

**SELF LEARNING MATERIAL**

**Master of English  
4<sup>th</sup> Semester**

**COURSE : ENG – 402**

**CONTEMPORARY INDIAN  
WRITING IN ENGLISH- II**

**BLOCK – I & II**

**Directorate of Open and Distance Learning  
DIBRUGARH UNIVERSITY  
DIBRUGARH – 786 004**

**ENGLISH**  
**COURSE : MA ENG – 402**  
**CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH- I & II**

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Published on behalf of the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning, Dibrugarh University by the Director, DODL, D.U. and printed at **The Assam Computers, Borguri, Tinsukia – 786126**, Total copies of Printing : 500 nos.

**Acknowledgement**

The Directorate of Open and Distance Learning, Dibrugarh University duely acknowledgement the financial assistance from the Distance Education Council, IGNOU, New Delhi for preparation of this Self Learning Material.

# SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

## Contemporary Indian Writing in English-II

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Unit – V : Raja Rao – *Kanthapura*

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Unit – VII : *Kanthapura* : *Techniques*

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**BLOCK - I : FICTION**  
**UNIT - I**  
**ANITA DESAI : *As a Novelist***

**Structure**

- 1.0 Objectives
  - 1.1 Introduction
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  - 1.3 The Life and Works of Anita Desai
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## 1.0 Objectives

In this unit, you will be acquainted with the background of Indo-Anglian novel and the life and works of Anita Desai. This unit will help you

- To acquaint yourself with the background of Indo-Anglian novel
- To highlight the major Indo-Anglian women novelists of Post-Independence Era
- To Formulate an idea about the life and literary achievements of Anita Desai
- To understand the thematic patterns of Anita Desai's major novels

## 1.1 Introduction

In this unit, you will be introduced to the background of Indo-Anglian novel. Indian English Literature refers to the body of works by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. Indo-Anglian novel has been relatively delayed manifestation of the modern Indian imagination, it has always been instrumental in an artistic rendering of the contemporary social reality. It made its appearance during the nineteen twenties and thirties, when most of the vernacular literatures in India had already achieved tremendous maturity especially in the medium of fiction reflecting the universal consciousness of change. The first Indian novel in English was written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who established the novel as a major literary form in India. His *Raj Mohan's Wife* was the first and the only English novel he wrote. Thereafter he wrote in Bengali. Lal Behari Dey's *Govind Samanta* published in 1874 may be considered to be the first ever important Indian novel to appear in English. The marvellous Toru Dutt, besides her many poems and her French novel, wrote in her teens an English novel named

*Bianca* or *The Young Spanish Maiden*. Romesh Chander Dutt was a gifted novelist as well. Two of his Bengali novels were also published in English. *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909) deals with Mughal times. Another novel *The Lake of Palms* (1902) is an intimate and reliable picture of social life in Bengal.. Among South Indian writers, B.R.Rajam wrote an English novel *Vasudeva Sastri*.

Among the Indians who came to prominence in the first decade after the war, one of the most outstanding was K.S.Venkataramani. His first published book *Paper Bats* gave a few vignettes of South Indian village life. After 1930, there came a sudden flowering in the Indian literature in English. A society compelled into self-awareness like that provides a fertile soil for fiction and it is no accident that the three major Indian novelists in English namely Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao began their career during the phase. Mulk Raj Anand hails from the extreme north-west of India. His birth place is Peshawar. His important novels are :*Across the Black Waters, Coolie, Two Leaves and A Bud, Untouchable, The Village, The Big Heart, The Sword and the Sickle and The Private Life of an Indian Prince*. He is an ardent believer in the doctrine of social revolution and socialistic pattern of society. His object is not merely to shock his readers by a representation of reality but to stimulate their consciousness and his concern as a fiction writer has always been the redemption of the poor and the oppressed. R.K.Narayan, a leading author along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao is best known for his works set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. *Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher* are known as the semi-autobiographical trilogy of R.K.Narayan. The fictional town of Malgudi, was first introduced in *Swami and Friends*. Narayan's *The Financial Expert* was hailed as one of the most original works of 1951 and Sahitya Akademi winner novel *The Guide* was adapted for film and for Broadway. Raja Rao is deemed as the

finest portrayer of Indian sensibilities. He tries to revive the ancient tradition of epics and puranas. He thus stands apart from the main current of Indian creative writers in English. *Kanthapura* is his well-known novel. Among other novelists of the period is S.Nagarajan. His *Athawar House* gives an enduring picture of a Maratha Brahmin family living in South India. Dewan Sharar wrote *The Gong of Shiva*. It is well planned, well executed and wholly an Indian novel. A.S.P Ayyar published two historical novels: *Baladitya* and *Three Men of Destiny*. The novelists were deeply affected by the radical changes which were brought about by the partition of the country. Major writers of the Post-Independence era are Sudhin Ghosh, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Dillip Kumar Roy, Khushwant Singh, Venu Chitale, Rama Sharma, K.A.Abbas etc. .In the succeeding section, you will be given an account of the major Indo-Anglian women novelists of the Post-Independence era.

**Check Your Progress1.**

**1. Write a note on the Background of Indo-Anglian novel.**

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**1.2 Major Indo-Anglian Women Novelists of Post-Independence Era**

