plot deals with a broken marriage. *Rich Like Us* (1985) is Sahgal’s best novel which was written towards the later part of

her career. The novel present a satirical picture of India in 1975 to 1976, the time of the declaration of National Emergency by Indira Gandhi, *Plans for Departure* (1985) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988) are two latest novels by her.

Anita Desai (1937 -), in contrast with Nayantara Sahgal, appears to be more interested in the interior landscape of the mind. In her novels she explores the disturbed pshyche of the modern Indian women and also tries to strike a balance between their instinctual reads and intellectual aspirations. One of her major themes is the existential predicament of an individual which she portrays through incompatible couples, for example the very union between sensitive wives and ill-matched husbands. Her first novel *Cry, The Peacock*, was published in 1963. The novels depicts the story of Maya, the chief protagonist, who fails to establish an effective communication with her husband Gautam. Gautam's indifference to her sensitive nature creates a deep sense of loneliness in her, finally making her hysteric. Her other novels include – *Vioces in the City* (1965), *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), *Where shall we go this Summer* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear hight of Day* (1980), *Village by the Sea* (1982), *In Custody* (1984), *Baymartner's Bombay* (1988), *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) and *Fasting Feasting* (1999). In most of her novels, the narrative is woman-centred. But in *In Custody* she has switched from a woman-centred to a male-centred narrative, a poorly paid lecturer in a provincial town. *Fasting Feasting* is her latest novel which was nominated for the Booker Prize in 1999 in which she tries to recapture the family life of two different cultures. The novel is in two parts – one dealing with Indian life and the other with life in the United States of America.

Another outstanding figure of Indian English fiction by women in the post-independence period is Shashi Deshpande. She has already written eight novels, six collections of short stories and four children's books. Her novels emerge from her rootedness in middle class Indian society and avoid mentioning about the events like partition, Emergency etc. *The DARK Holds No Terror* is her first novel. The heroine of the novel is a mother who finds no happiness with her husband and children. *If I Die Today* (1982) and *Come up and Be Dead* (1983) are two novels by her which have the elements of detective fiction.

That Long Silence (1988) is her fifth novel which was selected for the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award. Through the narrator Jaya, the novelist portrays the hollowness, boredom of modern Indian life as well as the silence imposed on women by many factors. *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *The Building Vine* (1993), *Small Remedies* (2000) are some other novels authored by her. In most of her novels the narrative is women-centred like in the novels of Anita Desai. Almost all her novels deal with a crisis in the heroine's life which is portrayed through the use of stream of conscious technique and other devices. Her novels are woman oriented depicting the meaning of being a woman in modern Indian society.

Apart from the novelists mentioned above, there are many other distinguished novelists (both men and women) such as Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Namita Gokhale, Gita Mehta, Allan Sealy, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and so on. The contribution of these novelists to the world of Indian English fiction in the post-independence period is also equally noteworthy.

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss the progressive stages in the development of the Indi-anglian novel.
2. Define the 'new' elements in Indo-Anglian fiction after 1947.
3. Discuss the contribution of the women novelists to the field of Indian English fiction in the post-independence period. Highlight their main concerns.

3.7 MAPPING MODERN TIMES

3.7.1 INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Indian English drama began with the appearance of Krishna Mohan Banerji's *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindu Society* in 1831. Despite its old origins, it is yet to establish itself as a popular genre.

Indian drama in English did not receive much inspiration even after 1947. The constraints upon drama in English as part of Indian literature are peculiar to the form itself. The growing interest abroad in Indian English literature led to some works by Asif Currimbhoy, Partap Sharma, and Gurcharan Das which were successfully staged in Europe and the U.S. but this did not lead to the foundation of an Indian English drama. The tradition of poetic drama of the Tagore-Aurobindo-Kailasam school continued with variations brought in by Manjeri Isvaran, G.V. Desani and Lakhan Deb.

Stop to Consider:

Drama being a genre that deals 'directly' with life-situations, entails many kinds of technical issues. Prof. Mukherjee has this to say: "It should be emphasised . . . that creating an 'Indian English' is by no means the primary duty of the Indo-Anglian writer. His success or failure will be judged not by the amount of Indian imagery he has used in his novels, nor by his capacity to capture the rhythm of the vernacular in English. These images and rhythms become important only if they serve some purpose in the context, become integral with the total pattern, and if they perceptibly enhance the scope of the language. . . . the Indo-Anglian writer . . . is writing in English about people who do not normally speak or think in English. One could add as a second problem the fact that he himself is writing in a language that is not his own . . .

Technically, the problem becomes most acute in the writing of dialogue and presenting conversation. This perhaps explains why drama has always been the poorest genre in Indo-Anglian literature." [*The Twice Born Fiction*, p. 160-61]

Asif Currimbhoy, Gurucharan Das, Nissim Ezekiel, Girish Karnad, Pratap Sharma, Gieve Patel, Mahesh Dattani, Manjula Padmanabhan are some of the leading figures of Indian English drama. These playwrights writing in English do so under various limitations and with a tension as they have to fulfil the demands of both Indian and foreign audiences. Their plays are rarely performed on stage as the performance comes out as a failure in most cases due to the lack of audience's support and appreciation.

Asif Currimbhoy (1928 -) has produced almost two dozen plays of which *The Tourist Mecca* (1959) is the earliest one. His plays fall under various categories: history, politics, social and economic problems, the East-West

encounter, psychological conflicts, religion, philosophy and art are some of the themes of his plays. Currimbhoy's dramatic output includes – *The Captives*(1963), *Goa* (1964), *An Experiment with Truth*(1969), *The Refugee*(1971), *Sonar Bangla*(1972), *The Doldrums*(1960), *The Hungry Ones*(1965, 1977), *The Clock*(1959) among others. His plays are representative of Indian life with all its predilections, delusions and fantasies. An inter-play between realism and fantasy is evident in plays.

Gurucharan Das is another playwright of post-independence India. His *Larin Sahib* (1970) is a successful play dealing with a historical theme. Nissim Ezekiel's, the famous Indian English poet of the post-independence, plays in English includes *Three Plays* (1969) and *Song of Deprivation* (1969).

Girish Karnad (1938 -), an actor, a film producer and a director, is one of the most prolific writers of Indian English drama. Being associated with the "Theatre of Roots" movement, Karnad has made a concentrated effort to go back to the Indian tradition and recreate it in the contemporary context. *Tughlaq* (1972) and *Hayavadana* (1975) are two plays by him written in the early part of his career. Karnad depicts the contradictions in the character of Tughlaq who was at once a dreamer and a man of action, benevolent and cruel, devout and goddess etc. His play, *Hayavadana*, is a bold experiment in the use of folk motifs. *Naga-Mandala* (1990), *Tale-Danda* (1993) and the *Fire and the Rain* (1998) are three other plays translated by the playwrights himself into English. In *Naga-Mandala*, the playwright depicts the story of Rani who suffers from isolation, loneliness in the company of her husband Appanna who neglects her and locks her up in the house. In *Tale-Danda*, Karnad deals with the crisis in the life Basavanna, the great social reformer of the 12th century Karnataka. Here too the theme is historical like *Tughlaq*. In *The Fire and the Rain*, the novelist draws upon a story from the *Mahavarata*. The 'Fire' in the title of the play is suggestive of lust, anger, vengeance, envy, violence etc. while the 'rain' symbolizes self-sacrifice, compassion, divine grace, forgiveness, etc..

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian playwright to win the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998 for his *Final Solutions and Other Plays*. Like Karnad, he is also a director and a filmmaker. He is also the founder of *Playpen*, a performing arts group dedicated to promoting plays written originally in English and translations from regional languages into English. In

most of his plays the unseen and the unheard is heard. But as a playwright, he always remains non-judgmental. He only implies, never sermonizes. *Final Solution and Other Plays* include four full-length plays, namely, *Where There's A Will*, *Dance like a Man*, *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Final Solutions*. The Indian joint-family and its impact on the individual, the sad plight of woman in Indian society, homosexuality, communalism, conflict between tradition and modernity, child's sexual abuse, incest, are some of the themes handled by him. His plays reveal his preoccupation with social and political realities in contemporary India. *Seven Steps around the Fire* and *Thirty Days in September* are two other plays written by him.

SAQ:

How do different Indian English dramatists resolve the problem of regional differences? (90 words)

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Manjula Padmanabhan's play, *Harvest* (1998), won the first prize in the first Onassis International Cultural competition. The play explores the issue of trade – trade of human organs in which 'Om', a character of the play sells his organs to a Multi-national Company in exchange for a luxurious life style. Her recent play, *Knights Out*, is based on a real incident of gang-rape that took place in a compound amidst a middle-class community in Santa Cruz, Bombay in 1982. The play exposes the presence of crime in society, where acts of sexual violence occur frequently and no one comes to help the victim, and where people's individual interests predominate over their social and moral responsibility. The play reveals her conscious understanding of the plight of woman in society.

The two plays by Dina Mehta, namely, *Brides are not for Burning* (1993) and *Getting Away with Murder* (2000) also deal with the plight of women in contemporary Indian society. Apart from the playwrights discussed above there are many other play wrights like Uma Paramer Waran, Poile Sengupta,

Gieve Patel, etc., whose contribution to the growth of Indian English drama is also significant.

Check Your Progress:

1. Analyse the line of growth of Indian English drama and try to account for its impeded development.
2. Discuss Karnad's use of 'Myth' and 'History' in his plays taking into consideration its relevance in the contemporary content.
3. How do the contemporary Indian English playwrights react to the plight of women in Indian society?

3.7.2 INDIAN ENGLISH PROSE IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Indian English prose in the pre-independence period was essentially political in character but with the attainment of Independence a fresh thinking developed covering many areas. A large number of autobiographies, biographies, historical and religious writings and travelogue appeared written by bureaucrats and other public servants.

One of the eminent writers of Indian English prose in the post-independence period is Nirad C Choudhury. He has written almost ten books, all of which have received critical attention and appreciation from the reader. *Defence of India or Nationalization of Indian Army* (1935) was his first literary effort which is a study of military organization in British India. *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) is one of his best books revealing the basic ideas that have shaped his individualistic world-view. The book gives an account of Chaudhuri's childhood and student days till 1921. His other book, *Thy Hand! Great Anarch* (1987) is an account of the decline and end of British rule in India. His 'A Passage to England' (1959) was the product of his short visit to England in 1955. *The Continent of Circe: An Essay on the People of India* (1966), *Culture in the Vanity Bag* (1976) are some other non-fictional prose works produced by Chaudhuri. His biography of Max Muller, *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Friedrich Max Muller* (1974) won Sahitya Akademi Award in

1975. This was his first attempt at biographical writing. The style of his prose is almost Victorian and he uses quotations in French, Latin, etc., in his work. However, his prose-writings reveal his wide reading and knowledge.

Autobiography – Apart from *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, a number of auto-biographies have been published during this period. R.K. Narayan, of the members of the ‘big three’ wrote *My Days* (1975) and *My Dateless Diary* (1960). Mulk Raj Anand’s *Pilali sahib : The Story of a childhood under the Raj* (1985) was published as the first part of an autobiographical series, although no subsequent volume has come out yet. Ruskin Bond’s *Scenes from a writer’s life: A memoir* (1977) and *The Lamp is hit: Leaves from a Journal* (1998) are two autobiographical works written in the same lucid style as his short stories. Dom Moraes, the poet, has published two autobiographical works namely *Never at Home* (1992) and *My Son’s Father* (1971). P. Lal, best known for his poetic translations of the Sanskrit classics, has published his autobiographical book *Lessons* in 1991. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, published her autobiography entitled *The Scope of Happiness: A personal Memoir* in 1979. Manjula Padmanabhan, the contemporary Indian English playwright, has published *Getting There* in 2000 which is a semi-autobiographical work. Shobha De narrates some incidents from her personal life in *Selective Memory: Stories from My Life* (1998). Apart from those writers mentioned above, there are many autobiographical works produced by numerous persons of different fields.

Biography - Numerous biographical works have been produced in the post-independence period. Among them S. Gopal’s *Jawaharlal Nehru* (Vol. I & II) won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1976. *Radhakrishna : A Biography* is another remarkable work by him which was published in 1989.

Another eminent biographer of this period is Rajmohan Gandhi. His biographical writings include *Rajaji : A Life* (1997), *Patel : A Life* (1990), *The Good Boatman : A Portrait of Gandhi* (1995), *Eight Lives : A Study of Hindu Muslim Encounter* (1986) etc.

Raja Rao has published a biography named *The Great Indian Way : A life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1998). Dom Moraes has written *Mrs. Gandhi*

(1980) on Indira Gandhi with a beautiful narrative style. Moreover, Nayantara Sahgal, Khushwant Singh and K.A. Abbas had published books on Mrs Gandhi before 1980. The industrialist Jamnalal Bajaj is the subject-matter of Mulk Raj Anand's *Homage to Jamnalal : A Pictorial Biography* (1989). Ved Mehta's *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles* (1978), Manohar Malgonkar's *The Man who killed Gandhi* (1978), K.R. Srinivas Iyengar's *Sri Aurobindo : A Biography and a History* (2 vol.s, 1972), and *On the Mother* (1978), Padmini Sen-Gupta's *Sarojini Naidu* (1965), are some other notable biographical works produced after independence.

Travel-writing - Apart from the biographical and autobiographical works, letters, travel literature, personal essays, religious and philosophical writings and history criticism contribute to the world of Indian English prose. Among letters, Nehru's *Letters from a Father to a Daughter*, Anand's *Old Myth and New Myth: Letters from Mulk Raj Anand to KVS Murti* (1991) and *Anand to Atma: Letters of Mulk Raj Anand to Atma Ram* (1994), Shobha De's *Speed Post : Letters to My Children About Living, Loving, Caring and Coping with the World* (1999) are some of the notable literary works of this period.

The significant part of travel-literature in the post-independence period consists of the contribution made by eminent novelists like Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Allan Sealy and Amitav Ghosh. Seth's *From Heaven Lake : Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983), Rushdie's *The Jaguar Smile : A Nicaraguan Journey* (1986), Allan Sealy's *From Yukon to Yucatan : A Western Journey* (1994) and Amitav Ghosh's *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma* (1998) are some of the outstanding creations in the field of travel writing. The personal essay is a very popular form of prose writing which is generally published in newspapers and journals. The eminent novelist, R.K. Narayan has produced many personal essays which reveal his keen observation of life in Indian society. In the field of religious and philosophical prose, the most remarkable contribution is made by J. Krishnamurti, one of the greatest philosophical minds of the 20th century. His philosophical writings include – *The First and Last Freedom* (1954), *Freedom from the known* (1969), *Life Ahead* (1963) among others.

Literary criticism - In the field of literary criticism *Encyclopedia of Indian Literature* published by Sahitya Academy in 6 volumes, *Modern Indian*

Literature: An Anthology edited by K.M. George are some of the remarkable works. Besides, many critical works on postcolonial studies and Women's Studies have appeared of which *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context* edited by Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and English Rule in India*, by Gauri Viswanathan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender Culture and Post Colonialism*, by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan are some particular examples.

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss the contribution of Nirad C. Chaudhury to Indian English prose in the post-independence period.
2. What are the various forms of prose writing that have achieved popularity in the post-independence period? Elaborate.

3.7.3 THE INDIAN ENGLISH SHORT STORY IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The writing of the short story in the post-independence has continued to be a by-product of novel writing in Indian English literature from its beginnings. Apart from the Indian English novelist there are also a few poets who have contributed to the growth of the Indian English short story.

The most notable contribution to the field of the short story is made by the 'big three' namely Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao. They started writing in the early twentieth century and have continued their writing to the latter part of the century. As we have already talked about their short story collections in the earlier unit, in this unit we will discuss the works of other short-story writers which had not been discussed earlier.

One of the outstanding figures of this genre is B. Bhattacharya who has published two collections of short stories namely *Indian Cavalcade* (1948) and *Steel Hawk* (1968). *Indian Cavalcade* is a re-telling of some striking incidents from Indian History while *Steel Hawk* contains a few stories of psychological interest.

Khushwant Singh is the author of four volumes of short stories namely *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories* (1957), *A Bride for the Sahib and Other Stories* (1967) and *Black Jasmine* (1971). Later on, he has included all these volumes together in *The Collected Short Stories of Khushwant Singh* (1989). Manohar Malgonkar has produced many volumes of short story which include *A Toast in Warm Wine* (1977). *Four Graves and Other Stories* (1990) is his recent collection of short stories.

Ruskin Bond has published a number of short-story collections including *Neighbour's wife and other Stories* (1966), *My First Love and Other Stories* (1968), *The Maneater of Manjari* (1972) and so on. Pets, animals, orphans, old man and lonely women, orphans, beggars and all kinds of have-nots form the subject-matter of his stories.

K.N. Daruwalla, the poet, has published his first volume of short stories, namely, *The Sword and the Abyss* in 1979. Seventeen years later he has published another volume, namely, *The Minister for Permanent unrest and other stories* (1996). 'The Potting of the White' is one of his best short stories dealing with the subject of race-relations during colonial days.

Jayanta Mahapatra has published his first collection of short stories, namely, *The Green Gardener and Other Stories* in 1997. The eighteen stories of the volume deal mostly with middle-class life in Indian society.

Rohinton Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha* (1987) is one of the most remarkable short-story collections of recent times.

Among the women short story writers of the older generation, Ruth Praver Jhavala and Anita Desai are the only major ones to publish their short stories in book form. Jhabvala's short-story volumes include *Like Birds, Like Fishes and Other stories* (1964), *A Stronger Climate* (1969), *An Experience of India* (1972) and so on. Anita Desai's first volume of short stories is *Games at Twilight and other Stories* (1978) which achieved a great success. She has published her second volume entitled *Diamond Dust* in 2000. 'Winterscape' is the best story in the relationship between a young American girl and her Indian mother-in-law.

Shashi Deshpande's short-story collections include *The Legacy and other Stories* (1971), *The Miracle and other Stories* (1986), *It was the*

Nightingale (1986), *The Intrusion and Other Stories* (1993). Most of her short stories reveal the plight of woman in Indian society. Like Shashi Deshpande, Dina Mehta's short stories also the life of woman in Indian society. Like Shashi Deshpande Dina Mehta's short stories also the life of woman in Indian Society. *The Other woman and Other Sories* (1981) and *Miss Menon did not Believe in Magic and Other Stories* (1994) are two volumes of short stories by her.

Manjula Padmanabhan, the playwright and cartoonist, is another outstanding figure short story writing in the post-independence period. *Hot Death Cold Soup* (1996) is her first collection of short stories. She has published another collection of ten short stories, *Kleptomania* in 2004. Many of her short stories are about the problems of communication between human beings, the difficulties of overcoming cultural barriers, gender, etc.

Moreover, the Indian immigrant women such as Suniti Namjoshi, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and many other writers have produced numerous collections of short stories in the recent times. Apart from the short story writers mentioned above there are many other writers like Monoj Das, Kamala Das, Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie, Amit Chaudhury, and others whose contribution is also equally remarkable.

Check Your Progress:

1. Consider the growth of short story in the post independence period with special reference to the works of its major practitioners.
2. 'Plight of woman in Indian society' is one of the major concerns of Shashi Deshpande and Dina Mehta's short stories. Discuss.

3.9 SUMMING UP

You have, by now, obtained a fair sketch of the main categories of Indian Writing in English. You have surely realised that the field is complex and fraught with issues related to the political history of the English language, the status of the Indian writer both during the colonial situation as well as after 1947. The themes that have animated this writing have only been mentioned.

You have to explore these on your own with reading of the works themselves. The problem of 'Indianness' will definitely remain in your mind as an unresolved question. Perhaps the resolution will spring from a new situation such as we are immersed in today.

3.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

M.K.Naik – *A History of Indian English Literature*, Sahitya Akademi

K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar – *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling Publishers, Delhi

Gauri Viswanathan – *Masks of Conquest*, Oxford India Paperbacks, Delhi

Meenakshi Mukherjee – *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English*, Pencraft International, Delhi

Meenakshi Mukherjee – *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi

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Block 2

Poetry

Block Introduction :

This is the Second block of Paper XVI. In this block attempt has been made to discuss Indian English poetry with reference to some select modern Indian poets. As you all have read about the genealogy of Indian English literature in the other blocks of this paper, what we will discuss here relates to the history of modern Indian poetry written in English.

If one wishes to discuss Indo-Anglian poetry, the first name that flashes before the eye is that of Henry Derozio. This young lad had the makings of a poet in him from a very early age, and Dr. John Grant of Calcutta identified it when he was just fourteen. Derozio is even compared to Keats for his love of nature. The next poet of importance is Kashi Prasad Ghose, one of the first Indians to publish a regular volume of English verse. Although Ghose's poetry is mostly derivative, there are flashes of originality that gives relief to the prosaic and the inane in his work. Michael Madhusudan Dutt shows rare poetic genius in his Bengal epic, *Meghanad Badha Kabya* (1861). He is also noted for his narrative poem, 'The Captive Ladie' (1849) in which one finds the influence of the English romantics. He, like Derozio, succumbed to fate and died at a very early age before his artistic genius could reach its height.

In analyzing the growth of Indian poetry written in English, in the chronological order, the next two names that are worth mentioning are Toru Dutt and Aru Dutt. Toru Dutt's 'A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields' (1875) is noted for her renderings from French into English. Of the 165 pieces 8 were by her sister Aru. Toru's achievements are most impressive of early Indian English poetry. Manmohan Ghose, the elder brother of Sri Aurobindo, is also noted for his deep poetic fervour in 'Love Songs and Elegies' (1898) and the posthumously published volume, *Songs of Life and Death* (1926).

Tagore's is another significant name in the realm of Indian Writing in English. He is the single writer who won for modern India a place on the canvas of world literature. The Nobel Prize for Literature to Rabindranath Tagore,

was the first step in the acceptance of Indian writing on an International Platform. A man of diverse leanings, Tagore was first and foremost a poet. His deep emotions and feelings along with his vibrant imagination find best release in the vein of poetry and song. The songs in *Gitanjali* are mainly poems of 'bhakti' in the great 'Indian tradition'. Deep patriotism, absolute faith in the Lord, and humble subservience to Him, along with love of nature and beauty, mark the essence of his lilting songs. Next only to *Gitanjali*, *The Gardener* is the richest of the collections that have appeared in English. 'The Child' is unique among Tagore's poems as it was first written in English and later translated into Bengali as *Sishutirtha*.

From the fifties onwards however, there could be seen an emergence of the 'new poets' or the 'modern' poets. The term modern has many connotations, but it would be convenient to acknowledge those Indian poets writing in English from 1950 to 1980 as the 'modern poets'. In the wake of the modernism of the fifties, are found poets like Nissim Ezekiel (1953), Dom Moraes (1957), P. Lal (1962), Adil Jussawalla (1976), Kamala Das (1965), Pritish Nandy (1970), Jayanta Mahapatra (1976), Dilip Chitre (1980), Vikram Seth (1985). But with the latter modernists, is noted a new note of lurking romanticism, especially in the poems of Lal, Moraes, Nandy, Mahapatra and Meena Alexander.