In the previous section, you have got a specific idea about Indo-Anglian novel and the contribution of the Indo-Anglian novelists to Indian literature. In this section, we shall discuss the major Indo-Anglian



women novelists of the Post-Independence Era. The very emergence of women writers during the Post-Independence Era was of great significance. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Veena Paintal, Nergis Dalal, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De have added new dimensions and depth to Indian novel. The emergence of these women writers marks the birth of an era which promises a new deal for the Indian novel. The battle of emancipation was taken over by a few educated women themselves who in their effort to communicate to the world their own bitter experiences as women as well as their ideals of social reform, turned writers. These women writers particularly shared experiences of Indian women and presented them into fictional form. Literature which until recently was male dominated has started reflecting the sparks that have emanated from this struggle of woman to be herself. The fiction of Kamala Markandaya is largely sociological in its focus. Her novels give a faithful account of contemporary Indian reality. Markandaya shot into prominence with her very first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) which was followed by *Some Inner Fury* (1955) and continued till the *Golden Honeycomb* (1977). Ruth Praver Jhabvala is another important woman novelist. The most significant thing about her is her awareness of man, society, human and moral dilemmas and the religious and aesthetic design that she projects through her experience. From her first novel *To whom She Will* (1955) followed by *The Nature of Passion* and then *The householder* (1960), *A Backward Place* (1965), *Esmond in India* etc. till *Heat and Dust*, she receive universal recognition in India as Indian novelist. Thus Mrs. Jhabvala, though limited in her sphere proves to be a torch-bearer for coming generations of Indian women writers in English. In this chain, another prominent novelist, Mrs. Nayantara Sahgal is undoubtedly a major Indian novelist who is also an established political columnist. She takes every occasion to demonstrate her view of Indian

womanhood in her fictional work. She does not view her women characters as wage earners or career women but mainly as married women, as wives, daughters and mothers and it is in these roles that they wish to experience freedom and to become aware of themselves as individuals and to be accepted as equals. From her first novel *A Time to be Happy*, till her latest novel *A Situation in New Delhi* she has chosen diverse aspects of Indian life.

Anita Desai is another *luminary* of this brilliant group of women novelists in the field of Indo-Anglian novel. Desai appeared on the literary horizon in the year 1963, when her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* was published. Her second novel *Voices in the City* was serialized in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* during 1965. She has added a new dimension to the Indian English Fiction. The other women novelists of this period are Shashi Despande, Attia Husain, Rama Mehta, Nergis Dalal, Bharati Mukherjee and Santha Rama Rau. There are some emerging women writers whose output is not large, but each of them is talented in their own way like Namita Gokhale, Nina Sibal, Shourie Daniels, Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Anuradha Marwah, Kiran Desai etc. Indian novel in English reached its zenith of glory when Arundhati Roy received Booker Prize for her novel *The God of Small Things* followed by Kiran Desai for *The Inheritance of Loss*. During the last few decades the Indian English novel has really enjoyed the golden period. Women writers have displayed remarkable social consciousness in their novels. The impact of western culture on the traditional society of India, the psychological turmoil faced by the immigrants, east-west confrontation, the resultant cultural conflict in the context of marriage, the oppression of the poor by the rich are some of the themes that illustrate the writer's knowledge of the human predicament in contemporary society. It can be said that the women writers have added a new dimension to Indo-Anglian novel with their exquisite perception of men and matters.

**Check Your Progress**

1. Who are the major Indo-Anglian women novelists of the Post-Independence Era? What is their contribution to Indo-Anglian literature? Discuss.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
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**1.3 The Life and Works of Anita Desai**

**1.3.1 Life**

From the previous section, you have learnt about the contribution of the major Indo-Anglian women novelists. Anita Desai is one of the most powerful contemporary Indian novelists in English. She was born in Mussoorie, a hill station of India, in 1937. Her father was D.N. Mazumdar, a Bengali businessman and her mother was Toni Nime, a lady of German origin. She got her education in Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School, New Delhi and graduated from Miranda House, University of Delhi with Honours in English literature in 1957. She started writing in English at the age of seven, and published her first story at the age of nine. She published her first story in a children's magazine when she was nine. As a novelist, Desai made her debut in 1963 with *Cry, the Peacock*. Being the daughter of a Bengali father and a German mother, Desai was familiar with many languages including Hindi, Bengali, English and German. For her English was the language of books because it was the first language in which she learned to write at school. Hindi and German were only spoken languages for her. She got married to Ashvin Desai, a businessman and they had four children

including Kiran Desai, the rising novelist of Indian literature. In her personal life, the complete assimilation of two different cultures is seen. Her mother, a lady of German origin accepts the Indian way of life but she also retains her original identity.

Desai's mother completely adapted herself to the Indian way of life retaining her German identity. The intermixture of German and Indian culture is seen in Desai's life too. Though she and her family spoke German and accepted western knowledge, they retained their Indian identity. Desai's own German half of the parental heritage is in the background of *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Since the 1950's Desai has lived in New Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, and other Indian cities. Her personal experiences as well as her frequent travel across the world have provided her the scope to give realistic presentation of her characters in a cross-cultural setting. She has been a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She has taught at Girton College and Smith College in England, and at Mount Holyoke College in the United States. In 1993 she became a creative writing teacher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She has spent there for one semester each year and the rest of her time in India. Desai is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London.

### **Stop To Consider**

**Kiran Desai** : Kiran Desai is the daughter of Anita Desai, herself short-listed for the Booker Prize on three occasions. She was born in Chandigarh on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, 1971 and spent the early years of her life in Pune and Mumbai. She studied in the Cathedral and John Cannon school. She left India at 14 and she and her mother then lived in England for a year and then moved to the United States where she studied creative writing at Bennington College, Hollins University and

Columbia University. Her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was published in 1998 and received accolades from such notable figures as Salman Rushdie. It won the Betty Trask Award, a prize given by the Society of Authors for the best new novels by citizens of the Commonwealth of Nations under the age of 35. Her second book *The Inheritance of Loss* was widely praised by critics throughout Asia, Europe and the United States. It won the Man Booker Prize as well as the 2006 National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award. She was awarded a 2013 Berlin Prize Fellowship at the American Academy in Berlin.