Makarand Paranjape categorically speaks of certain characteristics of these 'modern poets'. The first important characteristic is a 'rejection of the past', as was suggested in N. Ezekiel's first book of poems *A Time to Change* (1952). Secondly, they were not enthused with the idealism or romanticism of their predecessors. Their vein was clear, hard, dry and matter of fact, devoid of any fancy. Thirdly, these poets lost all faith in religion and mysticism, the candid secular voice being loud in their poetry. Nature was no more redeeming, as the poets turned their attention to human relationship and wrote about it with candour. Finally, in their disillusionment alienation and their state of ennui that seemed to oppress them, 'irony' became an important mode in their poems.

With the beginning of the 1980's another phase comes into being, although its exact contrast with modernism is not yet clear. Poets like Mahapatra, Alexander have moved into what may be termed as the post-modernist mode by 'calling into question' the observing 'self' in their poetry. Poets

like Agha Shahid Ali, Saleem Peeradina, Vikram Seth, Imtiaz Dharker, besides the upcoming Melanie Silgado, Menka Shivdasani, Sudeep Sen, Lara Patel, are noted as experimentalists with new devices like parody, pastiche, collage, intertextuality—all of which make what may be called post-modern trends in Indian poetry in English.

In order to discuss the issues mentioned above and the poets prescribed for you we have divided this block into 5 units. I hope this division will help you in having a comprehensive idea of the poets we are dealing with as well as their writings.

Contents of Block 2

- Unit 1 : Jayanta Mahapatra
- Unit 2 : Keki N Daruwalla
- Unit 3 : Kamala Das
- Unit 4 : Adil Jussawalla
- Unit 5 : Vikram Seth

Unit 1

Jayanta Mahapatra

Contents:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introducing the Poet
- 1.3 His Works
 - 1.3.1 Themes in Mahapatra's Poems
 - 1.3.2 Poetic Technique in Mahapatra
- 1.4 Critical Reception
- 1.5 Context of the Poem
- 1.6 Reading "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore"
- 1.7 Summing Up
- 1.8 References and Suggested Readings

1.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at introducing you to the poem "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore", by Jayanta Mahapatra. As you must know, Mahapatra is one of the most acclaimed Indian poets writing in English. In fact, he started as a bilingual poet writing in Oriya and in English at the same time. This unit is also designed to help you analyse the intriguing dichotomies and complexes that lurk about its contours, adding to the richness of the poet's works. With these objectives in view, the unit is designed to help you

- *connect* the life of the poet with the work
- *place* the poet in his proper historical age and context
- *realise* the canvas of meanings possible that the text unfurls before us.

1.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

As an Indian poet writing in English, Jayanta Mahapatra is certainly a name to contend with. Starting rather late in life at the age of forty, this professor

of physics had garnered enough experience and knowledge of life to write copiously and publish ten volumes of remarkable poems during a period of fifteen years. Mahapatra's keen perception, his deep insight, his sharp intelligence, added to a strong and lucid expression, and reinforced by forceful images—have all gone into the making of the poetic excellence in him. The reader cannot ignore the prominent mythical leanings in Mahapatra which account for the so-called 'Indianness' of his poetic genius. Even while standing in line with his peers, the modern Indian poets like Ezekiel, Ramanujan or Kamala Das, it is beyond doubt that Jayanta Mahapatra has carved a special niche for himself in India and abroad.

Born in Cuttack in 1928, Jayanta Mahapatra was educated at Steward School and Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, and Science College, Patna. At present, a Reader in Physics at Ravenshaw College, he lives in Cuttack. Mahapatra made his debut as an Indian poet writing in English about ten years back with the publication of his first anthology *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* and the second 'Svayamvara and other Poems', both published in 1971. His third anthology, 'A Rain of Rites', a much appreciated work was published in 1976. His latest work is 'Random Descent', 2005. Mahapatra has contributed to literary journals abroad and has merited much admiration besides winning international awards. Some of his works, though of a fine quality, have not been published. 'The Logic', 'Grass' and 'Lost' are his three unpublished poems. It is indeed remarkable that in spite of Mahapatra's late entry into the world of literary writing, he matured very fast and rose to recognition and fame in a very short time. Critics are of the opinion that Mahapatra's poems are noteworthy for their rare poetic quality. A natural grace and easy flexibility also mark his poems, negating any need to qualify his poems with a calculated foreignness to arrest attention.

The poems of Mahapatra are a collage of local and mythical images. He has lived all his life in Orissa; so the landscape, the ethos, the sensibility of the people of Orissa is deeply etched in his mind. He had started his career in writing in Oriya, and had been well applauded for his Oriya poetry. His translation works include *Counter Measure* (1973), translated from Soubhogyia Misra's Oriya poems. It is this bilingual writing in Mahapatra that is at once noteworthy and also the reason behind the intense sensibility and easy fluidity reflected in his poetry. So, though he thinks in Oriya, as he himself admits, he wishes to write in Oriya and in English too. This accounts

for the easy movement of thought and expression through languages. As he says: 'Orissa is my land, my roots are there and my people. But my training was in English ... I began writing in English.' The Indian ambience is Mahapatra's essential back-drop as an individual, and the English language is his tool to give expression to his experience, his feelings and his thoughts. He takes his "Indianness" in his stride, and writes with strong conviction and deep sensibility. Therein lies the pliability and essential charm in Mahapatra's poetry.

Stop to Consider:

R. Parthasarathy writes: "It is nearly one hundred and fifty years since Indian poets gathered under the common umbrella of the English language. The earliest attempt, as far as I know, to present them in a book was undertaken at the instance of E.V.Rieu, and published by Oxford University Press in 1920. This was *India in Song: Eastern Themes in English Verse by British and Indian Poets*. Introducing the anthology, the editor, Theodore Douglas Dunn, Inspector of Schools, Presidency Division, Bengal, wrote: "The period to which the verse of this collection belongs is roughly the century beginning about the year 1817; and the authors represented are both Indian and English. It is not generally known that during this century much good English verse was produced by Indians. ."

It is unlikely that the present generation will endorse Dunn's opinion. Only Toru Dutt had talent, and even she is chiefly remembered for one, unique poem, 'Our Casuarina Tree'. Henry Derozio's *Poems* (1827), Kasiprasad Ghose's *The Shair or Minstrel and Other Poems* (1830), Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *The Captive Ladie* (1849) and Manmohan Ghose's *Love Songs and Elegies* (1898) are today only of historical interest."

Parthasarathy also writes: "In examining the phenomenon of Indian verse in English, one comes up, first of all, against the paradox that it did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of the British from India. An important characteristic of Indian verse in English in the mid-twentieth century has been its emergence from the mainstream of English literature and its appearance as part of Indian literature. It has been said that it is Indian sensibility and content, and English in language. It is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment, and reflects its mores, often ironically.

However, for an Indian writing in English, there are at least two problems. And, sooner or later, he has to come to terms with them. The first is the quality of experience he would like to express in English. The Indian who uses the English

language feels, to some extent, alienated. His development as a poet is sporadic. And it is partly because of this that there is, today, no perspective at all in which to evaluate this phenomenon. The second is the quality of the idiom he uses. There has always been a time-lag between the living, creative idiom of English-speaking peoples and the English used in India. And this time-lag is not likely to diminish, although it has today considerably narrowed down. It is true that the historical situation is to blame. Besides, there is no special Indian-English idiom, either. English in India rarely approaches the liveliness and idiosyncrasy of usage one finds in African or West Indian writing, perhaps because of the long traditions of literatures in the Indian languages, and also because of the relative sophistication of those who write in English. It is not surprising, therefore, that writers in English are consciousness of their Indianness because, at the bottom of it all, one suspects a crisis of identity.”

The passage quoted above brings to view the historical and the sociological impulses behind the tradition –as it is now already shaped – of Indian Writing in English. We have added this extract for you to recall and assimilate these larger dimensions integral to the writing you are here studying.

SAQ:

Which elements of Indian culture are realized in Indian poetry written in English? (80 words)

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1.3 HIS WORKS

In this section, you will be introduced to some of the significant poems of Mahapatra. These poems are a pointer to an understanding of Mahapatra as a poet of international renown.

Mahapatra’s work, strangely, was not recognized in India. His short stories sent for publication in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* had been returned by Nissim Ezekiel. His poems met with the same fate. But in 1972, the *Critical Quarterly* accepted and printed those poems. This was a boost for Mahapatra, for the *Illustrated Weekly* thereafter published his poems.

Mahapatra states that the reviews of his works were not encouraging. But that did not deter him from writing, for as Mahapatra asserts, he was writing for himself. In 1975, the University of Georgia (USA) published his work. Soon, Indian readers were found to be more responsive to his works. Mahapatra's published volumes of poetry are *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (1971), *Svayamvara and Other Poems* (1971), *A Father's House* (1976), *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *The False Start* (1980), *Relationship* (1980), *Burden of Waves and Fruit* (1988), *Temple* (1989) and *Random Descent* (2005).

His poetry has been much appreciated outside India, ranging from Chicago to Victoria and from Manchester to Melbourne before the Indian government honoured him with the Sahitya Akademi Award (1981).

Stop to Consider:

What poetry means to Mahapatra

Poetry has always been responsible to life. By this, one means that a poet is first of all responsible to his or her own conscience, otherwise he or she cannot be called a poet [A poem is meant to] touch another human being, before one comes] to notice the other qualities of the poem ...'This is how Mahapatra interprets his work. The focus of the poems of Mahapatra is seen to be mainly on the issues that he feels closest to his heart. Born and brought up among the deprived sections of the poor of Orissa, Mahapatra has deeply felt about poverty, hunger, starvation and sexual exploitation of women. These feature in a significant way in 'Hunger' and "The Whorehouse in Calcutta" from the *The Rain of Rites* (1976). It is important to note the dignity with which the poet treats these issues, never letting his poetry crumble into lampoon. There is a startling candidness with which Mahapatra deals with human relationship. But there is neither vehemence nor vulgarity in his treatment. A sober yet robust quietude seems to be the dominant mood in his exploration of the intricacies of human relationship. Mahapatra is deeply convinced of the impact of silence as he speaks of Tagore moving towards a silence he alone could conceive of.

'India', 'Indian' and 'Indianness'

Nineteenth-century Indologists like Albrecht Weber and Maurice Winternitz are said to implicitly create a 'perception of Indian literature, based on a pan – Indian language' and that was Sanskrit. Nehru says that each of the Indian languages 'is not merely the language of a part of India, but is essentially a language of India,

representing the thought and culture and development of this country in its manifold forms.’ On the other hand, the apex body of Indian literature and culture, Sahitya Akademi lays stress on the cultural unity of India by affirming that Indian literature is one, though written in many languages.

Often critics unconsciously speak with a Hindu bias and for them India is Hindu-Indu, and Indian literature springs from Hindu sensibility. Influential scholars too argue that there is a single Indian literature, though they are hard to define with any degree of plausible specificity. Thus Indian writers in English in the 20th century often are candid about their medium of writing. Anantha Murthy admits that his mind is English whereas his heart is Kannada. Arundhuti Roy claims, ‘English is the skin of my thought’. Jayanta Mahapatra would instead say: ‘Orissa is my land, my roots are there and my people, but my training was in English so, I began writing in English.’

SAQ:

How far, do you think, does the poem (you are here asked to study) reflect Mahapatra’s sense of alienation from and a desire for community? (90 words)

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Mahapatra’s contemporary, the Indian poet A.K. Ramanujan, is intensely aware about his Hindu heritage as seen in ‘Conventions of Despair’. Some may find a similar obsession in Jayanta Mahapatra regarding Hindu traditions, in spite of his being a Christian.

‘Hunger’ is one of the remarkable poems of Mahapatra. Pithy as the title is, it explores its subtle double-edged connotations with mature dexterity. The poet-protagonist is struggling against the desires of the flesh, as the fisherman father sells the flesh of his daughter to fulfill the cravings of his flesh and that leaves the flesh of the young daughter exposed and helpless before the lust of leering males. A dominant brevity of treatment and silence looms over the poem, enhancing the intensity at every movement of the short lyric.

“It was hard to believe
The flesh was heavy on my back.
The fisherman said: will you have her, carelessly,
Trailing his nets and his nerves, as though his words
Sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself
I saw his white bone thrash his eyes” (Lines 1-5)

In ‘The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street’, a very different narrative is used. Loquacious and verbose, the narrative style seems to be in keeping with the subject of Mahapatra’s poem. As against ‘Hunger’ here the overall ambience is of a loud and frivolous nature. The banality of the situation could not be better expressed. It is true that the reserved, contrite and sharp style of Mahapatra is missing here. But that only proves his range of poetic renderings. The affected conversational tone in ‘The Whorehouse’ which so distances the Mahapatra, known to the reader in poems like ‘Hunger’, points to his poetic acumen.

In this poem, the poet tries to explore the mind of modern man, as he indulges in the gratification of the flesh, with strange females having strange thoughts and strange reactions. Through this Mahapatra wishes perhaps to focus on the uncertainties of modern life that continue to burden him as he lives a life, alienated and sad.

“Walk right in. It is yours
Where the house smiles wryly into the lighted street.
Think of the women
you wished to know and haven’t.
The faces in the posters, the public hoardings.
And who are all *there* together,
those who put the house there
for the startled eye to fall upon,
where pasts join, and where they part” (Lines 1-9)

SAQ:

Which images or phrases persuade us to think that Mahapatra is pointing to the status of Indian women? (80 words)

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‘Indian Summer’ (*The Rain of Rites*, 1976) illustrates the basic vision of Mahapatra in his poems that is constituted by the tragic, the pessimistic and the somber outlook. Grief, loss, dejection, rejection are some of the moving concerns for Mahapatra. In no other Indian poet in English do they operate in as much a disturbing manner as in Mahapatra. Again, in this tragic consciousness is found the power of his poetic strength. A collage of different scenes of an Indian summer, the poem focuses on the stark sense of ‘existentialism’ as experienced by the deprived, sections of Indian society.

“Over the sougning of the somber wind,
Priests chant louder than ever
The mouth of India opens.
Crocodiles move into deeper waters.
Mornings of heated middens
Smoke under the sun.
The good wife
Lies in my bed
Through the long afternoon;
Dreaming still, unexhausted
By the deep roar of funeral pyres.”

1.3.1 THEMES IN MAHAPATRA’S POEMS

An issue haunting Mahapatra’s poetry is that of alienation, the adjustment in the relationship of the ‘self’ to the ‘other’. Placed in the locale of his land, Orissa, the only landscape that he cares to know about, he is devastated to

find that he is an outsider, after all. Mahapatra has himself admitted, ‘Orissa is my land, my roots are there and my people [It] would not be wrong if I said that my poetry has been about Orissa, the land where I was brought up and have spent my life.’ So he is constantly drawn to the culture, the tradition of the land, the rites, the rituals, the sounds of temple bells, the prayers of priests, the sights of funeral pyres, the gods, the images, the crumbling ruins of temples and every sight, sound and smell of Orissa in a very intense way. But this is a reality in which he has no part, being alienated by his grandfather’s conversion to Christianity and his own English-language education. The poems record the ‘listening’ and ‘waiting’ (the only alternatives for him) in search of a renewal, an involvement, or a bonding. But that is a hollow desire; giving rise to an inner thought, a rationalizing process, a philosophical journey and a series of fantasies crumbling before realities,- an altogether personalized inner space of the poet’s making. So, one finds that Mahapatra’s poetry is that of inner spaces, of psychology, of contradiction and renewed feelings of depression, guilt, desire, lust and attention. In ‘Relationship’, one notes the cloying need of the poet to cling to and understand the past, with its myths, rituals, legends and history, from which he is alienated. Here, one finds the poet’s attempt to regain the materials of an epic culture through a dream-like pilgrimage. The vision comes as ‘dreams’ found in the carvings of the Konark temple. ‘The poem is of crisis, a psychic reliving of one’s imagined origins.’ Thus an intense tension between the inner and outer worlds of Mahapatra grips him. At such deep, psychological moments, silence becomes eloquent. In ‘Hands’, ‘Summer’, ‘Exile’, Mahapatra is seen taking recourse to use of silence.

SAQ:

Memory and myth seem to lurk at the fringes of “The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore”. Would you say that this is a strategic technique by which the poet filters his sense of ‘self’ and the external world? Give reasons for your opinion. (80 words)

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As the landscape and the culture of Orissa holds Mahapatra, the pain and anguish of the poverty-stricken people grips him and leaves him distraught. A deep sense of sadness overwhelms him at the plight of the people around him. Poverty, deprivation and sexuality are dominant and interrelated concerns for Mahapatra. This is noted in poems like 'Hunger', 'The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street' and 'Grandfather'. In fact, Mahapatra says that his poverty-stricken grandfather and his travails were the source of his poem 'Grandfather' and also the birth of the poet in him. Set in the famine of 1866 it is a saga of a hungry sixteen-year old who walks thirty miles and reaches a mercy camp run by white missionaries. There he is given food, life and a new religious order, i.e. Christianity. So, we find that pain, anguish and sufferings of the poor haunt Mahapatra, thus giving rise to a gnawing pessimism in his poetry. As Mehrotra suggests, '... Mahapatra's work is a meditation on a single theme: the daily tragedy of having to wake up in a sun-filled room.' The brooding and reflective mood in Mahapatra makes his poems obscure and difficult as it records reality as an unidentifiable flux.

Unlike Nissim Ezekiel who advocates a pan-Indian sentiment in his poems, Mahapatra projects a unique sense of the 'local' and the 'regional' in his works. For him there is no 'India' but there are 'Indias'. "India is too vast a country for one region to know so [intimately] about another ...' is his candid stand. He further insists that a conscious striving for Indianness would only lead to affectation. What he tries to imbibe is the 'Indian sensibility'. This is that 'area of the Indian mind where space and time, sound and silence, motion, linear and cyclic, word and symbol, melt into each other and it is no longer possible to distinguish one from the other.' So, where Ezekiel's poetry is transparent or concrete, Mahapatra is opaque, vague or indeterminate. Mahapatra's poetry often deconstructs at the moment it tends to affirm anything. Finally, affirmation or conclusion of any kind is an illusion.

Stop to Consider:

Forging an 'Indian' English

R.Parthasarathy writes: "One of the basic problems for the poets has been to find an adequate and, above all, a personal language. A few have been successful. But, by and large, they have not been able to extend the resources of the English

language or even to Indianize it.” Parthasarathy goes on to name Joseph Furtado (1872 – 1947) who “wrote some poems in pidgin or bazaar English, like ‘The Fortune-teller’ and ‘Lakshmi’. But Furtado himself did not use Pidgin English extensively, except in a few humorous poems. He was interested in it as a source of humour. He seemed to have been unaware of the possibility of its developing into a creole. A pidgin, in any case, arises under the pressure of practical circumstances in a bilingual situation.”

Parthasarathy further writes: “After Furtado, Ezekiel is the only poet to have seriously considered the use of pidgin English, notably in poems like ‘A Very Indian Poem in Indian English’, ‘Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.’ and ‘The Professor’. These poems imitate the idiolectal features of English used by Gujarati speakers. Some of these features are also present in other Indian languages: the use of the present progressive tense for the simple present tense, un-English collocation of lexical items, and literal translation of phrases and idioms.” Here Parthasarathy quotes from ‘The Professor’:

“If you are coming again this side by chance, / Visit please my humble residence also. / I am living just on opposite house’s backside.” Our critic goes on to comment – “This is the unmistakable jargon of the *métèque* who uses English in defiance of the rules of idiom and grammar.” We are invited further to understand that “In the absence of a linguistically respectable variety of Indian English, the jargon never rises above caricature. In fact, the jargon is heard all over the Subcontinent.”

Parthasarathy distinguishes the work of our poets from that of the African poets. “But our use of pidgin English, as exemplified by Furtado and Ezekiel, has none of the colloquial reverberations one encounters in African usage . . . Pidgin English in India is not part of the spoken idiom as it is in Africa. For this reason Furtado’s and Ezekiel’s use of it stops at parody.”

In his remarks on A.K.Ramanujan, Parthasarathy adds his insight that “English being a foreign language, the words are not burdened with irrelevant associations for the poet. They are invariably ordinary and conspicuous; rarely, if ever, reverberant. And herein lies their strength. There is something clinical about Ramanujan’s use of the language. It has a cold, glass-like quality. It is an attempt to turn language into an artifact.”

Human relationships or the feelings of love and sexuality are serious and dominant concerns in the poetry of Mahapatra. But he does not convey these concerns with the sentimentalism of the love poets of the Elizabethans nor the exuberance of the Romantics of the nineteenth century. Also, one does not find the calculated cynicism of the twentieth-century poets like Ezekiel or Kamala Das. Mahapatra explores the intricacies of human relationships with a robust tenderness.

Love and physical attractions are treated as metaphysical abstractions with oblique and obscure poetic delineations. Besides, sexual attraction for some woman or women is shrouded in mystery and disguise. Many of the lyrics like 'Loneliness', 'Love', 'Summer' speak of the gap between what is felt and what can be expressed. As he writes in one of his early poems 'Love':

“leave through alone
to find meaning ...
it will not turn
to
a sentence.”

1.3.2 Poetic Technique in Mahapatra

It is true that Mahapatra's early poems may be seen as his vivid experimentations, as poems willed by intellect than created by feelings. As has already been noted, his poems treat of loneliness, frustrations due to lack of communication, moments of sexual desire, the pregnancy of silence, the fantasies of the mind, the clash between the inner and outer worlds, Indian myths and rituals, dreams and reality. All this is noted in his first book, *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten*. In the handling of these themes in his poetry, Mahapatra is noted to use a very significant and often very idiosyncratic style. It is the diction and the play of words that immediately catches the eye of the reader in Mahapatra's poems. As Mehrotra observes 'In the secretive language he mines, certain words recur whose meaning lies in the body of his work. Thus 'iron' signifies calamity, sometimes person; 'rain' a past experience that, though painful, is often remembered; 'hands' a woman once loved and unattainable from the start; 'vague' a sudden intake of breath on coming to a vista in his interior landscape; 'door' the ineffaceable

and inexpressible; ‘glass’ the innocence of childhood; and ‘window’ the quotidian, divided world.

SAQ:

Distinguish between realistic detail and symbolic use of detail with textual examples. (60 words)

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The diction of Mahapatra is pithy, economical, pointed and startlingly fresh. Epithets used are often found to be as original as they are earthy and vivid, as is noted in his play of transferred epithets like ‘indulgent sunshine’, ‘melting festival’. Mahapatra’s poetic vision combines the human with the non-human, the flux with fixity, the concrete with the abstract with effortless ease as noted in the pliant play of words in his poems. Thus, it is noted that certain words and images recur throughout the books, for example in *Close the Sky Ten by Ten*. It is often found that this pattern of recurring vocabulary creates an inner world of significance which Mahapatra closely relates to. This use of recurrent vocabulary is also apparent in the works of Ramanujan, Mahapatra’s contemporary Indian poet also writing in English.

Mahapatra’s use of imagery in his poetic works is adroitly built up by the recurring ‘words’ and ‘phrases’ forming patterns of motifs and images throughout. So, words like the ‘sky’, ‘crows’, ‘flames’, ‘trees’, ‘seasons’, ‘walls’, ‘distance’ become important symbols. Some of the links are discreet: ‘Loneliness’, the title and subject of the first poem, is picked up by ‘leave thought alone’ in ‘Love’, the second poem. So one notes that the recurring motifs and images is a way by which a significant and organic pattern of his concerns about loneliness and personal relationships is very carefully built up. Yet by the mid 70’s, Mahapatra’s style is seen to have become much more mature and co-ordinated. This is noted in his work ‘A Rain of Rites’ (1976). Here he uses symbols from his surroundings to articulate an inner world of thought and emotion. The monsoon season, which provides symbols

for 'A Rain of Rites' is both a time of grey skies, disasters and depressions and also a period of renewal, birth, vegetation. 'Dawn' is representative of Mahapatra's poems using the images of 'Silences', 'Waiting', 'the temple bell', 'Crow', 'Sun', 'door', 'waking' etc. Mahapatra's use of similes and metaphors are as original as they are apt for the situation described. In 'Hunger' one finds, 'In the flickering dark his lean to open like a wound' – which certainly is a most expressive simile. Likewise, in 'Lost' we have the child's mistake in his faith being likened to a mechanical' defect in a 'toy'. 'Dawn at Puri' again has a striking simile 'their austere eyes / stare like those caught in a net.' Similes, interesting as well as extremely significant are noted in poems like 'Taste for Tomorrow' and 'Relationship'.

Mahapatra displays metaphorical strain in his poetic language. In 'The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street' one discovers metaphors like 'yet nothing you do / Makes a heresy of that house', and 'The shooting stars in the eager darkness of return'. In 'Taste for Tomorrow', we read of 'the wind of greater reasons'. In this way, use of similes and metaphors charm the reader with their brilliance and their appropriateness.

Stop to Consider:

One cannot undermine the influence of Imagists like Ezra Pound on Mahapatra. The imagery in the poems of Mahapatra is varied, vivid and most often realistic. Though more often than not, he uses surrealistic imagery as in 'Indian Summer Poem', 'A Missing Person', 'Dawn at Puri' and 'The Abandoned, British Cemetery at Balasore'. Symbolic imagery abounds in poems like 'The Exile' and 'The Moon Moments'. Animal imagery is significant in Mahapatra's poems as noted in 'Total Solar Eclipse', 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore'.

As Mahapatra himself claims in an interview, the rhythm is 'not an English rhythm. It's the rhythm I have imbibed from the Oriya songs that I have heard. It is a rhythm, within me, in my blood. In spite of this, or, may be because of this Mahapatra's English poems, written in blank verse mainly, are appealing and have an inherent charming cadence of their own. The sounds are so blended with the rhythm that the reader is totally mesmerized by the liquid harmony and consummate effect of it all.'

Check Your Progress:

1. Comment on the recurrent symbols in Mahapatra's poetry.

[Hint : Growth of Indian writing in English, the novelists, the poets, Mahapatra's growth as a poet, his initial hurdles, his acceptance later, his vision, his concerns, his craftsmanship, the body of his work, an assessment.]

2. Trace a few dominant themes in Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry that show his concern with the Indian landscape.

3. How far does Jayanta Mahapatra introduce 'modern' themes or concerns into his poems? Assess and illustrate.

4. Discuss Mahapatra's use of the Indian landscape in his poems.

[Hint: Concerns about Orissa, the sound, music, rhythm, the people, the dichotomy between self (the Christian Mahapatra) and the other (the Hindu culture and tradition around him to which he is an alien), the need to strike a balance, Mahapatra's stubborn regional commitment].

One of the remarkable techniques in the poetry of Mahapatra is the use of dramatic monologue. It is neither as obvious nor apparent as those found in the poems of Robert, Browning. Mahapatra's is a subtle, unobtrusive dialogue of the mind with himself, finding expression in poems like 'Of that Love', 'Hunger'. We read in 'Hunger':

"it was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back

The fisherman said: will you have her..." (Lines 1-2).

Mahapatra's poems are organically structured. There is a neat and logical planning in his poetic delineations. Often, it is seen that there is a series of images described. But these descriptions are never taken as quite haphazard or casual projections of the poet's thoughts. There is a studied and focused plan, which however, must not be mistaken for artificiality or for affectation. What Mahapatra brings into effect in his poems is an easy spontaneity born out of deeply felt emotions and thoughts, filtered through a keenly scientific and intelligent mind. So, the apparently unconnected series of images in 'Indian Summer' have a connecting thread of thought holding them together

to bring out an organic structure. Some of the poems are very short, as in 'Door' and 'A Missing Person'. Here, the very words 'unsaid' or 'silence' speaks between the lines. The poem becomes a well-structured thought-provoking verse. In poems like 'The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street' and 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore', the structure is well adapted to the subject in hand. In the former, a detailed narrative is used to imbibe the spirit of the theme, hence bringing to use a format which is long-winded and elaborate. This description, discursive narrative structure is also found in 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore', 'The Moon Moments', and 'Total Solar Eclipse' show Mahapatra's economy of poetic device. There is absolutely no redundancy nor extraneous embellishments in the poems, thus lending an ordered compactness running through the mind of the poet's complex thought process.

1.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

M.K. Naik says: 'Mahapatra's poetry is redolent of the Orissa scene, and the Jagannath temple at Puri figures quite often in it. His most characteristic note is one of quite but ironic reflection mostly concerning love, sex and sensuality in the earlier poetry and the social and political scene in some of the later poems. His style has an admirable colloquial ease, punctuated by thrusts of striking images as, for instance, 'his lean-to opened like a wound' ('Hunger') and 'the one wide street / Lolls out like a giant tongue' ('Taste for Tomorrow'). His muted brooding occasionally results in extremes of either excessively cryptic statement or verbal redundancy and in weaker moments he is seen echoing other poets, as found in the Eliotesque 'mornings / Like pale yellow hospital linen;' but his better work indicates a poetic voice which promises to gather strength in the years to come.

In his long 'Relationship', which won him the Sahitya Akademi award, Mahapatra explores his intricate relationship with the larger amphitheatre around him. It is a protracted meditation on the important myths and legends of Orissa the Jagannath cult, and the stone sculpture of the Orissa temples, the river Daya, a mute witness of Orissa's history. It is best summarized in the poet's own words. He says that in the poem he 'tried to build up a long contemplation on the meanings of symbols on the stones of a crumbling, once glorious Orissan temple. In twelve sections, the poem, fugue-like in construction, dealt with the mystery of suffering, with triumph and disaster. It was, in many ways, my romance with my own land and with my innermost self.'

Stop to Consider:

K. Ayappa Paniker puts Mahapatra's concern with contemporary reality thus: "... the recent poems of Jayanta Mahapatra reveal an increasing concern on the part of the poet with contemporary reality with all its political connotations. From the preoccupation with timeless myths he has extended his range of interest to include reality, still glimmering in the light of reason, not yet metamorphosed into myth."

Bruce King, on the other hand, makes a succinct study of Mahapatra's verse constructions: 'Jayanta Mahapatra seems closer to the modernist movement of the first half of this century with its open ended literary forms and reliance on recurring symbols to provide coherence to non-linear, fragmented structures. Mahapatra's persona is an estranged, distanced, sensitive artist rather than an invisible or playfully prominent post-modernist author. As in modernist writers there is less importance on the material world and more emphasis on subjective memory and the inner self, the psychological, in contrast to the post-modernist's emphasis on almost totally self-enclosed art, forms. Mahapatra's is an elite art, aimed at a small, discriminating readership Mahapatra's vision and obsessive writing of poetry as a hopeless search for meaning in the human condition is, however, a characteristic of post-modernism as found in Beckett's later works.'

However in a different context, critic Devinder Mohan shows how 'Mahapatra's poetry demonstrates a continual rehearsal of dramatizing a human longing for the possible alternatives of the dying process as in 'The Dance of Shiva'. The dying process refers to the dying process of the Hindu myth, predominantly incarnated in the Hindu way of life over which Orissa temples were originally founded.

1.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

The poem described the author's reflection upon entering a cemetery in which a number of Britishers lay buried. But it is also deserted and abandoned now as the incidents happened a long time ago, about a hundred and fifty years back. A number of British died due to an outbreak of cholera in Balasore and their dead bodies were buried there.

1.6 READING “THE ABANDONED BRITISH CEMETERY AT BALASORE”

In the process of reading the prescribed poem, you will discover the socio-political background in India from 18th century onwards that has given rise to a very strong body of literature i.e. the Indo-Anglian literature, later to be known as the Indian writing in English. You will also discover different poets and their contributions before the times of Mahapatra in the 20th century. As you read the work of Mahapatra you will be aware of the subtle power and the quiet force that makes him stand out and win accolades in the West before he is recognized in the East (i.e. India).

At the very beginning of the poem ‘The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore’ Mahapatra confronts, or even poses for us, a problem: “This is history.” Why does he call the dead “archaic”? This succeeds in splitting the idea of past history as capable of living and also... dead... ‘This is history’. Then follows the need to understand and appreciate the annals of the past, a need to identify and assimilate as the poet moves on in life, alienated and alone. ‘This is history’ – this is a statement with multiple meanings. Is ‘this’ something to be forgotten as an irrelevant past? Or is ‘this’ again a ‘history’ a significant tradition of the poet to ferret out and cling onto for a fuller understanding of one’s identity. The dichotomy, the dilemma in the mind of the poet continues. He perhaps should be quite detached. The crumbling ruins of the abandoned cemetery at Balasore should not incite any interest in him. For, certainly, the cemetery is just a record of history, of some events that occurred in the past at Balasore.

The crisis of culture and tradition that Mahapatra is a victim of makes him revolt. He does not wish to have any kind of bonding with those dead and buried in the cemetery, the Christians—who are technically akin to him but he shies away from any kind of kinship with them. A deep trauma descends upon him, leaving him isolated, unconnected and utterly alone. He is in a ‘coma of alienated decay’—a terrible state of ennui and inaction. For as he stands between the dead of the past and his vibrant present, the throbbing reality of Orissa which he knows and wants to relate to, he finds that he is more than ever an alien and a misfit.

SAQ:

How does the poet emphasize or evoke a sense of loneliness? (60 words)

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Mahapatra points out that if it was not for his accidental initiation into Christianity, an event of the near past, - if he had been a part of the ancient culture and tradition of Orissa, perhaps he would have lived a more meaningful life. Now, it is not so. A silent acceptance of his Christian order (weed) is the only alternative. So, he asks himself “will it matter if I know who the victims [at the cemetery], were, who survived?” It is not through any sense of belonging that he makes a visit to the cemetery of Balasore. However, the poet does make his visit. He walks about the 39 graves, the history of their lives reflected on the dead stones, having really no meaning for him. The poet’s intrusion is watched warily by the lizard and the scorpion, full of suspicion, curiosity. Here, the animal imagery accentuates his alien, dehumanized self. As the poet moves about he reads the epitaphs, young women of the age of 19 and 17 lie buried there. They were somebody’s wife, somebody’s daughter. Cholera had robbed them of life.

“Of what concern to me is a vanished Empire?”-the question is rhetorical but its abruptness seems to suddenly break into the listing of names and dates.

A strong rejection of the poets inherited tradition is expressed. He is not concerned about the dead as a part of his Christian origin. But it is something more than that, that pulls him towards the dead. It is the pain, the anguish of humanity that touches Mahapatra and leaves him troubled. The sufferings of the youth who have died have touched the heart of Mahapatra. He has been devastated by their sufferings. This is the same pain that affects the youth in the present, living in the shacks beyond the cemetery. Suffering has closed the distance between past and the present, the dead and the living.

SAQ:

Explain the function of the last 3 stanzas of the poem in bringing out the theme. (50 words)

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The poet focuses on an anchor, a discarded iron piece which stands erect in the ground. A curious metaphysical strain seems to seep into Mahapatra's perception with the concept of the 'anchor'. The 'anchor' stands with the constancy of the gravitational pull of the earth. The piece of iron, the rusted anchor, entrenched in the...is constant and continuing-like history. History, that is, in the sense of accumulated events and records. It Past and present, keeping one stretch of time alive, it suppresses theof the new. Mahapatra is playing with the word "anchor", because an anchor gives stability and continuity, but it also tends to ward off the new.

Mahapatra's poetic vision is complemented by his mature and sophisticated poetic vein. In keeping with his gnawing poetic concerns, his poetic images are complex, abstract but nonetheless vivid and satisfying. Often, his images may appear disconnected, but to the discerning eye a meaningful and significant thread seems to run through them, lending a subtle charm in the bargain. In 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore' the crumbling grave yard is the dominant image. This compelling image is highlighted by the minor details of 'alienated decay', the 'archaic dead, the 'bramble and grass', 'weed', the 'thirty-nine graves'. As one reads on, keeping in mind the series of images, one is conscious of the quiet interplay of the 'objective' and 'subjective' worlds in Mahapatra. The poet physically observes the 'ruins of stone and marble' the crumbling wall of brick, And though he apparently continues to describe the grave-yard as 'the coma of alienated decay', there has already been a change in the 'subject' of discussion. For, it is 'he' who is the 'alienated' one decaying with inaction, or in a state of 'living death' which is his 'coma'. So, the poet too is no more alive, than the 'archaic dead' in the graves. In this way Mahapatra is seen to give a new

thrust to the modernist movement in Indian poetry in English that work around concrete experience, a rational thinking and the imagist technique.

SAQ:

Make a list of the words in Mahapatra's poem, "The Abandoned British Cemetery" that create a feeling of alienation. (70 words)

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Mahapatra's deep-seated restiveness at his identity crisis is succinctly evoked by the image of 'a twilight of baleful littoral'. He is in a twilight zone, shady and undetermined. The image of the 'littoral', points to the Mahapatra's alien self, 'bordering' on the two contradictory worlds. So, his affiliation to the British Cemetery is superficial, as he is only a part of, the 'flaking history', which is another striking image. In 'The tribe of grass, in the cracks of my eyes', - 'grass' and 'eyes' are unusual but compelling images in the context. Here 'grass' suggests that which is concrete, apparent and 'cracks of my eyes' point to the keen discerning eye of the poet, which enables him to see beyond the superficial calm.

The image of 'iron' next gains importance towards the end of the poem. Starting with its physical reality, the poet points to its permanence, its erect unrelenting stance under the constant effect of earth's gravity. But suddenly this conviction becomes too banal. It may appear to be a succour, to hold history together, but it is also unconvincing as it stifles the survivor's cry and thus distorts history. Faith, belief history is thus questioned by Mahapatra. What is important to him is 'humanity', - human problems, the need to sympathise with the sufferings of man. This is what he wishes to do as he wanders through the crumbling ruins of the British Cemetery as also in other places of ruin as found in poems like 'Relationships'.

The poet speaks of the 'scrawny lizard', the hooded 'scorpion'. They watch the poet closely as he walks about the cemetery. They sense his distress, his alienation. Their eerie, macabre physical states emphasise the terrible

loneliness, and the crisis in his mind. These animal images also seem to embody the gloom that shrouds the cemetery as well as that which infests the consciousness of the poet. The words used by Mahapatra in 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore' display clarity and conviction as they describe the object and then spiral off to complex and intricate patterns of suggestions and meanings. The repetition of the words 'history', 'legend', 'grass', 'eye', 'dead', 'ruin' are significant in the poem. The phrases like 'alienated decay', 'archaic dead', 'flaking history', 'baleful littoral', 'timeless ennui', 'final bone', 'useless rain', 'survivors issuing cry' lend a deep poetic resonance to Mahapatra's constant preoccupations.

The structure of 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore' is much more detailed than that found in most of Mahapatra's poem. The narrative is slow, as if in keeping with the discursive, rationalizing philosophizing thoughts in the poet's mind. The rhythm is easy, flexible in perfect harmony with the flow of Mahapatra's thoughts:

"It is the cholera still, death's sickly trickle,
that plagues the sleepy shacks beyond this hump of earth,
moving easily, swiftly, with Quick power
through both past and present ..."(Lines: 27-30)

Rhetorical questions abound in the poem. Mahapatra seems to doubly assert his stand, his convictions, as he debates various queries in his mind. So we read -

'How exactly should the archaic dead make me behave?' (Line: 4)

or

'Will it matter if I know who the victims were, who survived?' (Line: 8)

However, the key utterance in the poem is:

'Of what concern to me is a vanished Empire?' (Line: 21)

It is this question that is the very crux of Mahapatra's concern in 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore'. In the poem the reader however, finds a mature Mahapatra, reaching out to the past to redefine human predicament through the ages, the past, present and the future. In a style which is poetic and compelling, with forceful metaphors and images, along with a powerful diction, Mahapatra has turned his solitary sauntering around

an abandoned cemetery to bring out a range of deep philosophical musings on the sufferings and pain of man and his states of helplessness down the ages.

Check Your Progress:

1. Parallel to the Symbolist-Surrealistic Stream, do you think that Mahapatra depends on the resources of the unconscious in his poem 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore'?
2. What arguments does Mahapatra put forward to justify his visit to the cemetery? How does he project a paradoxical combination of both detachment and philosophical concerns?
3. What does the piece of 'iron' stand for? Explain Mahapatra's symbolism.
4. Discuss the style of Mahapatra in 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore'.

1.7 SUMMING UP

In the previous sections attempt has been made to give you a brief introduction to Jayanta Mahapatra. In the introductory sections, we have tried to estimate the achievement of Mahapatra by referring to the salient traits of his writings and the various influences that have shaped his creative genius. In analyzing the basic facts of his life, attention has been drawn to his accidental initiation into the Christian religion and its consequences. The land of Orissa and its compelling influence upon Mahapatra is a noteworthy feature in the study of his works. It is against this background that the themes, the style, the critical assessment of Mahapatra are all discussed regarding his poems on the whole, with special reference to 'The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore'.

Mahapatra has reiterated that he took to writing poetry seriously at an age when most poets would have established themselves. But within the short period of his writing he has achieved eminence. His acute Indian sensibility, his mastery of the English language, his mythopoeic imagination, his poetic

diction, the startling images, his eye for clinical detail, his deep sense of humanity have all contributed to his greatness as a poet.

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Unit 2

Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla

Contents:

- 2.1 Objectives
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 - 2.6.1 Reading “Hawk”
 - 2.6.2 Reading “Wolf”
- 2.7 Summing Up
- 2.8 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit intends to introduce you to modern poet, Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla who has carved a niche for himself in Indian English literature. Like Jayanta Mahapatra, Daruwalla also brings in contemporary issues through his verses, as we see in “Hawk” and “Wolf”. After working through this unit you should be able to

- *explain* the nature of Daruwalla’s poetry
- *identify* the imagery and other literary devices,

2.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla was born in Lahore in 1937. He studied in Government College in Ludhiana and joined the police services as an officer

under the government of India. At present he lives in New Delhi. A synthesis of a police officer and a poet lends reality to his poetry because literature always “reflects” society in some subtle way. Daruwalla is notable for consistency in expression and maturity of thought which are two of the major aspects of his verses. He has been regarded by our critics as the follower of a neo-modernist tradition in style and technique as well as subject-matter. We notice a kind of a consciousness towards his craft, on his part, as a poet. Besides, we may see his awareness regarding tone, structure and control.

In our discussion we have to keep in mind the fact that Daruwalla started writing poetry only in the late seventies and that he was influenced by contemporary poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das and others. Daruwalla employed a bold and powerful imagery to speak of the evils of the present-day world. Being a police officer he gained a first-hand experience of a violence-torn society wherein everything in its worst, immoral form may take place. You may see how issues of famine, flood, corruption, an obsession with communal identity, lovelessness, black-marketing, orthodoxy, rootlessness and all sorts of contemporary subjects have been handled as the matter of his poetry. We may believe that his direct experiences helped him in understanding the problems of our society which have been ‘realistically’ produced in words. However, through all these we also see him portraying a society in verse that is full of people who are helpless, alienated individuals, and rootless, too. Daruwalla has not left the theme of ‘crisis of identity’ untouched or unnoticed resulting from these causes, in his poems. He has sensibly put to question present-day problems, and thus has touched the reader by exposing this sense of a loss of identity of modern man. All these, he believes, are the outcome of a commercialized civilization. Daruwalla finds:

“The unrest of desire is lit up with eyes.
Whatever mask you slap upon your face,
However you tear at the soft throat of life
And probe the salt-blood with your insistent tongue
The unrest of desire is revealed by eyes.”

(“The Unrest of Desire”)

Daruwalla expresses the restlessness of modern man in the above verse with the help of powerful images like ‘unrest of desire’, ‘soft throat of life’ and ‘salt-blood with your insistent tongue’. The verse may be taken for the perfect example of his excellence in exploring the theme of contemporary issues as well as the expression of a modernist poet having direct contact with social machinery.

Stop to Consider:

According to Bruce King, Nissim Ezekiel shows that one need not be always self-consciously Indian to write about one’s Indian self and that an Indian poetry can very well express the experiences of the educated and urbanized people of India without being preoccupied with mythology, peasants and nationalist slogans. Subsequently, with Ezekiel a post colonial Indian poetry started reflecting the lives and identities that an increasing number of educated Indians would know or seek. Being a Jew and raised as a secular rationalist by his scientist father made Ezekiel an outsider to Hindu-Muslim culture which finally made him the representative voice of the urbanized, western educated Indian. (BK 92)

Now you will observe that a poet in modern times creates something beyond the fragile literary world which expresses his anger, frustration, desire to change the world, question of human values and the like. You should understand why and how Daruwalla projects his thoughts in the poems, ‘Hawk’ and ‘Wolf’.

SAQ:

Would you assume that Daruwalla often highlights tension between the ‘literary’ claims of poetry and the ‘reality’ claims of a police –officer’s knowledge? (100 words)

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.....

2.3 HIS WORKS

When we discuss Daruwalla as a poet we must refer to the following volumes of his poetry:

Under Orion (1970), *Apparition in April* (1971), *Crossing of Rivers* (1976), *Winter Poems* (1980), *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982) and *Landscapes* (1987). For the *Keeper of the Dead* he was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Academy award in 1984. All these works establish the fame of Daruwalla as a modern poet who adds a distinctive flavour to his themes and form. So, far as we are concerned with Daruwalla's works, we notice that he is different from the older poets in terms of the subject-matter and treatment. Though a patterning is present in his verses yet it is incoherent. In our reading of his poetry we find that his way of writing is mostly narrative. Using the dramatic monologues and free verse as literary weapons the poet makes a complete departure from the already established tradition of rhyming romantic poetry to a newer tradition labeled as 'modern' poetry regarding theme and style. All these volumes of poetry written by Daruwalla record his interest not only in ancient history but also in the recent themes displaying a sense of 'bleak realism'. He questions why there is everywhere the ugly and dreadful things instead of the flower, the candle and the other good objects which influence him to write about. He believes that the good elements in society carry peace to this violence-torn world.

Talking about the use of English in Indian poetry, Bruce King's survey of the scene of Indian poetry reveals that "whereas the significant poetry of the '50s and early '60s was primarily the personal short lyric, often confessional or argumentative, in the mid '60s poets found new modes of expression. While Ezekiel and Ramanujan were already familiar with American poetry, the American influence on Indian poetry became more significant in the mid '60s, when Daruwalla, Shiv Kumar and others began to aim for a less formal, direct personal voice and diction and to write about ordinary experience in recognizable locations. The Man-alone-in-a-hostile world attitude, with its sense of opposition, cynicism and the ironies of life, found in the poetry of Daruwalla, has its affinities in American literature, as does Daruwalla's trust in the speaking voice. Although he continues to use traditional prosody and formal stanzaic shapes, the voice seems closer to the experience of the senses than in previous Indian poetry where there was often a distance between moral reflection and actuality. There is also

openness, especially noticeable in middle portions of the poem, as if association were taking over from logic. Narrative becomes experience itself instead of an example in an argument.” (BK-6)

Stop to Consider:

If we discuss our poetry in terms of ‘English’ influences we note that the earlier Indian poets were greatly influenced by Byron, Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth and the formulation of the tone , texture, syntax carried this spirit, form and expression. Poets like Henry Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Aru Dutt, Ramesh Chander Dutt, Monmohan Ghose exhibited their love of history and landscape of India in their poetry.