### **1.3.2 Works and achievements**

You have got an idea about Anita Desai's life from the previous section. In this section, we shall discuss the works and literary achievements of Anita Desai. The important fictional writings of Anita Desai are *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Bye-bye Blackbird*, *The Peacock Garden*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, *Cat on a Houseboat*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Games at Twilight*, *Clear Light of Day*, *The Village by the Sea*, *In Custody*, *Baumgartner's Bombay*, *Journey to Ithaca*, *Fasting, Feasting*, *Diamond Dust and Other Stories*, *The Zigzag Way*, *The Artist of Disappearance*. She received the Guardian Award for Children's Fiction for the novel *The Village by the Sea*, and the 1978 National Academy of Letters Award for *Fire on the Mountain*. Desai considers *Clear Light of Day*, her most autobiographical novel, because she was writing about her neighbourhood in Delhi, although the characters are not based on her brothers and sisters. What she was exploring in this novel, she has said the importance of childhood and memories as the source of a life. Anita Desai grew up during World War II and could see the anxiety her German mother was experiencing about the situation and her family in Germany. After the war, when she realized that the Germany she had known was devastated, her mother

never returned there, nor had any desire to return. Anita Desai herself did not visit until she was an adult. Desai herself describes her upbringing as the greatest gifts she could have been given as a writer. Desai likes to lead a quiet life. Her colleagues who knew her in the 1950s, describe her as intense and solitary. Even her choice of books reveals this tendency. She likes to read books which explore human nature. Her favourite authors are Chekhov, Henry James, D.H.Lawrence and Dostoevsky.

Anita Desai won the Winifred Holtby Prize of the Royal Society of Literature for the novel *Fire on the Mountain* and the Guardian Award for Children's Literature for *The Village by the Sea*. She also received the Padma Sri Award from the Government of India and the Taraknath Das Award for promotion of Indo-US relations. She also won the Sahitya Academy Award and National Academy of Letters Award. Her three novels *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody* and *Fasting, Feasting* have been nominated for the Booker Prize. She is a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi and fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London, The American Academy of Arts and Letters, Girton College, Cambridge and Clare Hall, Cambridge. She has been awarded the Neil Gunn International Fellowship. Her novels have drawn worldwide attention and she stands in the fore front in the world of fiction, in the company of Iris Murdock, Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood and Flora Nwapa. Before coming to Massachusetts Institute of Technology where she is Professor at present, she was Purington Professor of English at Mount Holyoke College and divided her time between the United States, India and England. Desai is one of the world's best known authors and a writer who has influenced generations of writers.

**Check Your Progress**

1. Write a note on the biography of Anita Desai.

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2. Discuss the literary works and achievements of Anita Desai.

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**1.3.2 Introduction to Major Novels of Anita Desai**

The previous sections have enhanced your knowledge of Anita Desai. This unit will give you an idea about the thematic patterns of Anita Desai’s novels. Anita Desai adds a new dimension to the achievement of Indian women writers in English fiction by probing the inner lives of her women characters. Desai depicts the Indian women as a fighter, a victim, a heroine and ultimately a winner because of her indomitable spirit and attitude of compromise. She has portrayed both kinds of women-those who are symbols of growth and change; those who are powerful means of withdrawal, regression, decay, death and destruction. Anita Desai has not limited herself to the domestic sphere only but at times she goes beyond the limits of family exploring and portraying social prejudices and perverted social values that affect the individual. The major Novels of Anita Desai are *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Bye-bye Blackbird*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*,

*Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of Day, The Village by the Sea, In Custody, Baumgartner's Bombay, Journey to Ithaca, Fasting, Feasting, The Zigzag Way.*

In her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, Anita Desai portrays the psychic tumult of a young and sensitive married girl, Maya who is haunted by a childhood prophecy of a fatal disaster. Maya is a spoiled and pampered daughter of a wealthy Brahmin and is married to Gautama, an older man, insensitive, pragmatic and rational lawyer who fails to understand her sensitive nature. She suffers from father obsession and looks for the typical father image in her husband. Childless, with an uncaring husband, she is lonely and loneliness is the bane and burden of her psyche. As her husband, Gautama is not compassionate to her inner sufferings, she is contracted to her dark psychic world. Her obsession with death results in the tragic end of her life.

*Voices in the City* deals with an account of the two world-weary young women, Monisha and Amla doomed to reside in Calcutta, known as the "City of Kali". Monisha's situation in the novel is a typical representation of the social situation of numerous brides in India who unable to bear endless torment and pinching behavior of the husband's family members, end up as cases of bride-burning, suicide or self-immolation. Monisha's relationship with her husband is characterized only by loneliness and lack of proper understanding. The oppressive lack of privacy, her sterility and her in-laws' suspicion, the absence of love and understanding in her life and the resultant loneliness within and without go to make Monisha a pathetic figure. She develops an incurable claustrophobia and commits suicide. Monisha's younger sister, Amla, a commercial artist with an advertising firm has romantic dreams of rising high in her job. She decides to lead a happy life with the painter, Dharma. But her joy is transitory and she also starts to realize the hollowness and futility of her life.



In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai focuses on the disturbing aspect of loss of identity that immigration necessarily involves. This novel deals with the lives of two Indian immigrants Dev and Adit in England. Dev is unhappy with the treatment accorded to immigrants in England. The female protagonist Sarah in the novel, has been portrayed as a lifeless doll lacking spiritual depth and insight. Though Sarah, the wife of Adit who migrated to England is of Anglo-Saxon origin yet she is quite 'oriental' in her ways, being gentle and submissive not knowing much about India. Her marriage to an Indian immigrant makes her very confused because she has to adapt the mixed cultures of the East and the West. However, she makes efforts to come to terms with reality.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* portrays the aching void in the life of a married woman, Sita by probing deeper into her life as a woman, a wife and a mother. The ill-assorted couple of Sita and Raman is confronted with the problem of male-female dichotomy. Sita represents a world of emotional and feminine sensibility while Raman is a practical man with an active view of life. Sita's problem is mainly domestic but the feeling of emptiness in Sita's life gives it an existential dimension. The temperamental incompatibility of the couple further aggravates Sita's plight.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Anita Desai deals with the inner and outer lives of her women characters. She delves deep into the inner psychic lives of her characters showing how external forces destroy their lives reducing them to mere puppets on the stage. In the novel the female protagonist Nanda Kaul, an elderly lady suffers the infidelity of her husband who is the vice-chancellor. She keeps herself occupied in her household duties and social activities yet the life of deprivation and unfulfillment haunts her. She craves for love and affection while her husband has an extra marital affair with Miss David. Initially she bears her betrayal stoically diverting her attention towards her children; but

her children grow up and her husband dies leaving her a lonely woman grappling with her isolation. Her evolution takes place in the light of her relationship with her old friend Ila Das and Raka, her great grand daughter who comes to stay with her. The novelist also narrates the tragic life of Tara which has an adverse affect on her daughter Raka.