The ‘Minutes’ of Macaulay can be seen as heralding the power of knowledge and some considered it as a conspiracy to destroy India’s culture and identity. So the Indian poets with the help of English language created content by introducing Indian themes from history and mythology. Rabindranath Tagore introduced mysticism and the Bhakti cult into the foreign medium. Again, Sri Aurobindo fused the language with a distinct aim incorporating myths, conception of creation and evolution. The great evocative power and sensuousness of Sri Aurobindo’s poetry is unparalleled in Indian poetry in English. Sarojini Naidu, the woman poet, and politician as well, used the foreign language as a vehicle of expression and she did not bring in the east -west encounter in her poetry. Pre-independence Indian poets used the language to show their competence and not to exhibit their slavery.

Post-independence Indian poets like Kamala Das, R. Parthasarathy, A.K. Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes demonstrate a totally different ethos regarding the use of the foreign language and for them, to adopt it, is not a problem but an opportunity. They have indeed gone further by manoeuvring it for the need of expression.

SAQ:

How did the earlier Indian poets writing in English use the English language as a literary vehicle? (60words)

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2.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Keki N. Daruwalla is well recognized as a modern poet by the reader and the critic alike for the projection of newer thoughts. Like other Indian poets who have indicated the bitter realities of modern society, he has concretized the same in his poetry. His ideas are rooted in the day-to-day evil/harsh incidents happening in and around our lives. The poet and critic, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, has stated that much of Daruwalla's early poetry is concerned with things like floods, famines, riots, anniversaries, or things that tele-printers are busy with.

The observation by Mehrotra supports the view of another critic Madhusudan Prasad who considers Daruwalla to be the "critic of his age" and a "fierce castigator of the socio-political-cultural reality of contemporary India". Such views speak of the poet's voice that openly registers his protests against the unpleasant circumstances that envelope social and political injustice. The poems of Daruwalla also exhibit concern for the problem of inequity in society making him thoroughly contemporary as he gives us a vivid and recognizable picture of the aspects we daily encounter. Another critic, Birendra Pandey, recalls Daruwalla as 'a conscious craftsman' who 'draws sustenance from myths, rituals, festivals and religious performances'. A comment like this reveals another objective of the poet who gives equal importance to myths and tradition making the rituals the themes of his poetry. Critics find the smooth rhythmic flow in Daruwalla's verses alternating with frequent changes in their rhythmic patterns. Variations lend a distinct identity to Daruwalla as a poet who can use the vocabulary for his need of expression. Since the modern world is basically a place where indifference to the sufferings of others is a major aspect, we see that Daruwalla transforms that indifference into his use of imagery, irony, sarcasm, etc. Well-chosen concrete images convey the poet's experience in the face of reality. The basic imagery used by Daruwalla directly relates to the animal world. He has taken them as literary weapons to bring in the contemporary ugliness which he encountered as a police officer. Through the animal imageries he projects the psyche of human beings who have lost the warmth of the heart and do not care for others. Pandey further adds, "Daruwalla's poems have sprung up from his experience as a police officer. Hence, most of them vivify violence, death, destruction and death."

2.4.1 A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

Daruwalla's poetry helps readers to gain a true picture of modern Indian society. Daruwalla searches out unnoticed terrain and with a sharp sense of satire, he highlights contradictions, paradoxes, ironies, hypocrisies, stupidities, violence and corruption that he sees contemporary Indian life to be replete with. A growing sense of deprivation, misery, disease and death often make his 'satire drip with bile and acid'. A poet's creative world is governed by his own experiences and Daruwalla's poems have sprung up from his own.

The power of generalization is the great characteristic of Daruwalla as a poet. He begins his poems, on an individual note but without any great effort he raises it to the level of universal realization. The accolades received by the concerned poet reveal his strength as an observer of our society. He keeps an eye like a guard on the anomalies happening in and around our lives that bring misery to humankind. His concerns place him as a humanitarian poet who is more concerned about society than the self. Reading Daruwalla, after going through Mahapatra's poem is to savour a modern cosmopolitan experience after a complex meditation on symbolic Indian settings.

After going through these aspects of Daruwalla as a poet, you will find yourself closer to his poems. You will also see how his experiences enrich the narratives of his inner feelings in verses so realistically that one is bound to think of the issues he has dealt with. In Daruwalla's own words, "Poetry is first personal-exploratory, at times therapeutic. At the same time it has to be social gesture, because on occasions I feel external reality bearing down on me from all sides with a pressure strong enough to tear the ear-drums. My poems are rooted in landscape...it is not merely to set the scene but to lead to an illumination...For me a riot- stricken town is landscape." Such an analysis on the part of the poet clearly reveals how far he is aware of the social evils and their impact on society in general.

Stop to Consider:

If we grant that Daruwalla represents a kind of 'modernity' in poetry we may do well to refer to Vinay Dharwadkar's observations-

[p.195]: "If the context of foreign literatures helps us to unravel lines of influence in the network of modernity, the context of Indian literatures allows us to separate

the varieties of revival, retrieval, reworking, and renovation that revitalize the Indian poetic imagination on its home ground. Although all modern poets 'reject' the past in order to become 'modern', they often end up using the past imaginatively and constructively in a multitude of ways: many modern writers are, quite paradoxically, traditionalists and classicists. We find modern Indian poets replicating this paradox from a variety of poetic, political, and philosophical positions. Thus, in the third quarter of the [p.196] nineteenth century, for instance, Michael Madhusudan Dutt (Bengali) inverted and retold a part of the *Ramayana* story in his *Meghanadbadh*, which became a classic of modern Bengali and Indian poetry; while in the second quarter of the twentieth century, Jayashankar Prasad (Hindi) incorporated Sanskrit myth, prosody, poetics, and philosophy with extensions rather than inversions in his lyric and epic poems, which struck a very contemporary note in their time."

[p.185 – 186]: "Like poems written elsewhere and at other times, modern Indian poems are connected to the larger world in which they exist in numerous, often complicated ways. One of the most common connections consist of the verbal references and representational strategies with which a poem points to, talks about, or even incorporates something in its historical situation or social environment. Another familiar link appears when a poem relates to the world through the life and works of its author, as well as the memories and imaginations of its readers, whom it affects and sometimes changes. A third connection surfaces in the institutions that give a poem its material form, put it into circulation, help it to survive, and thus make it a vital part of its world. Yet one more link takes the form of a poem's embodiment or incarnation in a specific language, its acceptance of a set of codes and conventions, its absorption into a well-defined literary tradition, and so on. Because of this multiplicity of references, relationships, and connections (more of which can be listed), modern Indian poems – like other poems – derive much of their meaningfulness and meaning, their cultural value and imaginative power, from their various contexts.

Reading modern Indian poetry in context, however, can be difficult and confusing, because the contexts often appear simultaneously at local, regional, and national levels, and involve not only the situation of a poem in relation to its author, readers, language, and tradition, but also the relationships between that language and the other Indian languages and their histories and cultures. A contextual discussion of modern Indian poetry is [p.186] nevertheless essential, since it gives us a historical account of the poetry in the various mother tongues (individually and together), relates the words and qualities of specific poems to specific events, institutions, and practices, explains why certain poems have certain features and not others, reveals how the poetry changes by language and region and yet remains interconnected across the subcontinent, and so on. All

this helps us as readers to clear up obscurities, resolve some ambiguities, make comparisons and judgments, discover generalities and patterns and take up positions, arriving at what we think of as an understanding of modern Indian poetry. . . .

One of the principal historical contexts of modern Indian poetry is the variety of movements, counter-movements, schools, factions, and styles that have shaped it during the past one hundred years or so. Throughout the twentieth century, schools and movements have appeared all over the country in significant numbers and with great regularity. Some of them have been national scope, bringing together most of the languages, while others have been local or regional in character, being confined to one or two languages and communities. Some have lasted for a quarter of a century or more, and have involved more than one generation of writers. Others, however, have [p. 187] survived less than a decade, and have been centred around small (but influential) coteries of friends. Most of the successful poetic movements have also produced large quantities of other work – ranging from manifestos, critical essays, and conference proceedings to famous magazines and popular anthologies – which follow different paths of innovation and change. The resulting variety has complicated the course of Indian poetry since the end of the nineteenth century, often creating one set of patterns at the national level and another at the local and regional levels, and generating unexpected continuities and discontinuities among the languages.

2.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEMS

2.5.1 CONTEXT OF “HAWK”

The poem “Hawk” presents the background of the art of hawking which was practised by some rich people, particularly in the middle-east countries. Here, Daruwalla has shown how human beings are the enemies not only to their own species but also extend their cruelty to the animal world.

In the poem, the hawk is victimised for their own pleasure in the name of sport. For them, it is the game of the aristocrat and the powerful who have money. Hawking almost turns into a ritual for them while it destroys the liberty of the free bird. Daruwalla throws light on the cruelty and selfishness of humans bringing in a comparative world of the bird and the man. Daruwalla’s interest in the tradition of hawking is not at all pleasant; instead he believes that human beings are predators by nature. With the help of animal images he reveals his pangs thinking about the bird. We may call this poem a protest against the art of hawking.

2.5.2 CONTEXT OF “WOLF”

The poem “Wolf” is based on myth and reality wherein we find the poet’s fear of a wolf that envelops his past/childhood. With the help of mixed metaphors Daruwalla creates the picture of the prowler, wind-sniffer, throat-catcher wolf that always made a story spoken to him by his mother. Now his daughter will not go to sleep after listening to the stories of the fiery wolf because she knows that the gun is there to kill the animal. The poet in his childhood believed in the stories about the animal world. He was simply afraid of that wolf coming in his dream/ imagination which was the result of his mother’s narrative. Now the picture is different as his daughter is reluctant to believe that same story. It cannot make her panic as there is no scope for imagination in her mind. His daughter’s knowledge about the gun makes it a reality that when there appears a wolf there is also the gun to overpower it. There is no more fear, no more imagination around the wolf. The poet tries to suggest that the journey of childhood experienced by him is totally different from that of his daughter undergoing now.

You may recall it as break from an older tradition and the progress to a newer one where less space for children is noticed. Daruwalla thinks that it happens due to the modern techniques seen by our new generation from the time they understand things in their surroundings. However, you will see the reality of the present day against the imagination of his childhood. The poem may be called a journey from innocence to experience.

Stop to Consider:

Metaphor: In a metaphor a word which in standard usage denotes one kind of thing, quality, action is applied to another, in the form of a statement of identity instead of comparison. Example: The camel is the sheep of the desert.

“His heart is a burning stable” (“Hawk”). Here the heart has been compared with the burning stable.

“His movements are a scribble on the page of death” (“Hawk”). You can discover precision with which Daruwalla writes in ‘Routine’:

“The putties were left behind by the Raj
a strip of fire round the legs in June.

Within the burning crash-helmet

The brain is a fire-pulp. The asphalt

Gives way beneath our boots and sticks.” (Lines: 1-5)

According to Bruce King, Daruwalla’s poetry is “both immediately Indian in reference and universal in its concern with love, death, denomination, self-control, self-betrayal and the corruptions that result from social and political accommodation. . . . His mastery of traditional prosody and free verse, creation of new stanzaic forms and mixture of controlled narrative with loosely associated events, showed a blending of the methods of contemporary American verse with the late-nineteenth century and early twentieth century tradition of Browning, Hopkins, Frost and Lawrence. If Mehrotra, Mahapatra, Nandy, Kolatkar and Chitre suggested that the closed, formal, logically organized poetry was being replaced by more experimental, radical methods, Daruwalla showed ways in which traditional kinds of poetry could be made contemporary in subject matter and style.” (Bruce King, p 29)

Check your Progress:

1. Explain the images/metaphors in the following:
 - a. “A hedge of smoking gun-barrel rings. . .”
 - b. “he can sniff out / your approaching dreams”
 - c. “Morsels of vision are fed to his eyes”
 - d. “the eyelids which burn with thwarted vision”
2. Explain the first-person tone in the fourth stanza onward. What does the tone effect?

2.6 READING THE POEMS

We see that in both the poems Daruwalla’s sensibility as a poet comes to light. He proves himself to be an observer of socio-political- cultural reality of contemporary India. In ‘Hawk’ we notice his awareness of the lovelessness, alienation, and the cruelty of modern man. Images used by the poet in the poems have sprung from his own experiences: ‘a rapist in the

harem of the sky' is a powerful metaphor that speaks about the bird who violates nature's law. The hawk is very cruel and this is conveyed with phrases like 'barbed passion' and pigeon 'skewered to heel- talon'. The rapist has scanned the flying birds and decides who would be his next target. We get a perfect-picture of the animal world from these images used by the poet extensively. The images supply the idea that the hawk kills its prey in need of food.

Most of his images vivify ugliness and concrete reality of modern man's existence. Besides, we notice Daruwalla's interest in tradition, myth, and rituals like that of hawking while at the same time that ritual reveals man's hypocrisy also. The poet's sense of anger is directed against the pleasure seeking that destroys the sanctity of the animal world. However our interest awakens when we note the predatory nature of the bird that permeates the human world. Daruwalla explains the cruelty of man with the help of mixed metaphors and we see how the hawk is ensnared, blinded, starved and its vision is perforated. Using the device of dramatic monologue the poet intensifies that situation wherein the bird suffers from modern man's heartlessness.

On the other hand, we see Daruwalla mixing up myth and dream in the poem "Wolf", to bring in a nostalgic effect. His own past is not the same as that of his daughter's because he slept listening to the stories, told by his mother, comprising wolf and other ferocious 'sulphur-bodied' animals with black snouts. But his daughter belongs to the next generation and does not believe in those stories of wolf. Besides, she is aware of the power of guns by which the animal can be killed. The blending of imagination and reality is an important aspect of Daruwalla's poetry. Again, the poet's sense of belongingness to a village surrounded by jungles where the wolf lives is in contradistinction to life in a city as his daughter is used to. The idea of wolf may be either in his dream, or in his memory but in the face of reality he has understood that story of a wolf as a part of growing up.

The characteristic feature of Daruwalla as a poet is that he is a humanist. No doubt the poet's social responsibility has been the motivating factor in focusing these burning issues which generally are being overlooked by others. The poetry of Daruwalla reminds us of the black protest poets who openly question values, and fearlessly try to protect the victims who face social and political injustice. As a poet he believes that poetry is an essential

instrument by which the poet can bring in a sense of consciousness to the people. It is an aesthetic force that reorients society on the deep ground of humanity. He is basically a poet of social commitment and involvement.

2.6.1 READING “HAWK”

The first two groups of verses set the background of the theme of ‘hawking’ which is almost a ritual among well-to-do people. The poet notices a wild hawk flying in the morning and in the evening and each time the poet observes its behaviour. Being a predator he searches for food with a gyrating momentum.

“I saw the wild hawk-king this morning
riding an ascending wind
as he drilled the sky...”(Lines: 1-3)

“But in the evening he hovered above
the groves, a speck of barbed passion.” ((Lines: 10-11)

The bird has been referred to as the ‘hawk-king’ because of its majestic nature. Its movement has been viewed by the poet as he has used the diction, ‘drilled the sky’. It simply reminds us of the normal exercise of flying to a height. It is rising to such a height far above the ground that it loses the vision of the land below him. The land is filmed over with salt, infested with insects, and covered with grass seeds. From the sky the hawk observes his preys like the crow, the pigeon, the mynah, and the parakeets flying below him. The picture of the bird has been drawn against the morning and evening skies. In the morning it flies but does not kill any bird. But in the evening it rules the sky like a ‘rapist’ breaking the peace, and holds a pigeon with its powerful ‘heel- talon’. To indicate the force of the hawk the poet has used the word ‘skewered’. The poet notices the hawk’s strong movements

“.....But he was lost
in the momentum of his own gyre,
a frustrated parricide on the kill.
The fuse of his hate was burning still.” (Lines: 6-9)

With speedy movements it chooses which one will be the next prey. The next prey would be from the group of the 'black dregs' which are hated by the hawk. We can note that Daruwalla takes care to note the fact that though the hawk is a predatory bird yet it kills its preys for food only.

The first two stanzas are important as they help the poet to build up further ideas of the same bird.

Now have you seen how the poet has delivered the picture of the bird with its natural behaviour and movements with the help of figurative language (metaphors, images and personifications?) At first we see that the poet infuses 'wind' with the power of 'ascending'. By bringing in ideas of almost primordial offences like "parricide", a new thrust is given to "the fuse of his hate" which is burning and will explode. The poet is revealing the undercurrent, the promise of certain doom.

In the third and fourth stanzas Daruwalla details the art of hawking and how the bird feels after it is netted and fed by the man who is the real predator. The poet has said that though the style of killing the prey for food makes the hawk-king cruel in our eyes yet the tamed ones are worse because they are touched by man and their own right has been violated. Man, for fun or pleasure, entraps the wild hawk in the woods and its eyelids are stitched by silk threads:

"When snared in the woods
his eyelids are sewn with silk
as he is broken to the hoods." (Lines: 22-24)

Daruwalla wants to protest because a bird neither wants silk thread nor the 'breast of quarry birds', it wants its own freedom of movement. The hawk is blinded, starved and its vision is perforated. Thus, man makes the powerful hawk a tool of his enjoyment. When the bird's vision is slowly released, opening stitch after stitch he sees a smaller world and his eyes travel at the speed of a storm. His vision is limited now after he is touched by man,.

"Morsels of vision are fed to his eyes
as he is unblinded stitch by relenting stitch.
Slowly the world re-forms:
mud walls, trees burgeon.
His eye travels like the eye of the storm." (Lines: 27-31)

The process of taming the hawk and depriving it of its own momentum is full of cruelty. Though the hawk is fed with the ‘breast of the quarry bird’ it gets revengeful. The poet says

“Hawking is turned to a ritual, the predator’s
passion honed to an art;
as they feed the hawk by carving the breast
of the quarry bird and gouging out his heart.” (Lines: 41-44)

The torture done on the bird is realized by the poet and he reiterates,

“The tamed one is worse, for he is touched by man.” (Line: 40)

SAQ:

Is the poet equating the cruelty of the animal world with the human? Or is the latter more cruel? (30+15 words)

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The hawk wants to fly as before but it cannot move at its normal speed because after being tamed he has lost his power to do so and thus is deprived of its natural rhythm. The poet observes that hawking is an interesting game for the rich who do not bother about the suffering of the hawk and though they feed the hawk with the breasts of other birds it loses its gyrating movement in the high sky. The hawk is stuck to the ground.

In the fifth stanza the mother hawk and son are let out for flying and a hare is given to them as a prey but even they are together, they cannot kill the hare at one sweep. The irony here lies in the fact that being a predator it ‘skewered’ pigeon, mynah and the like with ‘its heel-talon’ in the sky. But now, its prey—the hare on the ground can escape its grasp and

“They have flushed him out of the tall grasses,
the hare, hunted now
in pairs by mother hawk and son.
They can’t kill him in one fell swoop.” (Lines: 45-48)

It happens because they have lost their vigour after being touched by man. The worsening situation of the hawk gives pleasure to the man while we see the difference between the same bird's art of preying. In the first stanza the hawk-king 'ran amok' but in the fifth stanza the grip of his 'talon heel' becomes 'one talon –morsel at a time'. The hare feels the pain in the body as the 'talon-morsel' diminishes its fur patch by patch and its blood cover the grasses as it struggles to move away. Ultimately the hare dies and 'His movements are a scribble on the page of death'. The poet has ironically presented the situation that if the hawk had killed the hare in its natural way the hare would not have suffered so much and the condition of the hare has been put in the following words by the poet:

"His heart is a burning stable
packed with whinnying horses.

His blood writes stories on the scuffed grass!" (Lines: 53-55)

After being trained / tamed by man the hawk has created chaos in the animal world. Again 'his heart is a burning stable...' and 'And his movements are a scribble on the page of death' is a mixed metaphor that speaks of the reality about man's nature.

The poet tries to focus on the issue of cruelty of man as it is extended to the hawk.

The sixth stanza is a dramatic monologue uttered by the hawk. It gives us a clear idea what is going on in its mind. The ensnared hawk says that he cannot remember when he was caught and taken away from its nest. He can remember only the leather disc covering its eyes that blocks his vision. He is disturbed by the burning in his eyes and as the vision is being narrowed he cannot see the sky fully. He sees only a patch of the blue sky. Still the hawk has learned to identify the ones who deprived him of his own right. The fellows who have their own dream of pleasure and to enjoy their lives will learn their lessons. The hawk-king is now determined to catch its predator and he has focused his eyes on the evil. One day he will come down and will kill the man who has wounded the bird robbing its freedom,

"I will hover like a black prophecy
weaving its moth-soft cocoon of death.
I shall drive down
with the compulsive thrust of gravity,

trained for havoc,
my eyes focused on them
like the sights of a gun.(Lines: 71-77)

In this monologue we see how the bird aspires to appear as ‘a black prophecy’ in the ‘moth-soft cocoon of death’ and will dive down to its ruler. The monologue delivered by the hawk speaks of the tyranny done to him by mankind and finally it will be the cause of death for the tyrant.

The final lines are significant as they capture the rise of a spirit of revenge. The poet puts into words an imagined sense of certain doom, retribution in the forms of the bird’s projected revenge, “trained for havoc.” When the doves will look up at the sky for rain during drought there will be the rain of hawks. The hawk’s promise ‘to hover like a black prophecy’ and to ‘weave moth-soft cocoon of death’ gives us metaphors of the grim rites of dying. Death is seen as enveloping, a visible mantle waiting to smother life.

The poem reminds us of another poem by the same title penned by Ted Hughes, the modern English poet. Both Daruwalla and Ted Hughes show the respective endings in equally powerful ways,

“During the big drought which is surely going to come
The doves will look up for clouds, and it will rain hawks.”

(“Hawk” Lines:78-79)

Both the poets see a retributive energy in the non-human world unleashed by man’s own cruelty.

Check your Progress:

1. Comment on the comparison between the animal and the human at the heart of Daruwalla’s “Hawk” and bring out the importance of cruelty in this comparison.
2. Attempt to distinguish between the metaphors of cruelty and the metaphors of preying in “Hawk.”
3. Analyse the symbolism in Daruwalla’s poems, “Hawk” and “Wolf” that serve to heighten their respective themes.
4. Comment on Daruwalla’s perspective on the role of imagination in modern day society.

Stop to Consider:

Daruwalla often allows scope for the reader to look into the contemporary scenario. We can analyze here the other metaphors extensively employed by the poet. If you try to find out them on your own you will obtain a better understanding of the text and you will be able to relate the predatory nature of the hawk with that of man. After reading and further scrutinizing the poem you will know how to place the two worlds side by side with similarities and dissimilarities. If we consider that Daruwalla is concerned with supplying an ironic perspective on modern Indian society, then we should take care to understand that he stops at irony and does not adopt the satiric mode. For instance, the hawk symbolizes cruelty of a kind. But to link it with the human world which has made it an oppressive instrument of great torture and pain, is not satiric ridicule. Finally consider whether Daruwalla is evoking our sympathy for the unfortunate hawk.