In the novel, *Clear Light of Day*, Desai portrays the development of the two main characters-Bimla and Tara-elder and younger sisters of Das family. Bimlais so preoccupied with the family responsibilities that she has no time for her own love and life. The irony of the novel is that in spite of her sacrifice for the family, she gets nothing but acrimony and bitterness. Bimla silently suffers the death of her parents, the desertion of her brother Raja and later the demise of Mira-masi. Bimla's responsibilities lead to isolation. She becomes aggressive in her behavior and indulges in frequent violent outbursts. In her character there is an obvious transformation. Introspection leads to self-discovery, a new awareness, she undergoes a change of calmness, love and affection, forgiveness and even tolerance towards the end of the novel.

*The Village by the Sea* by Anita Desai is considered as 'children's fiction'. Hari, the central character was heavily burdened with domestic responsibilities-useless and jobless father, sick and bed ridden mother, sisters to be married off and no dowries. Hari decided to go away, he left Thul, his village and reached Bombay. After lots of hardships faced by Hari in Bombay, he started working at a restaurant. Gradually he got accustomed to his new environment where lights were never put out. Later on, Hari became an apprentice to the watchmendor Panwallah. Leila, Hari's elder sister worked equally hard in the village during Hari's absence and she used to take her father to hospital also. Leila and Hari change their traditional lifestyle of immobility and worklessness. The experience made Hari wiser and mature. He had known finally that he belonged to his village by the sea-Thul and that

for happiness he would go back to his village. There is no tragedy and the novel end in a cheerful note.

*In Custody* is largely the story of Deven Sharma, a lecturer in Hindi in a private college, Lala Ram Lal College at Mirpore near New Delhi. Deven has great passion for Urdu poetry and a reputed Urdu poet, Nur Shahjehanabadi. He is so fascinated by the personality of the poet Nur that he is never able to come out of his shadow. Deven's wife, Sarla leads a life of neglect and economic hardships as Deven is always engrossed in poetry and squanders much money on publications for which he also borrows money. Deven has to take great pains in order to interview the poet. Finally when the interview takes place it is a fiasco, for the tape-recorder has not been properly operated. On the contrary Nur and his wife trouble Deven for money, for they have been instrumental in materializing the interview and so it appears that Deven's life is in custody of Nur and his family.

Desai's another novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* presents the modern phenomenon of immigrated persons. It is a story of an uprooted Jew, Hugo Baumgartner, who is harassed in his own country, Germany. It is due to the rise of Nazism he is compelled by the circumstances to arrive in British India before the second world war to begin his new life and to earn his livelihood. In due course of time, India becomes his home country, and he lives there till his death. Unfortunately he is not accepted as one of them by the Indians even after fifty years. The novel deals with the condition of a lonely man in an alien country where he remains as an outsider throughout his life.

In *Journey to Ithaca*, the main characters are Matteo and Sophie, an European couple who came to India together to share an adventure as hippies in the early 1970's. The story begins with Matteo lying sick in a hospital in India. Sophie who had deserted him, fed up with his foolish craving after 'Gurus' hurries to him to fetch him back home to live with

her and their two children Giacomo and Isabel. Of the three major characters in the novel Sophie is at the centre of the narrative. The novel beautifully documents the journey of two characters Matteo and Leila searching for enlightenment. Matteo, Sophie's husband is eager to have oriental knowledge and to live his life according to the traditions of Indian society. Sophie is quite logical and modern to believe the healing power of saints of India. She considers people's faith in such 'Gurus' a sign of backwardness. Anita Desai has a significant balance of tradition and modernity, East and West, humanism and spiritualism in this novel

In the novel *Fasting, Feasting*, Anita Desai has dealt with the happenings in the lives of an Indian family and an American family. The novel is in two parts. The first part deals with the travails of Uma, a daughter with neither looks nor intellectual brilliance, who is treated as a domestic drudge by her parents. She has to leave school to look after her baby brother Arun. The second part deals with Arun, who goes to study in America. The novel throws light on certain social practices of modern India. In the first part there is elation over the birth of a boy. The status of woman is raised when she bears a son. Desai's subversion of this manifestation of patriarchal values is apparent in her tone. Marriage is seen as the only career for the girl and home is her confinement. The novel exposes the degrading and exploitative nature of the dowry system.

In her latest novel *The Zigzag Way*, Anita Desai continues the thematic experimentation with foreign characters along with their story of displacement. Eric, a New England born student in History at Harvard, is a newly minted historian just out of graduate school, unsure of his past choices and future options. With no clear direction, he follows his lover, Em when she travels to the Yucatan for her scientific research. But, unfortunately once she sets off with her colleagues to conduct field operations, Eric ends up alone and overwhelmed in this foreign place.

Then he pursues his own private quest, tracing his family's history to a Mexican ghost town, where a hundred years earlier, young Cornish Miners toiled to death. With vivid sympathy, Desai conjures the struggles of Eric's grandparents and their community. As the novel progresses, Desai neatly ties the loose ends of many stories and the reader is held fascinated by the mystery not only behind ancient family histories but just as much by the lure of Mexico painted incredibly by Desai.

### **Stop to Consider**

**Nazism:** National Socialism, more commonly known as Nazism is the ideology and practice associated with the 20<sup>th</sup> century German Nazi party and Nazi state and by extension, other far-right groups. Usually characterized as a form of fascism that incorporates scientific racism and anti-semitism, Nazism developed out of the influences of Pan-Germanism, the Volkisch German nationalist movement and the anti-communist Freikorps paramilitary groups that emerged during the Weimar Republic after German defeat in World War I. The Nazi Party was founded as the Pan-German nationalist and anti-Semitic German Workers' Party on 5 January 1919. By the early 1920s, Adolf Hitler assumed control of the organization and renamed it the National Socialist German Workers' Party to broaden its appeal. The National Socialist Program, adopted in 1920, called for a united Greater Germany that would deny citizenship to Jews or those of Jewish descent, while also supporting land reform and the nationalization of some industries. In *Mein Kampf*, written in 1924, Hitler outlined the anti-Semitism and anti-communism at the heart of his political philosophy, as well as his disdain for parliamentary democracy and his belief in Germany's right to territorial expansion.

**Check Your Progress**

1. What are the major novels of Anita Desai? Discuss the thematic patterns of these novels.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

**1.4 Let us sum up**

In this unit you have got a general idea about the Indo-Anglian novel. You have also learnt about the major women novelists who have made significant contribution to Indo-Anglian literature. Anita Desai is one of the most distinguished women writers of India. The section containing the life and works of Anita Desai has enhanced your knowledge of Anita Desai's background and literary works. You are also acquainted with her literary achievements. The discussion of the major novels of Anita Desai gives you an idea about the thematic patterns of her novels. This has incited your interest in the novels of Anita Desai. You have also learnt from the additional informations given in the boxes. The given exercises have enhanced your comprehension as well as writing skills. With these improved skills, you have already taken a step forward towards the next unit where you will learn about *Fasting, Feasting*, one of the most significant novels by Anita Desai.

**1.5 Key Words**

**Vernacular:** The language of a people or a national language; Everyday speech or dialect, including colloquialisms, as opposed to literary, liturgical or scientific language.

**Vignette:** A picture that shades off gradually into the background; a brief literary sketch; a decorative design, as at the beginning of a book, chapter of a book etc.

**Redemption:** The act of redeeming or something redeemed; salvation from sin.

**Trilogy:** A set of three works of art that are connected, and that can be seen either as a single work or as three individual works.

**Emancipation:** The act of setting free from the power of another, from slavery, subjection, dependence or controlling influence.

**Zenith:** Highest point or state; the highest point in the sky reached by a celestial body.

**Immigrant:** A person who comes to a country in order to permanently settle there.

**Assimilation:** The process of absorbing; the process of adapting or conforming

**Regression:** An action of regressing; a return to a previous state

**Pragmatic:** Treating things from a practical point of view

**Claustrophobia:** Abnormal fear of being in an enclosed space.

**Oriental:** Happening in the eastern part of a given place or location; pertaining to the regions east of the Mediterranean, beyond the Roman Empire or the early Christian world; of the Near East, the Middle East or the Far East, now especially relating to East Asia.

**Dichotomy:** Division into two, usually opposing, parts or view-points.

**Puppet:** Any small model of a person or animal able to be moved by strings or rods, or in the form of a glove; a person, a country etc. controlled by another.

**Acrimony:** A sharp and bitter hatred

**Introspection:** A looking inward specifically, the act or process of self-examination, or inspection of one's own thoughts and feelings; the cognition which the mind has of its own acts and states; self-consciousness; reflection.

**Apprentice:** A trainee, especially in a skilled trade.

**Squander:** To waste, lavish, splurge; to spend lavishly or profusely; to dissipate

**Fiasco:** A ludicrous or humiliating situation, some effort that went quite wrong.

**Hippie:** One who chooses not to conform to prevailing social norms; especially one who ascribes to values or actions such as acceptance or self-practice of recreational drug use, liberal or radical sexual mores, advocacy of communal living, strong pacifism or anti-war sentiment etc.; A person, especially a male, with unusually long hair and often wearing ragged clothes.

**Enlightenment:** An act of enlightening, or the state of being enlightened or instructed; A concept of spirituality, philosophy and psychology related to achieving clarity of perception, reason and knowledge.

**Travails:** Arduous or painful exertion; excessive labor, suffering, hardship.

**Displacement:** The act of moving something or someone, especially to forcibly move people from their homeland.

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## Suggested Reading

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## **BLOCK – I : FICTION**

### **UNIT - II**

#### **ANITA DESAI : *FASTING, FEASTING***

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Summary of *Fasting, Feasting*

2.3 Theoretical Perspective: A Feminist Reading of *Fasting, Feasting*

2.4 Themes

2.4.1 Gender Differences and Role of Society

2.4.2 Family Bondage and Individual Freedom

2.4.3 Plenty versus Want

2.4.4 Tradition in contrast with Modernity

2.4.5 Pangs of Loneliness and Warmth of Togetherness

2.5 Let us Sum Up

2.6 Key Words

2.7 References

Suggested Readings

## 2.0 Objectives

In the previous unit, you have learnt about the background of Indo-Anglian novel. You are also acquainted with the major Indo-Anglian women novelists of the Post-Independence Era. The life, works and literary achievements of Anita Desai have also been discussed in that unit. You have got the idea about the major novels of Anita Desai. In this unit, we are going to discuss a novel, *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai. This unit will help you to

Formulate an idea about the novel, *Fasting, Feasting*

Interpret *Fasting, Feasting* from the Feminist Perspective

Acquaint with the thematic interpretation of *Fasting, Feasting*

## 2.1 Introduction

In this unit, you will be introduced to the novel, *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai. Anita Desai is a distinguished Indo-Anglian novelist and has been popularly known as a literary genius both in India and abroad. *Fasting, Feasting* was first published in 1999 by Chatto & Windus in Great Britain. It was short-listed for the Booker Prize for fiction in 1999. As the title, *Fasting, Feasting* itself suggests, the novel shows the similarity and contrast between Indian culture and western culture. The novel also speaks about gender issues prevalent in Indian society and in American society. After going through this unit, you will be able to relate *Fasting, Feasting* with that of the other novels by Anita Desai.

### Stop to Consider

**Booker Prize:** The Man Booker Prize for Fiction (formerly known as the Booker-McConnell Prize and commonly known as the Booker Prize) is a literary prize awarded each year for the best original novel, written in the English language and published in

the United Kingdom. The winner of the Man Booker Prize is generally assured of international renown and success; therefore the prize is of great significance for the book trade. From its inception, only Commonwealth, Irish and Zimbabwean citizens were eligible to receive prize. In 2013, however this eligibility was widened to any English language novel.