You should also remember whether Daruwalla engages the attention of the reader in “Hawk”. We can refer to Vinay Dharwadkar’s observations in this connection

[p.193] Dharwadker, in his survey of the multiplicities in terms of the Indian poet’s resources (when writing in English), first covers the ground of the different movements and counter-movements, etc. that constitute the variety of these resources. He goes on to say: “A second major context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian poetry is the variety of Indian and foreign literatures surrounding it. In the web of intertextual relationships spreading outwards from this poetry, ‘foreign influences’ have played a crucial role in the emergence of Indian modernity. The same is true of the older literatures of the subcontinent, which constitute the ‘domestic sources’ that Indian poets have constantly plundered in their quest for novelty, modernity, and meaning. Reading modern Indian poems in the context of various literatures and literary relationships helps us to explain phenomena that we cannot explain easily by analysing the history of poetic movements.

Indian sources and foreign influences play different kinds of roles, with each also serving several distinct purposes. Some foreign influences work at the level where an entire Western literature deeply affects one or more modern Indian literatures. English literature is an obvious case in point, because it has pervasively influenced all the Indian language traditions since the nineteenth century. Other Western literatures also enter the picture, but they work differently and differentially.”

2.6.2 READING “WOLF”

The poet Daruwalla imagines a wolf that was a part of his childhood or his past. The story of the wolf told to him in his childhood by his mother brings the imaginary picture of the animal, the ‘wolf’. Its picture is projected onto his mind as he has never seen it. So, to the poet, the idea of a wolf is half-projected by the bedtime story and is half-myth too.

“Fire-lit
half silhouette and half myth
the wolf circles my past
treading the leaves into a bed
till he sleeps,....” (Lines: 1-5)

He imagined in his childhood how the wolf looked, where it made its way, and the ‘black snouts on extended paws of it’ all mingled with dread and fear. The poet visualizes the wolf with a ‘black snout’ on its ‘sulphur body’ and he feels as if the wolf is slowly moving into his ‘consciousness’. The beginning of the poem builds up the idea of the poet’s childhood spent in a calm and quiet village against the childhood enjoyed by his daughter in the city. He had believed that the wolf is a ferocious animal and it is a,

“Prowler, wind-sniffer, throat-catcher
his cries drew a ring
around my night;
a child’s night is a village
on the forest edge.” (Lines: 11-15)

SAQ:

Does the figure of the wolf draw a continuity between the poet’s childhood and his daughter’s? Or does it symbolize change? (60+40 words)

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The child believes the story of the wolf told by its mother and he is afraid of it as it a prowler, wind-sniffer, throat- catcher etc. His mother told of the ears of the wolf that stood up when dew fell. And it could sense even a shadow and get ready to catch its prey. The wolf is too powerful to sniff out the approaching dreams of a child and the child should sleep well. Listening to the story the child sleeps unless it would be attacked by it,

“There is nothing
that won’t be lit up
by the dark torch of his eyes.” (Lines: 23-25)

A sense of immediacy is perceived by the poet at the end of the poem. Suddenly the poet comes to reality as he has shared his daughter’s thoughts. Now he has realized that the wolf’s story cannot put his daughter to sleep. The description of the sulphur body, black snout on its paws, does not terrify the child who is born and brought up in the city. The concrete reality of the changing times has gripped the poet and he shows a sense of nostalgia in this poem. The reality has been concretized and the wolf is no more a fear- factor for the new generation,

“The wolves have been slaughtered now.
A hedge of smoking gun-barrels
Rings my daughter’s dreams.” (Lines: 26-28)

With an economy of words Daruwalla has narrated his beliefs of childhood, and the experiences of a father. The picture of a village has been portrayed by him while he has used trivial objects like the ‘leaves’, ‘hedge’ and areas like ‘forest edge’, and the phrase ‘dark night’. The difference between the father as child and his own child stems from their background. Since he hails from the village he does not know how to disbelieve and that is why his village situated at the edge of the forest gate carries the picture of the wolf to him appearing at the night His daughter lives in the lit-up city and she knows that there is no possibility of a wolf entering there. When she listens to the story of the same wolf she thinks that it can be killed by the gun and it is not an animal to be afraid of. ‘The wolves have been slaughtered now’ implies that the story of the wolf is no longer needed by the children as they are aware of scientific stories. The daughter belonging to the new generation would not dream of the wolf, instead she, would dream of gun-barrels and smoke.

A sense of nostalgia regarding his childhood forms the theme of the poem. The desire to tell his daughter a story of a wolf is being rejected. So the concepts of dream, memory, a sense of alienation from the present generation work in this poem. The poem may be read as the poet's journey from innocence to experience. Besides, we can add that it narrates the complications of urban life. Urban life robs the imagination of a blessed childhood while the village children still imagine as they are not exposed to an environment of crime and terror.

SAQ:

Amplify the associations of the phrase 'smoking gun-barrels. Does the image adequately capture the sense of urbane life with its propensity for crime? (50+70 words)

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After going through the above analysis you see again how the poet has forwarded his concern for the tradition of story-telling to teach a child and how this tradition is gradually missing. The imagery of the 'wolf' has dominated the theme from the beginning of the poem to the end while the end comes strikingly as the wolves are being slaughtered. Surprisingly the poet's quest for tradition still remains even as he declares that his daughter's dream is about the 'smoking gun-barrels'.

Check Your Progress:

1. Compare the symbolism used in the two poems "Hawk" and "Wolf". How effectively do the two major symbols convey the conflicts of modern Indian society?
2. Highlight the use of irony by Daruwalla in the two poems studied here in bringing out a sense of dissatisfaction and anger with regard to the contemporary scene.

2.7 SUMMING UP

By now we have come to the conclusion of our discussion. After discussing the two poems, namely, 'Hawk' and 'Wolf', we have come to understand the nature, form and the literary devices used in Daruwalla's poetry. We should always keep the fact in mind that his poetry is equally realistic and ironical. In 'Hawk' you have seen how the poet has satirized human nature, and compares man and bird. We see the poet's intention to show in the false aristocracy-rather, we may call it hypocrisy, in the art of hawking. He directly criticizes the man behind hawking who violates the law of nature for his pleasure. The hawk kills the smaller birds for food and not for fun. We see the climax of the poem while the hawk declares that it will not surrender to man and one day it will take revenge on the catcher. 'The Wolf' on the other hand is another variation in Daruwalla's poetry taking us to the poet's imaginary world. Here imagination and reality are interwoven together when the poet releases his subject through metaphors.

We must remember that Daruwalla uses animal imagery to convey his thoughts. The idea of using this particular imagery is to draw a line between the two worlds of the human and the animal. In his poetry Daruwalla explicitly identifies the irrationality of human beings. Not only on these two poems in your syllabus deal with the animal imagery of a 'hawk' or a 'wolf', but also other poems of Daruwalla record this imagery. You can add that using animal imagery he has given a special touch to his theme as well as structure. As a modern poet he has experimented with this imagery coming away from the old and conventional models. The animal imagery is far bolder to convey his hatred for the bad practices like hawking. Consequently, it can be said that the animal imagery in daruwalla's poetry is evocative of powerful feelings. The names themselves create panic in the mind but Daruwalla ironically suggests that man is more dreadful than these animals.

2.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 3

Kamala Das

Contents:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introducing the Poet
- 3.3 Her Works
- 3.4 Critical Reception
- 3.5 Contexts of the Poems
 - 3.5.1 Context of “My Grandmother’s House”
 - 3.5.2 Context of “A Hot Noon at Malabar”
- 3.6 Reading the Poems
 - 3.6.1 Reading “My Grandmother’s House”
 - 3.6.2 Reading “A Hot Noon at Malabar”
- 3.7 Summing Up
- 3.8 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to introduce you to Kamala Das, one of the prominent Indian women poets writing in English, through two of her very significant poems, “My Grandmother’s House” and “A Hot Noon in Malabar”. As you proceed through this unit, you will be able to appreciate the preoccupations and travails of Das as a person, and a woman writing about her innermost thoughts in unrestrained verse. Care has been taken to acquaint you with the socio-economic conditions of the twentieth century, so that Kamala Das is understood in the context of her times, in the context of her needs and urges.

With these objectives in view, the unit is designed to help you

- *position* the poet in her proper historical age and ‘context’
- *understand* the extent of her literary concerns and the various complexities of the life of a woman that are highlighted through her work

- *apprehend* the correlative meanings and significance of the poems prescribed for study
- *appreciate* the poems in their totality.

3.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Kamala Das is one of the significant Indian poets writing in English. She began writing poetry by the time English poetry by Indian poets had moved away from national themes to more personal experiences. With Das, one confronts a wide range of human feelings and emotions with deep psychological and philosophical complexities. The poet has dealt it all with a candour and freshness which is remarkable.

Kamala Das was born on the 31st of March in 1934 at Punnayarkulam in the coastal region of Malabar in the state of Kerala. Her real name is Madhavi Kutty, 'Kamala Das' being her pen-name. Both the parents of Kamala Das were poets and it is no surprise that Das should take to poetry too. But what is surprising is that she was educated at home and was denied formal school and college education. Before she could really come into her own, Kamala Das was married at the early age of fifteen. She had three children and lived in Mumbai. But Das's married life was fraught with disappointment and disillusionment. A completely unfulfilled woman, she writhes with pain and disenchantment in her writings. It is curious to note that though incomplete as a lover, her husband can be a 'kind' person and is apparently a 'good friend'. But he is a 'friend' who does not care if she is promiscuous. This only adds to her agony and frustration in her married life. Kamala Das records the poignant story of her life in her autobiography 'My Story' serialized in 'The Current Weekly' from January to December, 1974. Similar autobiographical prose pieces like 'I Study All Men – I had to' was published in the 'Illustrated Weekly of India' in 1971.

Stop to Consider:

A Brief Look Backwards

It is nearly one hundred and fifty years since Indian poets have been grouped together through the single vein of the English language. Starting from 1817 onwards, Toru Dutt, Henry Derozio, Kasiprasad Ghose, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Manmohan Ghose have made their mark. Of those writing in the first half of the twentieth century, mention may be made of Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghose (or Sri Aurobindo), Sarojini Naidu, Joseph Furtado and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya. In the latter half of the twentieth century, much good poetry came to be published. But nothing was accomplished on the scale of Tagore or Sri Aurobindo. This began what is termed as the Modern Period. Nissim Ezekiel, Dorn Moraes, Kamala Das, Gieve Patel, Arvind K. Mehrotra, Keki N. Daruwalla, Arun Kolatkar, Shiv K. Kumar, R. Parthasarathy, Jayanta Mahapatra, A.K. Ramanujan are important names to contend with so far as modern Indian poets are concerned.

Of the modern women poets special mention may be made of poets like Kamala Das, Mamta Kalia, Melanie Silgado, Eunice De Souza, Imtiaz Dharker, Smita Agarwal, Sujata Bhatt, Charmayne D'Souza, Tara Patel and others.

Vinay Dharwadkar writes of the changing contexts and their multiplicity in relation to Indian poetry in English. His summary account of the scene of Indian poetry continues with regard to women poets and the context of their writing. "In the post-colonial decades, that world has undergone a new series of far-reaching transformations. For one, during the past thirty years it has been altered increasingly and with great effect by the emergence of women poets in the various languages. Until the end of the British Raj, and even in the first decade after Independence, there were few prominent women poets in the country: in the second half of the nineteenth century, for instance, there was Toru Dutt (English); between the two World Wars there were a handful of figures like Sarojini Naidu (English); and Mahadevi Varma and Subhadra Kumari Chauhan (Hindi); and in the final years of colonial rule there were a few younger women like Indira Sant (Marathi) and Balamani Amma (Malayalam). Since the late 1950s, however, the number of women poets in print has risen sharply. This shift is part of the larger, more dramatic trajectory of change Indian women have been creating for themselves in the domestic and public spheres, especially in the domains of literacy, education, journalism, scholarship, the arts, the entertainment industry, politics, and the various modern professions. Between the 1950s and 1970s, we therefore find women poets like Amrita Pritam (Punjabi), Kamala Das (English), and Nabaneeta Dev Sen (Bengali) working concurrently with fiction writers like Qurratulain Hyder (Urdu), Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya (both English), and Mahasweta

Devi (Bengali), scholars like Irawati Karve (Marathi), Romila Thapar and Meenakshi Mukherjee (both English), translators like Lila Ray (Bengali and English), and editors like Madhu Kishwar (English and Hindi) to bring into existence a large, well-defined emergent community of women intellectuals, and a formidable body of women's post-colonial writing in the various languages. In the 1980s there has been virtually an explosion of women's poetry in India, with dozens of new names and voices in English, Marathi, Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Malayalam, Telugu, and Kannada.

The situation of woman poets in Indian English, in fact, may be a good measure of the change as a whole. In the 1960s, the foreground was occupied by relatively isolated figures like Monika Verma and Kamala Das. In the 1970s Gauri Deshpande, Malathi Rao, Anna Sujatha Modayil, Lakshmi Kannan, Mamta Kalia, and Sunita Jain, as well as Eunice de Souza, Melanie Silgado, Priya Karunakar, Debjani Chatterjee, Nasima Aziz, and Meena Alexander entered the picture, giving it the look of a community of women poets. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Imtiaz Dharker, Tilottama Rajan, Charmayne D'Souza, Shanta Acharya, Menka Shivdasani, and Sujata Bhatt, among others, filled the frame, joining (whether they wanted to or not) the poets who had survived from the previous decades, and giving that community an impressive new profile. Together with their counterparts in the other languages, these women writers have effectively displaced Indian writing from its 'traditional male-dominated centres'." [p.204]

SAQ:

Which notable features characterise the 'context' of Kamala Das' poetry?
(80 words)

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Irony sears through her poetry as Das writes with passionate candour, and in revolt against the situation she finds herself in. It is entirely unconventional and shocking in the Indian context. But Das continues to be completely sincere, being true to herself, both in her prose and poetry. All the time, even as she writes her shattering, but not always too perfect poetry, she continues to live with her husband. What is significant is that Kamala Das

must be acknowledged as one of the greatest Indian poets writing in English who had the courage to bare her essential feminine sensibility without inhibitions nor any kind of hypocrisy.

3.3 HER WORKS

In this section you will be introduced to some of the major works of Kamala Das. Although each of her books cannot be discussed in detail, care has been taken to choose those that project the quintessential strains of her writing.

Kamala Das began writing verse in school and had already published her work in the 'Indian PEN' (1948). She started as an amateur poet using traditional verse methods and finally evolved as someone with a strong and strident personal voice though she did not quite improve on her knowledge about poetic technique or theory. As Bruce King opines, 'She is a natural poet with an excellent feeling for sound, rhythm, phrasing, image, symbol, word play and drama.' Her poetic contributions are to be seen in four volumes of poems which include *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973) and *Stranger Time* (1977). *My Story*, Das' autobiography, was published in 1975. Although Kamala Das made her mark as an Indian poet writing in English, her acumen as a writer in the regional language, Malayalam, is also noteworthy. She is known as a writer of short stories in her mother-tongue for which the Kerala Sahitya Akademi honoured her with an award in 1969.

Kamala Das is also renowned for her prose-writing in English. A number of miscellaneous essays project her as a very controversial person among the Indian reading public. Some of her essays are 'I Studied All Men', 'What Women Expect Out of Marriage and What They Get', 'Why Not More Than One Husband?' and, 'I Have Lived Beautifully'.

In the volume *Summer In Calcutta* (1965), some of the significant poems are- 'The Dance of the Eunuchs', 'The Freaks', 'Spoiling the Name', 'The Fear', 'My Grandmother's House' so on and so forth. This first published anthology of Kamala Das' poetry sets the tone for her entire writing. Of the fifty poems in it, only a few deviate from the theme of love or failure in love. The exceptions include 'The Flag' about poverty-stricken Indians and 'Sepia'

about dissipated and inactive Indians. This volume depicts a harsh sun-scorched tropical world. Against this backdrop, Kamala Das lays bare her unhappy soul, her craving for love in all its dimensions, her longing for her happy carefree childhood and her initiation into a world of lust and physical craving which she tries to rationalize, but all the time inwardly rejects. The poem, 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' which starts the volume sets the tone of all her works. The dancing eunuchs, with their colourful whirling movements symbolize Das' frenzied sex life. But behind it all, she is as devoid of love and true affection as the hollow, pitiful lives of the freaks of nature, the eunuchs. 'The Freaks' vents the need for sexual gratification of a woman. She is in bed with a man who is passive and completely unaware of the needs of the woman beside him. The autobiographical strains in the poem are only too obvious.

Stop to Consider:

M. K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan write (in 2001) in *Indian English Literature 1980 – 2000 : A Critical Survey* : "Four decades ago, Kamala Das had urgently articulated "the muted whisper at the core of womanhood," expressing "the endless female hungers." During the last two decades, several younger women poets have taken up Kamala's "brown burden," and presented many more aspects of the complex fate of being a woman in modern Indian society.

Before the work of these poets is considered, it is necessary to look back at the women poets of the previous generation, and note how many of them have continued to write beyond 1980. Unfortunately, very few of them have, and this includes Kamala Das herself. The publication of the Collected Works of a writer normally indicates that their work is now complete. Kamala Das's *Collected Poems*, which appeared in 1985 seemed to suggest just that. Later, she published only one more collection: *The Soul Knows How to Sing : Selections from Kamala Das* (1997). It does contain a few new poems, but they do not constitute a distinctly new departure. . .

But a very large number of the contemporaries of Kamala Das have published virtually nothing after 1980. Among these are : Monika Varma, Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia, Tilottama Rajan, Mary Ann Dasgupta, Gauri Pant, Indira Devi Dhanrajgir, Mary Erulkar and several others." [p.184]

Kamala Das' early poems are basically concerned with her marriage, love life, desire for intimacy, and the repercussions- which included guilt, and her fame as an author. Raised in the warmth of the close Kerala matrilineal society, she felt alienated when her father moved to Calcutta. Her early marriage and the life of drudgery at her husband's home combined with his callous, uncaring attitude towards her shocked her, and made her subsequently angry, confused and rebellious. She longed for her happy childhood in Kerala, and she reminisces about it. This is also noted in the poetry of Ramanujan and Parthasarathy. Kamala Das idealizes her childhood in, 'My Grandmother's House' where she was showered with love and affection that she misses so terribly in her married life. So she says:

“..... you cannot believe, darling,
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved ... I who have lost
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?”

The same theme is also noted in 'Corridors'. In 'Composition' Das juxtaposes her present life with the time she spent, 'lying beside my grandmother'. As she moves so freely as it were in a wild hunt for love, there is a poignant remembrance of her grandmother – 'I miss my grandmother'. In 'A Hot Noon at Malabar' Das takes us once more to the warmth and charm of her grandmother's house where she basked in joy, her senses stirred, ready for warm love. This is the mood that Kamala Das wishes to relive but in vain.

Stop to Consider:

The 'Confessional' Mode of Kamala Das

As an exponent of the 'confessional' mode of Indian poetry, Kamala Das is essentially one of the modern Indian women poets giving expression to her suppressed experiences. It is appropriate to say that Kamala Das creates a free form, shaking all the established norms of life and art. She was unconventional in life, and she is equally unconventional in her diction, and in her verse-form. The crucial factor in all confessional poetry is a matter of tone. The free verse of Kamala Das, by carefully avoiding all clichés of expression, has perfected a way

of treating the most intimate experiences without ever being sentimental or having any trace of pathos.

Often the images of Kamala Das are symbolic which helps to increase the expressive range of her language. The 'sun' and 'heat', 'house' and 'window', 'cremation' and 'burning', 'nature', the 'human body', 'sleep', 'sea', the 'mythic grandmother' and 'Krishna' constitute her range of imagery.

Kamala Das may be said to have ushered in a kind of new morality according to which the time-honoured virtues of timidity, submissiveness, chastity, and dependence on men are to be thrown overboard. The reminiscences of Kamala Das's childhood at Nalapat House, her family home, are tinged with nostalgia, as found in 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' and 'My Grandmother's House'. She writes, 'From every city I have lived I have remembered the noons in Malabar with an ache growing, inside me, a homesickness.'

The Descendants, which is comprised of twenty-nine poem is the second volume published in 1967. Most of the poems in this volume have similar themes as those of the first. But soon one notes a dualism in her writing, where the soul is contrasted with the body. As Bruce King puts it, 'She seems to imagine overcoming this dualism only through death; her poems are filled with longings to die, especially to drown in the sea, water being associated in her mind with an all – encompassing, universal calm ...'. This is noted in poems like 'Suicide', 'The Descendants'. *The Old Playhouse and other Poems* (1973), contains thirty-three poems including fourteen poems which have been published in the first two volumes. The longing for the innocence of children, the frustrating present of a married woman, the wild search for love, the sexual adventures – hollow and yet demanding, the need to subjugate men with female wiles, and finally the oppressive guilt, making Das yearn for death – are the focus of her poems. This is noted in poems like 'Glass', 'The Prisoner', 'Blood'. In *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* she says:

“You called me wife.

I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and

To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering

Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and

Became a dwarf ...”

This is in revolt against the male chauvinism, the dominating male who wishes to subjugate the woman and crush her spirit. Dominant strains of feminism mark Kamala Das' poetic delineations. In 'Stone Age' Das once again airs her extreme feminist views as she ridicules her husband intruding into her privacy of her mind where she fantasizes about different men in her life.

SAQ:

Analyse the idea of candour and revolt in Kamala Das' poetry. How important is 'context' in this case? (80+70 words)

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3.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Kamala Das won sudden recognition in 1965, and with her third volume, *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), which included her earlier work also, she has tried to build on her reputation as a strong feminist in Indian poetry in English. Critics like K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar compare her 'confessional poetry with that of Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Judith Wright. Works like 'Composition' are a sustained exercise in self-exposure. But Iyengar agrees with Vimla Rao, when she says 'Kamala Das finally appears to be a poet of decadence ... a victim of the inadequacies of her life, failing to gain control even over her art'. Her autobiographical 'My Story' has stimulated interest in the poet in her. M. Elias wishes to bring to the fore her Malabar antecedents and concludes that when Kamala Das speaks, it is 'rather the Nair maiden unburdening her collective nightmare.' But there are lines of poetry written by Das that transcend all kinds of monotonous self-exhibitionism, and the deadening sex and sensuality as found in the following lines:

"I also know that by confessing
by peeling off my layers
I reach closer to the soul ..."

M.K. Naik says that the most colourful feature of Kamala Das's poetry is the uninhibited frankness with which she talks about sex, referring nonchalantly to 'the musk of sweat beneath the breasts', 'the warm shock of menstrual blood', and even 'my pubis'. But these are not wanton expressions of a nymphomaniac. The persona in Kamala Das's poems is merely 'every woman who seeks love'. She may 'flaunt a grand, flamboyant lust', but basically she remains the eternal Eve, proudly celebrating her essential femininity. Eunice de Souza lauds the honesty in the writings of Kamala Das. She is also impressed by a control of form and the disciplined expression of painful emotions. However, her poetry is often seen to get out of control due to callous editing. Das's main problem is not to know when to stop. So, often the cumulative impression of strong feelings results in a whine. Devendra Kohli wishes to draw the reader's attention to compulsions to articulate and understand the workings of the feminine consciousness as in 'The Music Party', 'Jaisurya' and 'Afterwards'.