## 2.2 Summary of *Fasting, Feasting*

In this section, you will be acquainted with the story of *Fasting, Feasting*. Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* deals with the happenings in the lives of two families across two different cultures- an Indian family on one hand and an American family on the other. The novel is divided into two parts- the first part deals with the Indian family having the parents named as 'mamapapa', their daughters Uma, Aruna and son Arun. The second part deals with the Patton family in America and Arun's association with this family. In a small town in India in the late 1970's, Uma and her younger sister Aruna grew up in a traditional Indian household. Their parents, called only Mama and Papa, try to control the destinies of their daughters by teaching them domestic, traditionally feminine skills. Uma takes little interest in marriage or household chores- rather, she loves attending her convent school, despite her failing grades. Mamapapa show little patience for Uma. Papa, a middle-government magistrate with a fragile ego, dominates his family life by dictating the family's daily activities and everyone's future. Priding herself as the wife of an important man, Mama cooperates with Papa on almost every issue. After Arun is born, Mama and Papa demand that Uma should leave school to take care of her baby brother. Uma runs away to the convent school and fruitlessly begs Mother Agnes to talk to MamaPapa into letting her back to school. Uma has her first seizure on the convent

floor after Mother Agnes says she is powerless to help her. Uma's beautiful cousin Anamika has the opportunity to go to Oxford University, but her parents Lily Aunty and Bakul Uncle do not allow her to go. Instead, they marry her off to the wealthiest, most educated man they can find. Soon, Uma and her parents hear that Anamika's husband and mother-in-law beat her and treat her like a servant. As Uma grows up, men show little interest in her, preferring her younger sister. After three failed marriage attempts, including two dowry scams and one old man who marries Uma and then abandons her, Mama and Papa give up on trying to marry Uma off. Aruna, meanwhile receives many marriage proposals and she chooses Arvind, a wealthy man from Bombay. After her expensive ceremony, Aruna leaves for a new life in Bombay and visits only occasionally. When she does visit, she acts superior to her family, especially Uma. Given great care and attention, Arun studies to the point of exhaustion every night under the supervision of a forceful Papa. Quiet and expressionless, Arun has been vegetarian since childhood, to the dismay of his parents, who see it as weak and old-fashioned. Neglected and confined, Uma tries whenever possible to get away from home. On one occasion, her relative Mira-Masi, a religious widow who travels the country freely, tricks Mama Papa into letting her bring Uma with her to an ashram, or pilgrimage house. There, Uma wanders around freely and happily for a month, until Mama Papa send her cousin Ramu to bring her back. Women in the community try to bring Uma out of her entrapped family life, inviting her to socialize and work with them. On another occasion, Dr. Dutt comes to Mama Papa's house to invite Uma to come work for her, but Mama and Papa refuse. Uma's eyes become painful, but Papa refuses to allow her to seek medical care. One night, the family hears that Anamika has been found dead, burned to death on her porch. Whether it is suicide or murder is unclear.

The novel now switches its focus onto Arun. After much hard work, Arun wins a scholarship to study in America. When he arrives in Massachusetts, he tiredly withdraws, spending his first year in university by himself. The following summer, Arun reluctantly stays with an American family, Mr. Patton and their children Rod and Melanie. Mrs. Patton warmly welcomes Arun, but he soon sees how she struggles against the strong will of her unappreciative husband. Mr. Patton and the athletic, self-oriented Rod ignore Mrs. Patton and Melanie, focusing on work, working out and playing sports. Mrs. Patton takes Arun shopping with her, insisting that he teaches her how to be vegetarian. Meanwhile, Arun becomes disgusted with American excess. He soon finds that Melanie, the daughter is bulimic and anxiously tries to find a way to tell the oblivious Mrs. Patton what is wrong. Meanwhile, one day in the grocery store, a cashier tells Mrs. Patton that she looks pregnant. Mrs. Patton becomes obsessed with sun tanning, further neglecting her daughter. Towards the end of the summer, Arun and Melanie go with Mrs. Patton to a pond. Arun delightedly enjoys the feeling of escaping himself when swimming. Later, while Mrs. Patton is sun bathing, Arun goes to look for Melanie, who has disappeared. He finds her half-conscious in a pile of her own vomit. Mrs. Patton soon arrives, shocked at what she sees. Melanie enters into a rehabilitative institution and Rod leaves for college. Mr. Patton has taken on a night job to pay the bills for Melanie and Mrs. Patton has stopped sunbathing, now letting the kitchen go bare while she tidies Melanie's room, on her knees, and seeks out new age spiritual literature and programs. Rod has won a football scholarship. Arun has just received the box with a brown shawl and a box of tea that his sister Uma prepared and sent to him, but he has no room in his bags for it. He gives both items as gifts to Mrs. Patton, wrapping the shawl around her shoulders, as he tells her that he

is leaving now. Mrs. Patton warmly wraps the shawl around herself as Arun quietly sneaks out.

### **2.3 Theoretical Perspective: A Feminist Reading of *Fasting, Feasting***

In the previous section, you have got the idea about the story of *Fasting, Feasting*. In this section, we shall discuss the novel from feminist perspective. Feminism is both a political stance and a theory that focuses on gender as a subject of analysis when reading cultural practices and as a platform to demand equality, rights and justice. The key assumption of feminism is that gender roles are pre-determined and the woman is trained to fit into those roles. This means that roles like 'daughter' or 'mother' are not natural but socially made because the woman has to be trained to think, talk, act in particular ways that suit the role. Feminist literary theory focuses on the representation of women in art and the real, material conditions of women. Feminist theory argues that the representation of women as weak, docile, innocent, seductive, irrational, sentimental is rooted in social conditions, where she does not have power, is treated as a sex-object or a procreating machine, has fewer political and financial rights. Feminism is worldview that refuses to delink art and literature from the existing social conditions and practices. Feminism explores the cultural dimensions of the woman's material life. Feminist literary theory assume that cultural texts such as cinema, TV soap opera, music, painting reflect real-life power struggles between genders. Cultural texts naturalize the oppression of women through their stereotyped representation of women as weak/vulnerable, seductress, obstacle, sexual object or a procreating device. The task of criticism is therefore, to reveal the underlying ideologies within these texts because these ideologies are instrumental in continuing women's oppression.

French writer and feminist, Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86) puts forward her views regarding 'woman emancipation' in her book, *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir argues that there is no such thing as feminine nature. In her view, the fulfillment of human potential must be judged in terms of liberty, not in terms of happiness. By liberty, she means not only maintaining one's existence peacefully and comfortably, but it also means to be free, to transcend the animal part of one's life and pursue the uniquely human desire to know more, to do more and have more. The female emancipation is possible through her release from her bodily identification. With the vision of female emancipation, Beauvoir forms the image of 'modern woman'. Woman must liberate herself from a system of patriarchal values and beliefs, and should empower herself to discover her uniquely female identity. Beauvoir's concept of 'woman emancipation' has been interpreted by women writers to signify the awakening of woman into a new realization of her place and position in family and society. The impact of socially constructed gender roles on the female subjects of Anita Desai's novels can be discussed from the feminist perspective. Anita Desai had never claimed to be a feminist, though most critical studies of Desai's works tend to trace a kind of feminist tradition in her writings. She herself, however, ignores this in an interview when replying to a question on the feministic tradition in India she says, "I take it you mean the feministic tradition in literature in India. I am not aware of any. In fact, there are no traditions at all in the English written in India." She considers that the term 'woman writer' is derogatory as it takes away her artistic autonomy and identity and the writer falls into the category of gender. Though she denies her link with any kind of feministic trend, her minute portrayal of the woman's psychic world inspires her critics to consider her writing as sympathetic to the woman's cause.

### **Stop to Consider**

**Simone de Beauvoir:** Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was a French writer, intellectual, existentialist philosopher, political activist, feminist and social theorist. Though she did not consider herself a philosopher, she had a significant influence on both feminist existentialism and feminist theory. De Beauvoir wrote novels, essays, biographies, autobiography and monographs on philosophy, politics and social issues. She is known for her 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*, a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract of contemporary feminism and for her novels, including *She Came to Stay* and *The Mandarins*. **The Second Sex:** *The Second Sex* is a book by the French existentialist, Simone de Beauvoir which was published in 1949. One of her best-known books, it deals with the treatment of women throughout history and is often regarded as a major work of feminist philosophy and the starting point of second-wave feminism. Beauvoir researched and wrote the book in about 14 months when she was 38 years old. She published it in two volumes and some chapters first appeared in *Les Temps modernes*.

In the novel, *Fasting, Feasting*, Desai portrays the roles of gender and their importance in society. In the novel, men appear to be more superior and important than the women in the society. The story has many situations where the family makes the comparison between their children. It is seen that there is unequal opportunities between men and women in Indian families. Desai depicts the patriarchal values and beliefs prevailing in Indian society that determine the role of women in society. The title *Fasting, Feasting* is ironical with its binary implications. The birth of a son is always to be feasted upon. It is a traditional belief that



a daughter spells misery. A daughter is to be married off with a dowry and she is to be educated to qualify as a desirable bride to a prospective groom. So a daughter instead of bringing any good fortune to the family adds to the compulsive expenditure in a family. The chief female characters in the novel are Uma, Aruna, Anamika, Mira-masi, the mother, Mrs. Patton and Melanie. Though the narration chiefly revolves around Uma and her frustrated efforts at education, the reader gets to know about Anamika's educational achievements. If Uma is plain and stupid Anamika is beautiful and clever. In spite of her being attractive and good in academics, Anamika has the only choice in life; to marry according to the parent's wishes. Her admission letter to Oxford university is tucked away carefully to be revealed to the prospective grooms as one of the requisites for good marriage. The efforts yield fruit and Anamika is married off to a joint family household. For the parents and her relatives the story of Anamika ends. Her people do not see her again as her in-laws do not like her to visit her people. So the relatives only hear about her from various sources. The reader learns about Anamika's groveling existence in her husband's family and finally her gruesome death from hearsay reports. The cruelties of Anamika's mother-in-law and her husband are clearly indicated in the novel: "Anamika had been beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by and approved-or, at least, did not object. Anamika spent her entire time in the kitchen, cooking for his family which was large so that meals were eaten in shifts-first the men, then the children, finally the women" (*Fasting, Feasting*, p.70).

Anamika was beaten by her mother-in-law while her husband was a mute observer of her humiliation. She was treated as a slave to cook for the massive family and is given to eat 'the remains in the pots before scouring them'. Anamika had a miscarriage and had lost her

child bearing capacity. Anita Desai does not reveal Anamika's mental condition and her painful life in details. Her predicament is made to known to the readers as an outsider, just as another newspaper clipping about a wife 'burnt to death'. Anamika's parental family accepted her death as a mere fate. It is indicated in the novel: "What Anamika's family said was that it was fate, God had willed it and it was Anamika's destiny."(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.151)

Desai ironically unfolds the acceptance of such events as mere fate or 'God's will' to mock at the patriarchal gaze and its blindness to these gruesome details of life. The Indian circumstances, the patriarchy is not just male authority. It is chiefly the authority of the mothers-in-law who unleash their frustrations on their daughters-in-law to maintain the power structure in the family. The mother and relatives of the girl are meant to be mute observers in their subservience to the patriarchal belief and control. Emancipation is only possible with the consciousness of the younger generation of women. So Uma, in spite of her dullness craves for education and wishes to be economically free of her parents. She too suffers the brunt of the patriarchal structure which makes her a hysteric. Uma is married to a man much older than herself. After going through the humiliation of her in-law, Uma realized with a shock that she is married to a man already married. He has married her for a dowry that he needed to cater to the needs of his already existing family.

The novel gives a proof of the deceitful marriage: "Harish was married already, had a wife and four children in Meerut where he ran an ailing pharmaceutical factory to save which he had needed another dowry which had led him to marry again."(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.93)

Unlike Anamika's parents, Uma's father is sensible to bring his daughter home. So Uma is saved. She does not die but she has no life either in her parental home where she is expected to serve her parents

and be of use to them. Uma's predicament in the novel is of daughter that the parents have not been able to get rid of and has to bear with shameful fortitude.