Stop to Consider:

"A break through to poetry about everyday Indian life written in a more colloquial-seeming voice occurred in the volumes published by Ramanujan, Ezekiel, Gieve Patel and Kamala Das in the mid 1960s. Das wrote in a colloquial and open manner about herself, her moods, her love, her marriage, her grandmother, and the cities in which she lived. There was an intimacy with the reader, a spontaneous acceptance of her life and its happenings in a way not seen before in Indian verse:

Our house crouches in dust in the
 Evenings, when the buffalos tramp
 Up the road, the weary herdsmen
 Singing soft Punjabi songs, and
 Girls from free municipal schools
 Pause shyly at our gate and smile ("The Snobs")

I don't know politics but I know the names
 Of those in power, and can repeat them like
 Days of the week, or names of months, beginning with
 Nehru. I an Indian, very brown, born in
 Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
 Two, dream in one. ("An Introduction")

The shift from the legendary and sentimentalized India of the pre-independence poets to a more socially conscious, contemporary, localized, personal India can be seen in the titles of her first book, *Summar in Calcutta* (1965), and in the titles of such poems as 'The Dance of the Eunuchs', 'My Grandmother's House', 'Visitors to the City', 'The Child in the factory', 'The Sea Shore', 'To a Big Brother', 'Punishment in Kindergarten', 'Farewell to Bombay' and 'A Hot Noon in Malabar'."

(Bruce King, pp-113-114)

Often the poems of Das offer a version of the *carpe diem* theme, a seizing the day both in awareness of the passing of time and youth, and in a need to live intensely. If many poems speak of unhappiness and the desire for an all-absorbing love, others are filled with Das's discovery of the life around her on the streets and in bedrooms. The interest of Das's poetry is not the story of sex outside of marriage but the instability of her feelings, the way they rapidly shift and assume new postures, new attitudes of defence, attack, explanation or celebration. Another very significant factor in Das's idea of 'feminism' is that it is her husband who must comfort her from rejection by another man : as seen in 'An Apology to Goutama'. In 'I Shall Some Day', one reads of her own fear of the attraction to domestic comforts and her fear of freedom:

"I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea."

Das brings a sense of locality to her poems. Although Ezekiel refers to his environment, Das draws on more concrete and defined situations like bedrooms, restaurants, and streets in which she meets her paramours, the rides in cars, the people she meets visits and observes. The most significant achievement of Kamala Das however, is her introduction of 'Indian' English. This unshackles the Indian writers from the language of the colonizers, creating a literature based on local speech. This essentially brings to the fore a new voice, tone, idiom and rhythm to translate what the writer feels with an immediacy as yet unknown.

SAQ:

How important is the reference to gender in reading Kamala Das’s poetry?
In what way does ‘gender’ define the context of her poetry? (70+70 words)

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3.5 CONTEXTS OF THE POEMS

3.5.1 CONTEXT OF “MY GRANDMOTHER’S HOUSE”

The poem ‘My Grandmother’s House’ from her earliest volume *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) is a nostalgic yearning for a life of love and affection that Kamala Das experienced as a child in the proximity of her grandmother in the coastal region of Malabar in Kerala. The poignancy of the poem is heightened as her present morbid married life is subtly juxtaposed with her carefree childhood. Das has written: “From every city I have lived I have remembered ‘noons’ in Malabar with an ache growing inside one, a homesickness.”

3.5.2 CONTEXT OF “A HOT NOON AT MALABAR” (*Summer in Calcutta*, 1965)

Like “My Grandmother’s House”, this poem too is considered Kamala Das’ warm recollection of her grandmother’s house at Malabar and her life with happy and colourful images of her past experiences.

3.6 READING THE POEMS

3.6.1 READING “MY GRANDMOTHER’S HOUSE”

‘My Grandmother’s House’ refers to the family home in Kerala where she spent her childhood. A poem that recalls the happy childhood days of the poem, it is a poignant pointer to the poet’s painful present devoid of true

love. It also conveys the sense of rootless ness and alienation that Das experiences when uprooted from her grandmother’s home. A desperate need to satisfy her love-lorn state makes her almost cringe before strange men, seeking love, even if it is just a little bit of it. But to her utter chagrin, all she receives is callousness, which makes Das dejected, and in a bizarre way, renew her quest for true love once again : ‘I who have lost / My way and beg now at Strangers’ doors to Receive love, at least in small change’.

SAQ:

Explain the time referred to in lines 1-5, lines 6-8 and lines 12-16. (80 words)

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‘Love’ or the quest for ‘true love’ is the dominant theme in the poem, ‘My Grandmother’s House’ as in most other ‘confessional’ poems of Das. Failure in the search for true love in her married life suffocates the poet. She is now a broken woman, sad, devastated and terribly lonely. But she has not always been the same. She had a warm rich and happy past in the house of her grandmother:

“There is a house now far away where once
I received love”(Lines: 1-2)

We see ‘Love’ in more than the romantic sense it is a synonym for human affection and security. So, closely associated with the theme of ‘love’ is that of ‘rootlessness’ and acute sense of alienation. The kind of freedom that Das’s husband offers to her as a writer shocks her. In “I Study All Men I Had To” Das writes “Last week the editor of a Kerala Weekly, a well-known capitalist, offered in return for any autobiography, a month’s holiday at the most expensive hotel ... I was thrilled. My husband said: why not take ‘K’ along with you as a diversion? You seem to find him attractive. After working hard, I shall not grudge you a bit of relaxation. This is what I

mean by friendship. It is hard to find a friend as good as my husband.' The irony of the situation is clear and indeed tragic. So, Das imbued with a flux of feminine sensibility revolts at this insensitive attitude of her husband and all other men, and takes on a strong feminist stand. She revolts against all kinds of male domination. As she defies male chauvinism, she also celebrates the body, her sexuality. Hence, suggestions of private moments '... lie / Behind my bedroom door like a Dog ...' show her brooding candour in her treatment of love.

Even as Kamala Das speaks in a non-chalant, uncaring tone about her various acts of physical relationships, one cannot ignore the sad and poignant cry for a fuller and more serene kind of love in her poem.

“... you cannot believe, darling
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved ...”

One certainly does not miss the heart-rending voice that speaks of lost values from a lost world, one which had once been so dear to Das.

Kamala Das is said to be a 'natural' poet. Hence, there is nothing very planned, calculated nor artistic in her style. However, one cannot ignore the imaginative use of 'diction' in her poetry nor the easy, flexible rhythm which lends variety and control to her poetry. Also, the use of images is lively, original and realistic. In 'My Grandmother's House', 'house' is a dominant image, running through the poem as a firm leitmotif. It symbolizes love, security, sanctity and an identity for the self.

Stop to Consider:

The essential nature of irony points to 'What it seems' as against what 'it is'. It is the product of the inherent ambiguousness of the whole concept and eludes definition. This elusiveness is the basis of irony. Irony has many functions. It is often the witting or unwitting instrument of truth.

The use of irony in Kamala Das as in Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson, Judith Wright is poignant and subtle. The life of Kamala Das with her husband, which she so hates is something which she cannot totally abjure. This ambiguity is the root of her ironical stand in her works. Besides, also a feminist, Kamala Das' initiation

into feminist ideas is ironical. She is given complete freedom to pursue her career by her husband. In fact, she is not stopped from indulging in extra-marital relationships. This again is a queer and ironical situation. But what Kamala Das revolts against is the humiliation of her sexual relationship with her husband, where she is treated without love and affection. Her sorrow is that he treats her as a mere object of sexuality and nothing more. So, although she enjoys much liberty, her deprivation in true love makes her rebel through ironical nuances in her poetry. Her excessive candour about the act of sex, her adventures with different men, and even her craving for the physical act is a pathetic depiction of the irony of her life. Finally while Kamala Das plays out her various roles in the poems of the unhappy woman, the unhappy wife, the reluctant nymphomaniac, she also talks of the 'sad lie / of my unending lust.'

According to Bruce King, Das's most remarkable achievement is writing in an Indian English: "Often her vocabulary, idioms, choice of verbs and some syntactical constructions are part of what has been termed the Idealization of English. This is an accomplishment. It is important in the development of a national literature that writers free themselves from the linguistic standards of their colonizers and create a literature based on local speech; and this is especially important for women writers. Such a development is not a matter of national pride or linguistic equivalent of 'local colour'; rather it is a matter of voice, tone, idiom and rhythm, creating a style that accurately reflects what the writer feels or is trying to say instead of it being filtered through speech meant to reflect the assumptions and nuances of another society.

As soon as 'that woman' (her grandmother) died 'The house withdrew into silence', The simple lucid narration has a quiet poetic intensity. The apprehension roused at 'death' and 'decay' is projected through the image of cold 'snakes' slithering around the dark lifeless house. The ideas of snakes moving 'Among books I (Das) was too young to read' is a painful as it is poignant. For, Kamala Das, perhaps fantasizes about other loving, rich and more fulfilling treasures like the 'books' in the house, and rues the fact that she had to lose them all before she could even relish them. The two lines emphasize the painful longing of the poet for her grandmother and the house with all that it embodies. So, after her grandmother's death, she felt like an

orphan – and so became cold and aloof. The simile of ‘coldness’ as embodied in the moon, in contrast to the childhood full of pride and love, emphasizes the decline into darkness already realized in the metaphor of a house falling into decay. The decay of the present is the cause of the poet’s nostalgia. The distance between the past and present is comparable to that between earth and moon.

Critics have expressed a distaste for the simile of a ‘brooding Dog’ even as they have lauded ‘an armful of Darkness’. They have opined that Das has degenerated into ‘bathos’ in her use of the simile. The metaphor of the subhuman species, ‘Dog’ enters a note of shock, and shocking change. We soon realize that it is meant to formulate her present state of lonely submission. Her life with her husband was reduced to that of a dog, so demeaning it seemed to her. The metaphor of ‘small change’ in ‘... I who have lost/ My way and beg now at strangers’ doors to Receive love, at least in small change?’ reinforces the completely degraded ‘self’ that Kamala Das’s married life has reduced her too. In such a plight ‘an armful of Darkness ...’ of her grandmother’s house can perhaps be her only succour and sustain her in her sordid existence in which, as she says in ‘The Freaks’ : ‘Its only to save my face, I flaunt, at times, a grand, flamboyant lust.’

By juxtaposing the two utterances in the two poems of Kamala Das’, we can read the sexuality in her poetry. Bruce King emphasizes that the “interest of Das’ poetry is not the story of sex outside of marriage but the instability of her feelings, the way they rapidly shift and assume new postures, new attitudes of defense, attack, explanation or celebration. Her poems are situated neither in the act of sex nor in feelings of love; they are instead involved with the self and its varied, often conflicting emotions, ranging from the desire for security and intimacy to the assertion of the ego, self-dramatisation and feelings of shame and depression.”

“My Grandmother’s House” is dramatic like the dramatic monologue. The conversational tone, the concrete images, the narrative tone, the ‘invisible’ second person (the husband here) whose presence is so pregnant throughout, help to exact a forceful and poignant drama. ‘...you cannot believe, darling, Can you, that I lived in such a house, and was proud ...’ The heavy sarcasm, the cold irony in the highly dramatic utterance serves Das to give vent to her acutely disturbed mind in a very effective way. Thus, in ‘My Grandmother’s

House' the poet has effectively cast her psychological trauma at the loss of her childhood innocence with the stark reality of marriage and adulthood.

3.6.2 READING "A HOT NOON AT MALABAR"

"A Hot Noon at Malabar" captures a mood of warm lassitude in the poet. There seems to be a sense of quiet indolence, of reflection and a deep longing to relive a world lost in time.

The poet reminisces about her youthful experiences in the house of her family. A pageant of fascinating scenes flashes upon her mind's eye. It is a hot afternoon in Malabar. The poet remembers the beggars coming up to the house, crying for alms. Then come the men from the hills carrying caged parrots to sell and the old dirty fortune cards which they use to forecast the future. Kamala Das remembers the 'Kurava' girls with their deep looks reading the palms with soft musical voices. The bangle-sellers are fascinating as they spread their colourful wares on the cool, black floor. They are all from a mysterious, altogether different world. The dust on their feet bears testimony to the distance they covered to reach Malabar. The poet almost hears the grating sounds of their feet as they clamber up the porch, so different were they. They are strangers in the world of Kamala Das and her family in Malabar. They peer curiously into their cool, ordered lives, into the 'shadowy rooms', towards the 'well', uncertain of their reception. Then there are the wild suspicious lot, who live life recklessly, wildly – their voices wild, untamed, 'like jungle-voices'. Das remembers the pantheon of mysterious and mystifying folks invading her afternoons and stirring her wildest fantasies. A wild abandon consumes her. But those moments hold no sense of guilt or regret. They were glorifying, happy and wild. Kamala Das longs to revel in the past experiences she enjoyed in her grandmother's house. But she is elsewhere, sad, lonely and quite unconnected-"To/Be here, far away, is torture."

The heady romance for Kamala Das of the colourful and wild group of people from the hills is fascinating. The romance associated with the hills is a contrast brought out in the last lines (Lines 22-24): "Wild feet/stirring up the dust, this hot noon, at my/Home in Malabar, and I so far away." In her adulthood, Das encounters different men. They invade her privacy. But

they cannot hold her fancy for long, leaving her with distaste. She is unfulfilled and lonely. The wild folks of the hills however, continue to fascinate and beckon her for years. Das rues the fact that she is so far removed from the fairyland of her childhood.

SAQ:

Does the poet succeed in building up a string of associations for the name/signifier, 'Malabar'? Explain the lines 16-20: Who are the "dark, silent ones."?(Words 50+80)

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The theme of alienation, loneliness and nostalgia for a happy childhood is thus once again dominant in 'A Hot Noon at Malabar'. The narration becomes a collage of vibrant childhood fantasies. As Das recalls the people, one by one, the lethargic afternoon comes to life, filling Das with fancies of every timber and hue. At the same time it projects her agonizing married life by contrast.

The uninhibited sexuality that Das writes about with such candour is apparently absent in the poem. But to a keen reader, the projection of 'the physical' (albeit in a more mature fashion) is clearly evident in, 'A Hot Noon at Malabar'. The different groups of wild men from the hills invade the privacy of young Kamala on a hot afternoon.

"Yes, this is
A noon for wild men, wild
thoughts, wild love."

The 'local' setting fills out the language with an almost exotic quality. So, words like 'Kurava' and 'bangles' are easily assimilated into the body of the poem. Besides, the pictures that Das conjures up of 'whining beggars', men with caged parrots, the fortune-tellers and gypsy girls, the bangle-sellers, strange unkempt wild men are very Indian in a south Indian ambience of Malabar

The Lines

“..... all covered with the dust of roads,
For all of them, whose feet, devouring rough
Miles, grow cracks on the heels”. (Lines: 8-10)

highlight the strangeness of the figures, but also their rough homeliness. As the poet proceeds, one finds her talking of ‘their hot, eyes/ Brimming with the sun’. Their eyes, dark, silent ones ...’ Here, the eye for detail of the poet is noted. Then Das uses the very apt simile of ‘jungle-voices’ to describe the wild voices of the men. The repetition of the word ‘wild’ towards the end of the poem reiterates the unreal, rather surreal fantasies that take hold of the poet in the afternoons similar to the afternoons of Malabar which she gives expression to, with the pageant of the different groups of wild men from the hills.

SAQ:

Select an apt subtitle for the poem from among the following. Justify your selection. (50 words)

- a. Bangle sellers in Malabar
- b. Hot Afternoons: Then and Now
- c. Childhood and Adulthood
- d. Love and longing in Malabar
- e. Past Happiness and Present Reality

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The structure and rhythm of the poem is in keeping with its mood. The prolonged narrative stance, punctuated with a leisurely rhythm creates an indolent mood of fanciful imagination. It is an apt vein to relive the happy memories of Malabar. It is also the right frame to embrace a need to unfurl inner urges dormant in the mind of the poet. The concluding line without a

full stop, 'wild feet stirring up the dust, this hot noon, at my home in Malabar, and I so far away ...' suggests the happy possibilities that await Das at Malabar, but which are all denied in her married life away from home.

Check Your Progress:

1. Assess the significance of the 'feminine sensibility' displayed in the poems of Kamala Das. Discuss the strategies by which it is projected.
2. Highlight and discuss the sense of alienation that Kamala Das constructs in her poems.
3. Discuss the thematic significance of 'My Grandmother's House' and 'A Hot Noon at Malabar' in terms of both 'Indianness' and the 'Feminine'.
4. Attempt a comparison of Daruwalla's and Kamala Das' poems in terms of their ironical probing into the fabric of contemporary Indian society.

3.7 SUMMING UP

Kamala Das is one of the most original Indian poets writing in English. Hers is a fiercely feminine sensibility that stops at nothing to speak of her thwarted feelings with courage and candour in an insensitive man centered world. Intense and involved, Das reveals a mastery of phrase and a control over rhythm which is admirable. Words flow uncontrolled wielding a resonance of meanings which adds to the feverish poetic intensity in Das. Her introspective style recalls that to Nissim Ezekiel's. Sometimes, however, Kamala Das's obsession with her 'self', including her longings, yearnings, disappointments become unrelieved and stifling so that her poetry tends to degenerate into maudlin bathos. Yet, one cannot deny the fact that Kamala Das 'mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms'.

In this unit, an attempt has been made to apprise you of the essence of Das's poetry through the two prescribed poems. Through a structuring of the life, the works, the influences, the study of critical reactions, and an

assessment of the themes and styles of Das in her poems, we have tried to present the artistic genius of Kamala Das for your understanding and appreciation.

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Unit 4

Adil Jussawalla

Contents:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introducing the Poet
- 4.3 His Works
- 4.4 Critical Reception
- 4.5 Context of the Poem
- 4.6 Reading the Poem *Missing Person II*
 - 4.6.1 Missing Person Part I
 - 4.6.2 Missing Person Part II
- 4.7 Summing Up
- 4.8 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at introducing you to Adil Jussawalla, a Parsi poet and one of the most versatile Indian poets writing in English, and his poem entitled *Missing Person II*. In the course of reading this unit you will find some of the basic ideas and concerns that shaped his work. The unit will also attempt to trace the current scenario of Indian poetry in English within which he is situated. By the end of this unit, you will be able to

- *explain* his main concerns
- *relate* the concerns to the context of his creativity

4.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Adil Jussawalla is a poet, critic, editor, reviewer, columnist and literary organizer who commands an influential presence in the Indian literary scenario. His body of work is confined to two volumes of poetry: *Land's End* (Writers Workshop, 1962) and *Missing Person* (Clearing House, 1976).

Jussawalla was born in Mumbai in 1940. He had his schooling in Bombay and then left for England. The years between 1957 and 1970 were spent in England where he studied architecture. He left studies to write plays, and later read English at Oxford and taught English at a language school. Returning to Mumbai in 1970, he taught English at St Xavier's College between 1972 and 1975. An Honorary Fellow at the International Writing Program in Iowa in 1977, Jussawalla participated in several national and international conferences, workshops, seminars, symposiums and literary festivals.

In his 'Intro-duction' to the Penguin anthology of *New Writing in India*, Adil Jussawalla identifies two common qualities in the literatures of the various Indian languages. The first is the predominance of "metaphors of dismemberment and dislocation," and the second is the presence of "a strong smell of death about contemporary Indian writing." For Jussawalla the source of the dislocated experience lies in the Partition of the subcontinent at the end of British rule in 1947. Partition caused a major split in the Indian personality, which also found expression in the linguistic division of India. Communal riots, territorial losses, unstable borders and big-power rivalries on the sub-continent have only served to further the cracks in the cultural colossus of India. It has contributed significantly to the country's lack of integration. This leads Jussawalla to recognize a parallel between "the obsession with death" and "the treatment of [such] political, social and personal paralysis" in and through literature.

4.3 HIS WORKS

Besides his volumes of poetry Jussawalla has also edited the path-breaking anthology titled *New Writing in India* (Penguin, 1974). He has co-edited an anthology of Indian prose in English titled *Statements* (Orient Longman, 1977) with Eunice de Souza, and acted as literary editor to several publications, including the *Debonair* and *The Times of India*. He also

founded the literary reading circle, “Loquations”. Jussawalla also engages in translations and has translated several important Indian vernacular works into English.

Jussawalla’s first book was the highly acclaimed *Land’s End*. It was written almost entirely in England and Europe and was published when he was merely twenty-two. It was hailed by a critic as a book that captured “the artificiality and vulgarity of this age, the paradoxical nature of our emotions and desires, the unbridgeable gulf between ‘you’ and ‘I’, between dream and reality and the beauty and ugliness of love.”

The first poem in *Land’s End* is titled ‘Seventeen’ which traces the contrast between the sensibility of the child and that of the mature adult. Bruce King sees ‘Seventeen’ as setting the style of future poems like ‘Missing Person’.

The second poem of the volume ‘November’ sketches a mood of hopelessness through the image of falling leaves:

“As outside my window
Leaves fall faded from tree
So let me fall my thoughts
Gone yellow and dry.”

The theme of sterility also pervades the third poem of the volume titled ‘31st December ’58.’

For Jussawalla, in poems like ‘The Moon and Cloud at Easter’, ‘The Suburb’ and ‘The Dolls’, modern life is equated with barrenness while the past is figured as being full of wonder and belief, giving life’s vitality. ‘Land’s End’ imagines a place in England where tourists are exposed to the older Christian beliefs of the divine origin of the world and the doctrines of the early Church that was founded by Peter. However, this disillusionment veils Jussawalla’s own sense of cultural exile and geographical alienation from Europe, especially England, in which he experiences great disappointment and rejection. Jussawalla’s poetic technique is based on T. S. Eliot’s. The influence of Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene is to be seen in his poems as they deal with the banalities of modern life.

SAQ:

Would you identify Adil Jussawalla's nostalgia for the past and rejection of the present as being with Eliot's stand in 'The Waste Land'? (80 words)

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In 'A Letter for Bombay' Jussawalla juxtaposes autobiography and representative scenes from the life of an Indian middle-class intellectual. In recording the war years, the poem recalls the emotions of fear and alienation:

“Who’s winning to-day? Are we on the side of the
Germans?)

My enemy tongue to mark time silently while the rest spoke
treason.”

In this poem the past is referred to as “those careless, gardened days” even as the poet begins his wanderings abroad. The verse concludes with an appeal to the Devi (who is the muse and the goddess of Bombay) to bring him coherence so as to end his wandering:

“...instruct me in my art,
Lacking a legendary muse, give my chaos form.
Should you refuse—the rack of your hovels raising your
Voice
Still further—demand nothing: touch me only as far
As the parted psyche can stand: divide city, combine,
And I shall return and pass beyond your storm.”

Jussawalla's stark style is evident in poems like 'Nine Poems on Arrival'

“Contact. We talk a language of beads
Along well-established wires.
The beads slide, they open, they
Devour each other.” (Lines: 15-18)

‘Land’s End’, after which the volume is named gives the range of stylistic skills that sketch the poet’s impressions of the edge of belief:

“Here in the cramped, pig’s-footed county at last
Where seas grip, the airs kick and squall,
Atlantic breakers boom, the sea-gulls fall
Downwind to sheets of spray, the fast
Seas race, roil, slump and shower
Across the thrusted coastland; where brine-wings beat
The rooted perch of weeds and brine-wings bite
Raw rock or nerve exposed to their brute power,
Land’s End or Faith’s – what must I call
This faulted coast Atlantic breakers pound?
Wave after wave explodes, hour by hour
To undermine my numbed and bulwarked ground.”

SAQ:

What special meaning do these lines create around the idea of ‘land’s end’? (60 words)

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.....
.....
.....

The lyricism of this poem and the stanza pattern showcase the poet’s control over the devices of metre and rhyme. Jussawalla’s fascination with Christian symbolism is remarkably audible in the individuality of the voice. Here the poet addresses God directly:

“Lord, your netted round of deep lifts
Its sweet fish to our lips; yet fishers haul
Against its tented pull do you extend...” (Line: 17-19)

This cry unto God is Jussawalla’s own.

“Land’s End” can be examined as an exploration of a traditional system of form and meaning; it is an attempt to accommodate inner chaos within the time-honoured mould of metre, rhyme and Christian symbolism. The volume deals explicitly with the wavering of faith; in a broader context it is an assurance of the validity of the attempts to contain individualism within the framework of traditional formal assumptions in the twentieth century. In his book *Modern Indian Poetry in English* (1987) Bruce King pronounced “Land’s End” as “an example of the continuing effects of colonialism.” He strikes a comparison with the Anglican poems of T.S. Eliot. “The Eliotics,” he says, “express an Anglo-Catholic religious phase Jussawalla was going through at the time, which was part of his crisis.” King is not being dismissive of Jussawalla’s work; rather he is trying to describe it in terms of a broader historical and literary context.

4.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Commentary on Adil Jussawalla’s poetry stresses that it is complex, ironic, fragmented, non-linear, and formally strenuous. His works evoke and indict a dehumanised, spiritually sterile landscape, ravaged by contradiction, suspended in a perpetual state of catastrophe. The poetry of Jussawalla does not reveal the Janus-faced postcolonial impulse of looking to the past to reaffirm the present. Rather, his poetry is born of a decision to look the present unflinchingly in the face, in all its disfigured and fractured reality. There is no attempt to escape “the various ways of dying that are home,” no resort to a visionary romanticism, nor a nostalgic recreation of a more innocent and untold history.

4.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

Adil Jussawalla’s poems are preoccupied with the theme of alienation; the idea of not being a part of the society in which he lives and the emotional need to be a part of that society. Thus in his poems he searches for and constructs his missing identity by placing himself in the history of the postcolonial world. For Jussawalla this presents a problem; the guilt of the bourgeois intellectual. In an essay titled “The New Poetry” (1973) Jussawalla says that in the poems written abroad he has “tried to show the effect of

living in lands I could never leave nor love properly to belong to.” After his return to India, Jussawalla found himself out of place in the land of his birth.

He told Bruce King in 1986, in an interview (AKM, 123) that the volume *Missing Person* thematically captures this alienation and cultural chaos, but suggests a Marxist-Fanonite explanation for this. Although Jussawalla was raised in a Zoroastrian family, he was educated at an Anglican school. This explains the Christian vision in *Land’s End*, and the continuity of it in *Missing Person*.

SAQ:

Could it be more appropriate to use the word ‘exile’ in place of alienation in relation to Jussawalla’s thematic preoccupations? (80 words)

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.....
.....
.....

4.6 READING “MISSING PERSON II”

The movement from *Land’s End* to *Missing Person*, published thirteen years later, involves a complete shift in the poet’s approach to the craft of verse. This contrast is immediately apparent from the form of the poem, which spreads across twenty-two pages divided into sections, each section being further subdivided into parts with rare sequential links between them. The earlier poems came across as composite self-contained structures but *Missing Person* appeared as a group of fragments loosely strung together. The poem seems to become an open space for ‘free’ improvisation on a very broad theme, rather than a self-contained construct based on older principles of composition. *Missing Person* is an essential part of Jussawalla’s oeuvre and is concerned with the need to find coherence in a country, that is India, where Jussawalla feels alienated. Another sharp contrast exists between *Land’s End* and *Missing Person*. Unlike the earlier poems the later poems are not necessarily nostalgic in nature but are more concerned with the present problems and their solutions. The book is divided into

three groups of poems: the 'Missing Person' sequence (written mostly in 1975), 'This Room and That' (written between 1962 and 1972) and 'Travelling Songs' (a group of songs written between 1965 and 1975).

Stop to Consider:

Reading the three poems anthologized by Arvind K. Mehrotra, in *Twelve Modern Indian Poets, Missing Person Part II* at first startles the reader with an almost colloquial, harsh language that prohibits the audience from taking comfort in the usual, familiar, "Eng. Lit." style of poetry. We are almost grimly forbidden from taking recourse to the symbol of Satan, Kipling's Gunga Din, Shakespeare's Caliban (or Browning's?) to identify the 'Missing Person'. The poet succeeds thus in giving to the idea of the 'missing person' an existence outside of the usual discourses authorised by conventional authority. The 'details' of this 'person' are set out in the second poem, gradually taking shape as the 'speaker' who cannot be understood within the present state of knowledge –

“a squall from the back of his skull
suddenly fluttered their pages,
making him lose his bearings,
abandon ship.”

“His cock, less rutable than his rest,
though fed on art-book types,
Hellenic forms,
plumped on libraries circulating
white bellies, white breasts,
.....
defying the watch-towers of death,
police dogs:
a river of wild statistics . . .”

Poem number 5 perhaps sets in context the 'missing person', showing the absence of the categories which would help in naming this 'person'. Jussawalla highlights the fact that Western ideas did not take the Third World into its account of human history – "Renaissance Europe (our one-time twin / was non-specialist also" – just as even Marx's study of society left out the reference to India – "We're the mix / Marx never knew / would make the best / Communists."

A.K.Mehrotra observes: “In Part II someone remarks of “our two-bit hero”, the missing person, “His thoughts were bookish”, and the sequence is in fact criss-crossed with literary references from nursery tales to Ezra Pound’s *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, and with sound-and-image patterns. Reading it is like entering an echo-chamber that is sometimes also a hall of mirrors. Puns are words inside words, or mirrors inside mirrors, and the faint-hearted reader might decide to leave, as others will stay back to see what comes next, when Jussawalla, doubling the mirrored space in the auditorium, puns on ‘reflect’.” Mehrotra then gives us the glossed passage from the opening lines of ‘Missing Person’:

“House Full. It’s a shocker. Keep still.

Blood crawls from a crack.

Keep still.

It’s all happening.

It’s a spear.

It’s your saviour.

It’s a quiet mirror with hair all over

born

to a middle-class mother.

God’s gift for further reflection.”

We can read the poems as also being rooted in the “fissured surface” of Indian English poetry – as Tabish Kahir has pointed out. Contrary to what the title, “Missing Person”, might evoke in the mind of a reader, of a sense of mystery as to the whereabouts of such a ‘person’, we must note that the poet leads us to the difficulty of naming and of coining the appropriate category which can accommodate the unnamed. In that sense Jussawalla is making a departure from the traditional mode of formulating – in a logical, rational manner – what has so far eluded our discourses.

4.6.1 MISSING PERSON PART I

The first part of the *Missing Person* sequence is entitled ‘Scenes from the Life.’ It contains fourteen selections from representative autobiography seen as cinema flashbacks. They are interspersed with various material which ironically comment upon life:

“Don’t shut your eyes. It’s only a movie.

[...]

‘Believe, that’s me on the screen

through the stuttering dust, through the burst-open door

The running dog runs but they’ve put out its eyes.

‘Once I was whole, I was all.

Believe, why don’t you believe?’”

After the alienating effect of school and expatriation, the Missing Person returns home though psychologically he is still in exile. He now recognizes that his privileges are based on the continuing injustices of colonialism and capitalism, but is unable to rise above the situation on a bourgeois level as is evident from the following lines:

“In the fist of a rioting people

his rotting head.

A mirror fires at him point blank

and yells, ‘Drop dead

colonial ape,

back under an idealist spell.

Yes, you’ve made it to some kind of hell,

backslider, get liquidated.’

”Wait! you know whose side

I’m on,’ he shouts,

‘but the people, their teeth bright as axes

came after my stereo and cattle,

came after my bride

I’ve said all my prayers

O pure in

thought word and deed have I been

delivering sun,

yet you gild street-urine-

theirs!”

The character here is murdered by his tribe, family, book-dust and English Literature. His inability to break free from the past is contrasted with the prediction of the future by his fate:

“And here’s an announcement:

Hope

which periodically triggers

some men to act

and looses the bonds of the earth,

has set a bright tide revolving inside me, a door.

Give up your seats and join the cast of thousands,

revolve about his pieces too

(brown slaves, black vamps, white faggots,

deceivers, women who rend and claw)”

The extremely fragmented nature of the poems makes some of them almost incomprehensible. The little line movements, the ellipses, and the juxtaposition cause a little jerkiness. This gives a sense of quick movement, an abruptness and a sharpness of focus.

4.6.2 MISSING PERSON PART II

Why *Missing Person* is a difficult text? A K Mehrotra writes that the sequence, *Missing Person* has 21 poems in two parts: 14 in the first part and 7 in the second. Jussawala, as Mehrotra has referred, has explained how the two parts are related: “In the first part I tried to get the feeling of a very quick-moving, rather jaggedly cut movie. I used popular element—the clichetic line, the language of advertising. In some sense deliberately flat. In some of the individual poems, perhaps too much happens... Perhaps I tried to do too much... Of the second part I am more sure. These are individual poems with...the points of view of persons who have seen the not very edifying film of the missing person. The audience reaction.”

The highly political content of his work is reflected in ‘Karate,’ a poem about the love-hate relationship that blacks share with the whites. Such content is also explicit in ‘Song of a hired Man,’ ‘Freedom Song’ and ‘Immigrant Song.’ In ‘Sea Breeze, Bombay’ the poet mentions the various

problems of India such as Partition, the refugees from Tibet, and complains to the cooling sea breeze “investigates nothing’ and settles adrift of the mainland’s histories.” Instead of accepting Indian life as it is, he asks us to “Restore us to fire.”

Urban and pre-urban images share the same canvas in Jussawalla’s poems, and there is a subtle blending in his work of landscape and cityscape. In ‘A Letter in April’ his use of compound words is clearly reminiscent of Hopkins, which exemplifies this blend:

“These are the days of shifting weather
When pods of blown, ignited clouds
Float and dwindle like burning cotton
Over the streetland’s roofhilled red.
Parallel buildings crowd together,
The lonely grip a bridge of crowds,
Drifts of winter half-forgotten,
Fused to the railing like scraps of lead.”

SAQ:

Explain the images ‘roofhilled red’, ‘the lonely grip a bridge of crowds’, ‘winter half-forgotten’ in terms of their poetic context.(90 words)

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In ‘Approaching Santa Cruz Airport, Bombay’ the poet records not only his ambivalent feelings on his return to India, but sets them within the general political and social context. The slums he sees below are contrasted with the attitudes of the well-off passengers on board:

“Economists enclosed in History’s
Chinese boxes, citing Chairman Mao,
Know how a people nourished on decay

Disintegrate or crash in civil war.
Contrarily, the Indian diplomat,
Flying with me, is confident the poor
Will stay just as they are.
Birth
Pyramids the future with more birth.
Our only desert, space; to leave the green
Burgeoning to black, the human pall.
The free
Couples in their chains around the earth.”

As similar political and social consciousness is reflected in ‘Nine Poems on Arrival’:

“Spiders infest the sky.
They are palms, you say,
hung in a web of light.
Gingerly, thinking of concealed
and traps, I step off the plane,
expect take-off on landing.”

SAQ:

Comment on the technique used in ‘hung in a web of light’, ‘expect take-off on landing’. (70 words)

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The strong element of social awareness is rooted in his concern as an alienated Indian intellectual. Unlike the poems in *Land’s End* that revealed the poet’s isolation, the poems in *Missing Person* explore his relation to India. By

creating the persona of the typical middle-class intellectual the poet sees him as a victim of colonialism, and an ironic representative of the bourgeois romantic. This character is highly disillusioned and disappointed by the circumstances, and is unable to understand the contradiction between his longings and their possible solutions. This signals that Jussawalla's poetry is becoming politicized as well as depersonalized. The creation of characters and the use of masks are tools to juxtapose the ironies that have become a means to guard the self.

The multi-sectioned volume is an attempt to explore what lies beyond the alienation of the wasteland. In Jussawalla's own words *Missing Person* is about disintegration, "my own personal disintegration has neither been very fundamental nor terrible." He continues to reject his upper-middle-class upbringing but no longer attempts to internalize the already dated ideals of European Catholic revivalism. The poet now seeks unity by identifying with a revolutionary process in which the people of the Third World will collectively create a new society.

Check Your Progress:

1. Highlight the idea of disintegration in Jussawalla's poetry. To what extent does he align it with a social critique?
2. Comment on Jussawalla's borrowings from English poets like T S Eliot in connection with his preoccupation with exile.
3. 'Missing Person' is regarded as exploring Jussawalla's relation to India. Do you agree? Justify your answer.

The irony grows more stark and darker and is accompanied by a discernible political consciousness in the second book, *Missing Person*, which was written after his return to India. Here Jussawalla acknowledges a morally compromised, hollow and absurd world, and also implicates the self in the failed quest for meaning. "If one tried literally to represent the different elements of world culture of which one's mind is made, one would write a language no one would understand. I have tried to suggest this chaos in *Missing Person*," says Jussawalla. Implicit in this evocation of chaos is a

trenchant critique of the underlying market-driven, consumerist ethic of the bourgeoisie — a class that “can only torment itself with its own contradictions or turn on itself in a fury of self-destruction.” As a critic Sudesh Mishra puts it

“For Jussawalla, the ironic emphasis on the marginal and the ‘non-human’ is perhaps a way of saying that the processes involved in the dehumanisation of art may well, in the future, contribute to the rehumanisation of man.”

The fragmentary form of the poem and its use of multiple voices thus reflect the fragmentation of the mind of its protagonist. In terms of the strategies the poem employs to capture this sense of fragmentation, *Missing Person* is distantly reminiscent of ‘The Wasteland’. But there are important differences between the two poems. *Missing Person* — for all its brokenness — continues to deliver a more unified experience than ‘The Wasteland’ does. This unity is achieved by the presence throughout the poem, of a *single* character, that is, the Missing Person. Regardless of whether one chooses to identify him with the narrator of the poem, he remains — despite the forces of disintegration of which his psyche is constantly a victim — a particular person whose mind the poem concerns itself with. The forces of post-colonial chaos that overtake this mind and the way this mind relates to the society it inhabits are the central themes of the poem.

The last poem in this book is one of the few poems in the book that makes no direct political statement — except perhaps in a single line. We find the poet briefly at home, his eyes focused upon the motions of a swing. The search for a steady monosyllabic rhythm is central to the poem, as is the sense of oscillation. It is here that the poet achieves a brief moment of equilibrium, when the sense of exile and that of belonging cease to be in binary opposition with one another. It highlights the notion that the only home a poet can find upon this planet is the poem he is currently working upon.

In “Missing Person” we no longer hear the first-person voice that characterizes so many of the poems in *Land’s End*. We have a ‘he’ instead of an ‘I’, a fictional character, fragments of whose life emerge in the course of a fractured narrative. Though this character is adequately individualised,

he may also be seen as the prototype of the bourgeois intellectual in postcolonial India. The missing person is, therefore, a being of the poet's creation, whose situation the poem describes. The third-person narrative is repeatedly broken by sudden voices that seem at first to emerge from out of the dark. They are often the voices of other people as he internalizes and remembers them; voices that articulate his perception of other people's perception of him; or the collective voice of society, as it were, commenting upon him, usually pejoratively.

The mind of the missing person is thus a troubled space inhabited by a multiplicity of voices, none of which quite sound like his own. The poem is as an exploration of a deep identity crisis, in which the missing person is constantly aware not only of his absence in the eyes of society, but of his own perception of himself. The search for identity results in constant rebellion against authority, which goes hand in hand with a desire to be contained within established systems. These include Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Marxism and the English language itself, none of which seem to provide the 'parted psyche' of the protagonist with what it is looking for. What, one may ask, is this mind, that seeks shelter everywhere and finds it nowhere, looking for? Essentially the mind must be searching for meaning; although it seeks this amidst the rubble of a fallen culture that has neither completely passed away nor given way to an alternate scenario; the mind rummages through the leftovers of colonialism for the slightest semblance of a new order, which, time and again, it fails to find. This is perhaps where the uniqueness of *Missing Person* rests: in its presentation of "the Indian bourgeois intellectual, with links to other Third World bourgeois intellectuals" who seems to share this common dilemma.

The chaos that overtakes the central consciousness of the poem is symbolic of the chaos of our literary culture where Indian poets writing in English find themselves helplessly immersed. *Missing Person* seems to have emerged from the complete failure of traditional systems to function meaningfully and from the absence of any new order that could take their place, and into which the poet could move with a renewed sense of self-assurance.

4.7 SUMMING UP

Missing Person does not threaten the reader's need for unity of perspective. The volume is thematically set in the context of the postcolonial third world. The search for structural cohesiveness and wholeness of conception based on older formal values, the growing emphasis on unity of tone and theme, the search for a more even rhythm and a steadier development of thought and feeling constitute the chief features of the poems in this volume. The voice that emerges from this search seems a far more mature and individualized than the one we hear in *Land's End*, where a similar stance was attempted. It is a voice that continues to talk of political and cultural chaos, but which seeks to accommodate this chaos within a more wholesome structure and begins to look to the past for signs of meaning that might redeem the present.

Jussawalla's poetry is not immediately comprehensible or accessible, nor does it aspire to be. When asked in an interview by Peter Nazareth in 1978 about the perils of being incomprehensible, Jussawalla responded, "Well, I think the situation of the poet in India is such that being misunderstood is part of his function." In the same interview, Jussawalla was asked about the responsibility of the writer in times of crisis. "I don't know," he replied. "I think each writer will deal with the crisis in his own way . . . Maybe, I see writing as an activity, at least for me personally, as linked up with a whole life, a whole sense of time. Indian writers do have a different sense of time in relation to their own work than the writers in the States, in England and in France, which means that we are bound to have a different attitude even to crisis . . . Am I being fatalistic if I say that for Indians, the crisis is perpetual?"

Check Your Progress:

1. Discuss Jussawalla's poetry as an engagement with its social and cultural environment
2. To what extent does Jussawalla make 'alienation a recurrent theme in his work? Illustrate with textual references.
3. Explain Jussawalla's deployment of 'masks' and 'ellipsis' as important poetic strategies with reference to his major poems.

4.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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Unit 5

Vikram Seth

Contents:

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introducing the Poet
- 5.3 His Works
- 5.4 Critical Reception
- 5.5 Context of the Poem
- 5.6 Reading “The Humble Administrator’s Garden”
- 5.7 Summing Up
- 5.8 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have made an attempt to acquaint you with Vikram Seth, one of the leading Indian English writers. However, in this unit we are supposed to read him as an Indian poet of great repute. After the end of the unit you should be able to-

- *introduce* yourself to Vikram Seth, one of the most versatile Indian writers in English.
- *discuss* his poems titled “The Humble Administrator’s Garden”.
- *trace* the current scenario of Indian Writing in English within which he is situated.

5.2 INTRODUCING THE POET

Ever since the beginning of his career, Vikram Seth’s works have succeeded in inviting attention with his experiments in Indian Writing in English. From poetry to novels and the libretto, Seth’s oeuvre showcases some of the finest literary attempts of a literary craftsman. His range and output is matched by his creative competence which further establishes

him as one of the most important Indian writers in English. Seth is a master of many genres and refuses to be categorized into the many available pigeon-holes that define the Indian writer in English.

Seth was born in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1952. His father, Premo Seth, was an executive in the Bata shoe company while his mother Leila Seth was a former Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court as well as a former advocate of the Supreme Court. Vikram's early life was spent in Patna. He attended the prestigious Doon School and later joined Corpus Christi College, Oxford University, where he earned a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). In 1975, he joined Stanford University to work for his graduate degree and then obtained his doctorate in Economics. He was a Wallace Stegner Fellow in Creative Writing from 1977-1978 at Stanford. Here he also worked with the poet Timothy Steele, whose traditionally structured verse with formal rhyme and metre inspired him to adopt a similar formal discipline in his own poetry. From 1980-1982, Seth was in China at Nanjing University for his fieldwork, gathering data for his intended doctoral dissertation on Chinese population planning and the economic demographics of the Chinese villages. While in China he became fluent in Mandarin which led him to study classical Chinese poetry and the language. This resulted in the production of two memorable collections of verse—*The Humble Administrator's Garden* and *Three Chinese Poets: Translations of Poems by Wang Wei, Li Bai and Du Fu*. He has travelled widely and has lived in Britain, California, India and China.

Seth is a fascinating polymath who has also studied several languages that include Welsh, German, French, Mandarin and English. He reads in Urdu but writes in the Nasta'liq script. He also reads Hindi but writes in the Devanâgarî script. Seth plays the Indian flute and the cello and sings the German lieder, especially Schubert. Having lived in London for many years, Seth now maintains residences near Salisbury, England, where he is a notable participant in local literary and cultural events. In 1996 he bought and renovated the house of the seventeenth century Anglican and metaphysical poet George Herbert. He also lives in Delhi, where he lives with his parents and keeps his extensive library and papers.

Stop to Consider:

Vikram Seth associated himself with Timothy Steele. In order to have a deeper understanding of the formal aspect of Seth's verse, you can read some poems by Steele in order to have a 'feel' of his poetry and to see its bearings on Seth. Secondly, the study of classical Chinese poetry also contributed to the poetic craft of Seth. Another influence is Philip Larkin, about whom Seth writes like this: "But as I read Larkin I began to realize the flexibility as well as the power and memorability of good 'formal' verse." An in depth study of Seth's poetry would require, therefore, some knowledge of the poetry of Timothy Steele, Philip Larkin and Classical Chinese poetry.

Many Indian poets now live, or have lived for long periods, abroad, mainly in the Unites States, and a number of them hold university posts teaching English literature or creative writing in English departments—A. K. Ramanujan is Professor of Darwinian Linguistics, Shiv Kumar was and Meena Alexander is a university English teacher, Agha Shahid Ali and G.S. Sarat Chandra teach courses in poetry writing... Vikram Seth was until recently an editor with Stanford University Press. The literature of exile is not peculiar to modern modern India; former colonies and new nations—with their limited home literary market for professional writers—have tended to have expatriate writers. Usually expatriate writers are novelists; this is partly because the market for poetry is small even in metropolitan centers and there are fewer opportunities for a career as a professional poet. Another reason poets stay at home is the need to be close to the culture of their speaking voice. Indian poet, however, are an exception; no doubt the greater opportunities (especially at universities) outside India have contributed to their exile. (Bruce King, p-209)

5.3 HIS WORKS

This section introduces you to some of the major works of Vikram Seth. Due to constraints of space and the necessity to map out the larger concerns of Seth's work, the references to certain lesser works have been left out.

Vikram Seth first introduced himself to the world as a poet with his collection of verse titled *Mappings* which was published in 1980. Since then he has published five volumes of poems. Seth's poetry contains elements like a highly colloquial vocabulary and syntax with 'enjambment' and rhyme, and a closely structured form without rigidity. The poems are musings on life, love and landscape. Interspersed with these are translations (one each)

from the Chinese works of Du Fu, the Urdu writings of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the German works of Heinrich Heine and the Hindi poems of Suryakant Tripathi Nirala. In his very first collection, Seth moves away from the traditional Indian poets and strikes a new note with casual verse. In the poem “Bagatelles” Seth mocks the English literary tradition with satiric humour. However, other poems in *Mappings* such as “The Tale of Melon City,” “Tomatoes,” “Dubious” and “Divali.” are seen to be satiric of the conditions of mankind.

With his *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983) Seth’s popularity began to increase. Fluent in Chinese, he recorded his astute observations and candid conversations with the many and varied people he met on the way from China via Tibet to New Delhi. The book also offers insight into the persona of Seth as he candidly expresses the reality and effect of living abroad. This theme of foreignness arises time and again in his poetry but nowhere in his fiction. *The Humble Administrator’s Garden* is a witty collection of nature poems structured around plants/places and was published in 1985. Like *Mappings*, this volume also contains moments of light-hearted irony which aims to showcase the quotidian nature of human life. This text has been discussed in detail in section 5.6.

Stop to Consider:

We have found that travelling is an important and inalienable part of his life. Seth is a traveller and a citizen of the world in almost the literal sense of the world. As he has travelled across countries, climates and cultures, experiences are many and varied and are bound to beak on his poetry. How for does Seth the traveller influences his poetic world and sensibilities, and fosters his speculations about life, things and people as revealed in his poetry?

Vikram Seth’s first novel *The Golden Gate* (1986) is written in verse. It is unique for its happy merging of fiction with poetry and has been called “Byronesque” by some critics. The novel is written entirely in rhyming tetrameter sonnets and is inspired by Charles Johnston’s 1977 translation of Aleksandr Pushkin’s 1833 Russian classic, *Eugene Onegin*. *The Golden Gate* is set in the 1980s in San Francisco while simultaneously noting the fashions and distinctions of West Coast society and culture. At its heart was

a relationship ruined by the extreme demands of a lover, and the woman's sensible choice of a good kind-hearted man in place of the miseries of an intense, agonizing love. The verse novel received wide acclaim (both critical and popular) and established Seth as one of the prominent Indian English writers. This was followed by *All You Who Sleep Tonight* a collection of poems grouped into five sections. The section entitled "Romantic Residues" consists of poems which reflect on feelings of love and their effects, or after-effects. In the section "In Other Voices" Seth writes poems from the viewpoint of people in other times and places, such as a doctor in Hiroshima on the day of the atomic bomb. In "In Other Places" Seth writes poems about places and people whom he encountered in his travels. The section "Quatrains" comprises of four-line poems on themes as diverse as insomnia and table manners. The final section titled "Meditations of the Heart" contains poems ranging from the admiration of the Russian dissident poet Irina Ratushinskaya and ends with the title poem of the volume. The poems broach a wide range of subjects which are indicative of Seth's education and experiences.

In 1992, Seth published *Beastly Tales from Here and There* another narrative of journeys. It contains ten well-known fables about animals which are again narrated in verse. These include "The Crocodile and the Monkey," "The Hare and the Tortoise," "The Cat and the Cock," "The Goat and the Ram," and "The Frog and the Nightingale." Structured around the classic tension between good and evil and punctuated by superb illustrations, these tales appeal to all. In the introduction to the book, Seth also refers to the origins of the stories, which is a pointer to the fact that all men share certain commonalities. Seth's sense of humour is exemplified by his retelling of the well-known fable of "The Hare and The Tortoise."

Seth's next publication is an English translation of the works of three Chinese poets namely Wang Wei, Li Bai and Du Fu from the original ideograms. Then he published *A Suitable Boy* (1993). Initially conceived as a short piece dealing with an Indian mother's search for an appropriate husband for her marriageable daughter against the background of the formative years of India after Independence, this novel turned into a massive novel. Published in fourteen countries, *A Suitable Boy* earned its author the title "A Tolstoy—on His First Try" (*The Washington Post*). The 1,471-page novel is a four-family saga—the Kapoors, the Mehrahs and the Chatterjis (Hindus) and

the Khans (Muslim), set in post-independence, post-Partition India, and alternatively satirically and earnestly examines a wide range of issues ranging from the national politics of the period leading up to the first post-Independence national election of 1952, the inter-sectarian, inter-religious animosity, the status of lower-caste peoples such as the *jatavs*, the land reforms and the subsequent eclipse of the feudal princes and landlords, academic affairs, and inter-and-intra-family relations. Seth has also written a libretto, *Arion and the Dolphin* (1994), which was performed at the English National Opera in June 1994, with music by Alec Roth. It tells the story of Arion, a young musician at the court of Periander in Corinth. Thrown overboard on his return from a musical contest in Sicily, Arion is saved and befriended by a dolphin.

Stop to Consider:

Tabish Khair in “No Golden Gate for Indian English Poetry? Reading Vikram Seth’s Novel in Verse in the Context of Indian Poetry in English” writes:

“As I have pointed out in a forthcoming paper in *Kavya Bharati*, Indian English poets are in a position that is *similar* – though *not* at all *identical* to that of a working class British poet with an elitist education, someone like Tony Harrison. Unlike the Maxwell generation of post-modern citizens of High Capitalist countries, the Indian writes about a world that is neither uniformly post-modern nor significantly High Capitalist. Moreover, it is a world that is not even uniformly AnglophoneBecause of both her social positioning and her personal circumstances, the Indian writing in English works, of necessity, on a fissured surface. The Indian English poet cannot take the surface of his or her language for granted as a site for ‘play’.

There are . . . two main reasons for this. They can be dubbed ‘linguistic’ and ‘social’. Linguistically speaking, the Indian English poet is confronted by other languages and these languages often vary from poet to poet. . .

And the social aspect adds to the fissured nature of the language of Indian English poetry, highlighting the fact that language is always more than a medium and less than transparent. Just as different linguistic surfaces make for a kind of tectonic underplay in Indian English poetry, acute social and economic differences ensure that the words of Indian English poetry cannot be taken as transparent across discourses.”

“Vikram Seth is a poet’s poet, someone who is so much in control of language, and who seems to be so in love with its rhythms, that one just has to listen to the

music of his verse and learn from his craft. . . .Seth himself has said that poetry written “in form” has an “emotional power . . . that is difficult to explain. . . . A Commonwealth Prize winner for poetry, Seth demonstrates in his award winning book, *The Humble Administrator’s Garden*, mastery over a range of poetic styles and exhibits the poet’s natural curiosity and skills of observation. The reader often shares with the poet the joy of the right choice of word, the challenges that such poetry poses. The poems also showcase his humanism and exhibit a range of emotions and his attempts to come to terms with his life. If *Mappings*, Seth’s first collection, signaled the emergence of a new poetic talent, *The Humble Administrator’s Garden* marked his coming to maturity.” (GJV Prasad, p.33)

His third novel *An Equal Music* was published in 1999 and added to his strength and reputation as a writer. It is a love story, the tale of Michael, a professional violinist who has never recovered from the loss of his only true love, a pianist whom he knew as a student in Vienna. Seth’s most recent book is *Two Lives* (2005), a double biography and memoir of his great-uncle and great-aunt. Written at the suggestion of his mother it focuses on the lives of his great uncle (Shanti Behari Seth) and German-Jewish great aunt (Henny Caro) who met in Berlin in the early 1930s while Shanti was a student there and with whom Seth stayed extensively on going to England at the age 17 for school at Tonbridge and then to attend Oxford. As with *From Heaven Lake*, *Two Lives* too contains much autobiography.

Seth has brought out his latest book “A Suitable Girl” which can be considered a sequel to his one of the successful book “A Suitable Boy”.

Check your Progress:

1. Write briefly on how Vikram Seth handles different literary genres to express modern/postmodern ethos.
2. Briefly state the issues/concerns/themes that find a place in the fictional, non-fictional and poetic works of Seth.

5.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Vikram Seth has carved a niche for himself by writing books that differ distinctly in style and content. It comes as a surprise to some readers of

Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) that the author of the longest novel in English ever written, has also penned six volumes of poetry. What is surprising is not Seth's shift between prose and poetry but his acumen as an author to have the capability to blend both the types. For Vikram Seth literature and life should be enjoyable, commonsensical, and worldly. His three novels have been chosen as examples of great performances, immensely successful with the reading public, and are translated into many languages. Each novel has been very different from the other and has taken an older literary form to unexpected new dimensions.

Seth is a master of his craft. From very early in his career he has refused to be categorized and has consistently resisted any ghettoization into any literary cult. He has often stated that he is neither an Indian nor a Commonwealth writer; he is merely one of those human beings who have been privileged and fortunate enough to travel and embrace the world as their own. This, perhaps, is the hallmark of this literary genius: he belongs to the world and the world belongs to him.

Stop to Consider:

Vikram Seth's works have received both popular and critical recognition. In 1983, he won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award for his travel-cum-memoir, *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet*. In 1985 *The Humble Administrator's Garden* won him the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia). In 1993 his novel, *A Suitable Boy*, was short listed for the Irish Times International Fiction Prize, and in 1994 the book won the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Overall Winner, Best Book). The book also went to win the W. H. Smith Literary Award in 1994. In 2001 *An Equal Music* won the EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) for Best Book/Novel. In 2005 Seth was honoured with the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, presented by Jagdish Tytler, MOS for Overseas Indian Affairs. He was bestowed with the Padma Shri in 2007.

5.5 CONTEXT OF THE POEM

The Humble Administrator's Garden (1985), centers on Seth's life in India and his experiences as a student at Oxford, Nanjing, and Stanford. Claude Rawson noted that the poems are "observant of pathos, of ironies of behaviour, and of the unexpected small exuberances of life." Both *The Humble Administrator's Garden* and *Three Chinese Poets* are the results

of Seth's perusal of the classical Chinese poetry and the language during his stay in Nanjing University. *The Humble Administrator's Garden* is divided into three neat sections: "Wutong," "Neem," and "Live Oak" each section dealing with his life and experiences in China, India and the USA respectively. Each section is named after a tree that is typical of that particular place where it grows.

K.C. Baral in his "Protocols of Poetry: A Study of Vikram Seth's *All You Who Sleep Tonight*" writes: "*The Humble Administrator's Garden* maps Seth's experiences of India, China and America. The different sections in the volume are connected by the symbolic representation of a 'tree'. The symbol of the tree metaphorically captures the essence of Seth's art. There are many poems in the volume that imply the way Seth redefines the nature of art. The title poem of this volume depicts the real pleasure garden of Chinese art created from practical experience of life in an implied contrast to the ideal. The volume presents a conducted tour of visual clichés and underlines Seth's predicament that he is a 'sucker of beauty' without questioning the means that create beautiful things like the administrator's garden." (p.78)

5.6 READING "THE HUMBLE ADMINISTRATOR'S GARDEN"

The text of "The Humble Administrator's Garden"

*A plump gold carp nudges a lily pad
And shakes the raindrops off like mercury,
And Mr Wang walks round. 'Not bad, not bad.'
He eyes the Fragrant Chamber dreamily.
He eyes the Rainbow Bridge. He may not have got
The means by somewhat dubious means, but now
This is the loveliest of all gardens. What
Do scruples know of beauty anyhow?
The Humble Administrator admires a bee
Poised on a lotus, walks through the bamboo wood,
Strips half a dozen loquats off a tree
And looks about and sees that it is good.
He leans against a willow with a dish
And throws a dumpling to a passing fish.*

There are three sections in the poem – “Wutong” (dealing with his life in China); “Neem” (his life in India); “Live-Oak” (his life in the USA). These trees are native to each respective country. A poem dealing with the meeting of strangers begins the book. Similarly, the book ends with a poem about another meeting of strangers. The love of music unites the first two strangers in a chance encounter; the music of love unites the second set of strangers in another chance encounter. The first poem consisting of three stanzas, is titled “A Little Night Music” . Prasad remarks – “The poet and the book wish to inhabit a world where all men are brothers but will make do with as little fuss as possible with it as it is; the poet will construct his separate peace, while hoping for ever for some congenial company, for some chance encounter. As Seth claims (or speculates ?) in the last poem of the book, “Unclaimed”, “To make love with a stranger is the best. This is so because your individual peace is not under any attack or stress.”

In the next section, “The North Temple Tower”, he portrays two young boys with a sense of irony as also humour. Next is “The Gentle Waves Pavilion” where we find the poet “talking of wanton acts of cruelty and the death of trees!” The other sections are – “The Great Confucian Temple, Suzhou”, “Nanjing Night”, “The Accountant’s House”, “Research in Jiangsu Province”, “From a Traveller”, and “Dubious”, among others that speak, in broad terms, “of compromise, of discipline, of form” , in the words of GJV Prasad who sums up Seth’s position: “The world is too much with people, and the individual has to learn all forms of defence; every experience is an intervention that has to be scanned carefully, the end-rhyme fire-walling the unwanted.” (GJV Prasad – “The Solitary Wanderer – the Seth of the Garden”)

The title poem of the volume is a sonnet. A corrupt but “humble” administrator, Mr. Wang, has made for himself a wonderful garden “by somewhat dubious means” so that the poet is prompted to ask “What/ Do scruples know of beauty anyhow?” (11). The garden is symbolic of beauty and the corrupt administrator symbolizes the evils of the world. The poem contains a note of positivism in its celebration of beauty amidst corruption. The false pretensions of the administrator are exposed and he becomes the target for mild ridicule but, nevertheless, his garden (“the loveliest of all gardens”) is to be enjoyed. The message here is loud and clear: the world contains both good and bad elements, the beautiful and the ugly. The administrator and his garden are symbols of these twin elements, and the poem highlights the pragmatic truth that it is possible to appreciate the beautiful even while simultaneously criticizing the tainted. In fact, the twin contrast only serves to further highlight the essential difference between the good and the bad. The

underlying parallel of this poem can be traced to the many faultiness in Communist China and the inherent humanism and camaraderie of the people which Seth was acutely aware of.

The poem is about the Humble Administrator who works through a pleasure garden he had created. The poem depicts how the administrator observes and appreciates the beauty of the flowers and fishes in the garden. Note that the poem apparently presents no complexity if we look at its content: The theme is clear – a Mr. Wang (The Humble Administrator) admires his garden and rejoices in its beauty. In case of form, however, it is a pastiche of Shakespearean sonnet, with a rhyme-scheme a b a b c d e d e f e f g g. We find that one of the prominent themes of Shakespearean sonnet is the idea of beauty. But here, despite having a similar thematic concern, there is a difference: Seth's concept of beauty does not actually match with Shakespeare's. Here we have no attempt to immortalize beauty, neither do we have a look forward to posterity. The poem is about enjoying the present moments, about grasping the aesthetic of the present.

Secondly, the poem positions itself as anti-romantic, because it presents the binary of the beautiful and the ugly with an overt ease and comfort. It is “the loveliest of all gardens” but acquired “by some-what dubious means”. Although the administrator is morally weak and corrupt, this moral weakness does not lessen the celebration of beauty, which he can appreciate with ease.

Look at these lines –

“..... He may not have got

The means by somewhat dubious means, but now

This is the loveliest of all gardens.....” (Lines: 5-7)

What is crucial here is the word ‘now’. It denotes a certain indifference to the history of the garden. (Of course this indifference is subject to reader's moral scrutiny). But the way the poet evokes the garden through certain metonymies must be appreciated. There is doubt about the fact that the appreciation of beauty here is unhesitating.

The theme of art as commodity is equally prominent. First, the garden is constructed almost like a work of art. The sonnet form easily accommodates

metonymic descriptions of the garden, starting from “a plump gold carp” to “a passing fish”. As the administrator constructs it, with utmost sophistication and care, it is not a poet’s figment of imagination but involves money. Also look at the way it is appreciated by Mr. Wang :

“And Mr. Wang walks round: ‘Not bad, not bad.

.....

And looks about and sees that it is good.” (Lines: 3- 12)

What has been dispensed with is the idea of sublime beauty. In a consumerist culture, a work of art loses its sacred area and hence becomes a ‘commodity’.

Stop to Consider:

The idea of beauty is ubiquitous from ancient cultures till now. Let us now contrast what we have just told about the co modification of art, with Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” Here is also we find a beautiful landscape and a reference to “easy wind and downy flake”. The beauty of this dark landscape is not easily graspable, because it is veiled by a certain mystery and terror. This mysterious beauty enchants the rider. But in Seth’s poem, the Mr. Wang is not enchanted as such; he appreciates the garden in a matter-of-fact manner.

Again, if you look at romantic poetry, particularly that of Wordsworth, we also have a binary of corrupted human society and grand nature. Nature is a sublime reality in moral, ethical or aesthetic terms, from which to look at the mundane human reality. This idealization is absent in Seth. And it is this that makes him very much a contemporary poet, despite his use of the conventional verse-form.

With regard to his use of the sonnet form, Prasad considers Seth’s *Golden Gate* “a fitting climax to the Indian English Poet’s love for this form for over a century and a half.” Khair observes, “In that sense he took an existing tradition, and revitalized it by making it more contemporary and expanding its cognitive world.” We should reflect that such critical comments fully highlight Seth’s achievements and the difficulties of writing poetry in English in the Indian context.

(Tabish Khair’s reference to GJV Prasad, p-54-55)

Regarding the form of the poem, the use of the sonnet-form is likely to cause a jerk in contemporary readers who are unaccustomed to such a verse form. Amid countless experimentation with style, form and language, Seth's is a remarkable variation. When he uses such a conventional form, it is more likely to be deliberate and self-conscious. Hence, readers do not look at the content through the form. Instead, the form itself is also looked at. Seen in this way, the poem is also a gentle parody of a certain poetic tradition. The poem is, thus, self-reflexive.

Read the final couplet

“He leans against a willow with a dish
And throws a dumpling to a passing fish”

Here the poet becomes more critical of the humble administrator. The poet confers a certain mundane element to the way the administrator is taking care of his garden. If you look at the final couplet in Shakespeare's sonnet, it ends with a definitive statement, resolving confusions and complications indicated earlier. Here, in contrast, the final action of the administrator is rendered in a moment which is positionally climactic but turns out to be an anti-climax. In this way the poem offers a mild ridicule on the humble administrator without 'disturbing' the beauty of the garden.

Stop to Consider:

Sections of *The Humble Administrator's Garden*

“Wutong”

Invoking the theme of foreignness, this section, begins with a poem about the meeting of strangers and ends with a poem about another meeting of strangers. This section has total 15 poems. In the first poem, “A Little Night Music,” the poet is drawn by the music into a courtyard. The theme highlighted here is that of brotherhood. In this poem an old man welcomes the stranger (the poet) into a world where all men are brothers. The next poem “The Gentle Waves Pavilion” sees Seth acknowledging his foreignness in a country that is not his own. The poem also seems to point towards the cruelty of man towards nature. In “The Great Confucian Temple, Suzhou” the theme is that of the Communist States celebrating sites of religious worship in the name of culture and history. The sonnet opens with two geese strutting through the balustrade. The Great

Confucian Temple symbolizes the state of decline that the country is in. Seth's liberal viewpoint comes to the fore in the poem "The Accountant's House" where he describes his visit to the house of an official from whom he has gathered data for his doctoral research. The family has lost a young son recently but despite the tragedy they are learning to cope with life. The fact that his research can only generate facts and figures is bemoaned in the next poem "Research in Jiangsu Province."

Other poems like "From a Traveller" is written in the form of a letter to a close friend, and Seth says, "I realize that I / Go around the world gathering as much / Nostalgia as knowledge." He doubts the truth of his experiences and is afraid of commitment because of the very changeable nature of knowledge. Seth seems to compromise when he realizes that in an uncertain world one has to learn all forms of defense and scan every experience carefully. Happiness, therefore, can be found only by losing oneself to the rhythms of the universe, while maintaining a distance from everybody. The last poem of the Chinese section is called "From an 'East is Red' Steamer." Here, the poet examines the vagrancy of human emotion that cannot be controlled. A father is leaving on a journey and reproves his family for crying at his departure. As the steamer rolls marital music begins to play that "exhorts us to do more / For the Four Modernisations." As the steamer moves away from the mother and the daughter, the father himself cries. The message in the poem is clear: emotional commitments bring both joy and sorrow.

"Neem"

With "Neem" we enter the Indian section of the volume. This section has six poems. The opening poem of this section is called "Profiting." Here, the poet describes his feeling of oneness with the world and nature, and any form of loss can be tied to the leaves that drift away.

"Vikram Seth's *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983) however does not specifically fall in the genre of these rescue and recovery missions. His journal is more akin to the classic Western trope of travel for the sake of travel, in the line of Rilke's dictum that a poet must travel in order to write. But given the fact that China and especially Tibet have been the special preserve of the Western gaze, via the national geographic or the many scholarly and fantastic Western narratives, his account cannot remain 'innocent'. What an Indian, albeit a Western educated cosmopolitan sees in a heavily orientalist terrain is a matter of great political interest. Is his gaze different from that of the Westerner? Does it reinforce the idea of the mystical orient or does it bring something extra to the narrative?" (Prasad, p-22-23)

“Seth is drastically different in the compassion and the love with which he remembers his friends and the Chinese common men and women. The tableaux vivants or vignettes of the street of marketplace are alike with the spontaneous life of a lively happy go lucky race. But the most remarkable thing is their instinctive kindness in the universal sense of hospitality they display. It is true that this is made possible because of the very nature of Seth’s travels that allows him to interact much more closely with the Chinese people, having the twin assets of a brown skin and the song from *Awara* to break the ice. But otherwise too, we get a glimpse of a convivial race, given to hospitality and a gift economy, and this is despite conventional expectations and assumptions of the Chinese as a highly xenophobic and unfriendly people, which is built in early on in the narrative.”
(Prasad, p-24-25)

Check your Progress:

1. What is the significance of trees in “The Humble Administrator’s Garden”?
2. Attempt a comprehensive assessment on the poetry of Vikram Seth, with special attention to his craft.
3. Do you think that the wider political implication of the poem “The Humble Administrator’s Garden” comes to the fore if we consider the fact that Seth writes it in China?
4. How do you relate the dialectic of (morally) ugly and beautiful expressed in the poem to his experiences in or views on China.

5.7 SUMMING UP

The most striking feature of Seth’s poetry is his craft. The poet Donald Davie writes: “Vikram Seth’s poems should have an impact far beyond much noisier pieces; for when did we last see a volume in which the poet’s eye is on what is objectively before him, rather than on the intricacies of his own sensibility?”. Vikram Seth accepts and highly delights in exile. His poetic form is self-conscious because he follows the traditional verse form in an era when writing in free verse seems to be the norm. For Seth, the use of form is also a tool against self-destructiveness. His neo-formalism is a kind of postmodernism.

“The Humble Administrator’s Garden” showcases Seth’s sophistication as a poet. In this volume he exhibits a consciousness and awareness of the different countries and cultures that he has experienced. The articulation of each culture was made possible by his craftsmanship and poetic sensibilities. The book attempts to weave in the many diversities of the world into a single thread, and it is beyond doubt that Seth has succeeded here.

5.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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