Uma becomes the victim of traditional patriarchal values. Uma's mother, who is successfully conditioned in the patriarchal notions, becomes its agent, displaying not only partial behaviour towards her, favouring her son, but also opposing Uma's wish to continue her studies. Mama orders Uma to bring orange and "she picks out the largest orange in the bowl and hands it to Mama who peels it in strips, then divides into separate segments. Each segment is then peeled and freed of pips and threads till only the perfect globules of juice are left, and then passed, one by one to edge of Papa's plate." This shows how females are made to work at home and how the males enjoy their hard work and pain. Even for peeling the orange, the simplest work, Uma and mother have to do for the father. "Boys should be educated" indicates that education is must for males and not for the females and the statement "Girls should be married off" indicates that the girls have no meaning, desires and wishes in their lives. The eldest daughter Uma was forced to give up her convent school education in order to look after the only son in the family. Her marriage happens to be a mishap for her. She returns home frustrated after a deceitful marriage and subsequent divorce. She was offered a job by Dr. Dutt. It was a good opportunity for her to escape the entrapped state. But again she could not accept the offer because of parental authority. Dr. Dutt insists Uma on accepting the offer, but her mother lies of an illness for which she needs Uma to nurse her. In the same way, the parents refuse to send her to a coffee party invited by Mrs. O' Henry for her apprehension that Mrs. O' Henry might ensnare her and convert her into a Christian nun. Uma's independence is totally lost and she is further entrapped in parental authority. In the novel, it is

seen that both Uma and Anamika are victim of gender discrimination and fail to have their distinct identities. The two families depicted in the novel are traditional families whose psychology is deeply rooted in the old patriarchal values of society. In these two families, both the men and women are depicted as the agents of patriarchal values who are unsympathetic towards their daughter and daughter-in-law. Desai's fiction highlights how the individual self of a woman often tends to disappear in the facades of socially and culturally constructed female identities.

In Part Two of *Fasting, Feasting* the scene shifts to America portraying two women characters: Mrs. Patton and her daughter Melanie. While Mrs. Patton is obsessed with food and keeps busy in either shopping or cooking, Melanie suffers from Bulimia and shuns company. Melanie is a victim of loneliness and isolation. Both Mrs. Patton and Melanie find the Western environment stifling. In both their cases excessive freedom led to a suffocating environment and loneliness. Uma and Melanie present two women of different cultures each reacting to the claustrophobic unwanted social norms in their own way. However both lack sufficient will power and hence fail to emerge out successfully in the efforts to rebel against the existing social norms. Thus both of them are forced to lead isolated lives.

**Check Your Progress**

1. What is feminism?

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2. Discuss *Fasting, Feasting* from feminist perspective?

Ans.....  
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## 2.4 Themes

After going through the previous section, you have learnt to analyse the novel from the feminist perspective. In this section we shall discuss the various themes in the novel that will enhance your understanding of the novel.

### 2.4.1 Gender Differences and Role of Society

One of the important themes in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* is the role of society in determining the gender based differences across cultures. The pressures and expectations placed on the different characters in the novel show the contrast in the social roles men and women are expected to fulfill, both in India and in the United States. While men are expected to be hard working, academic and successful, the social value of women is dependent on their submissiveness, domestic abilities, beauty and child bearing. Aruna and Uma are raised, educated and groomed only with marriage in mind. When the multiple attempts of MamaPapa to arrange a marriage for Uma fail, it becomes Uma's job to take care of her baby brother, Arun and later her ageing parents. Mama's identity is tied in with her role as the wife of an important man and she seldom disagrees with him. Anamika meets the social expectations of female submission-yet, abused to death, Anamika experiences the ultimate loss of freedom that threatens all women who

are forced to fulfill the feminine ideal. Dr. Dutt and Mira-masi both represent women who, independent of family and men, defy female social roles.

Men also lose their free will and individual expression to the social roles they must fill. As a child, Arun is showered with care and attention, unlike his neglected sister, Uma. Yet Mama Papa place high demands on Arun for him to work hard in school and achieve constantly, giving Arun no alternative path. While Papa has the most authority in Uma's household, his ego and pride are bound to his social role as a male head of the household. He cannot appear vulnerable and so never forms genuine human connections. American society as portrayed in the novel also places gendered expectations onto its members, particularly in regards to male and female beauty. Mrs. Paton, like her daughter Melanie is burdened by American ideals of female perfection and beauty which are obsessed with dangerous degrees of thinness and over-tanning. Mr. Patton and Rod similarly fulfill the traditional Macho American stereotype of athleticism and hard work. Like Papa, Mr. Patton assumes passive control over the members of his household. Mrs. Patton, like Mama appears to have no other identity beyond wife and mother.

#### **2.4.2 Family Bondage and Individual Freedom**

Another important theme of the novel is the hold of the family over individual desires. At the heart of many of the character's stories lies a common search for freedom to be oneself and carve out one's own life path. The needs and desires of the individual are in constant tension with the demands of the family, which is the central social institution throughout the novel. Uma's desire for freedom is the central example: constrained by her family's needs and expectations, Uma yearns to be free, pushing against her family wherever possible. Uma's desires are in constant check by her parents, yet she develops a freedom

of spirit in her own world. When Dr. Dutt offers Uma a job, Uma's mother directly rejects the offer:

“Our daughter does not need to go out to work, Dr. Dutt,’ she said. ‘As long as we are here to provide for her, she will never need to go to work.’”( *Fasting, Feasting*, p.143)

Mira-masi, Ramu and Dr. Dutt all represent freedom from family expectations and social roles. Leading very independent lives, they have defected from their traditional family roles and defied societal expectations. Not surprisingly, all of these characters are unmarried. Marriage, with the exception of Mrs. Joshi and Aruna's example, almost consistently threatens individual freedom by melting two people into one-as symbolized by Uma's reference to her parents as one entity: MamaPapa. Further this melting through marriage usually comes to the detriment of the woman, who ends up being subservient to the man. While gender expectations inhibit both Uma and Anamika's freedoms, it is the confines of marriage in particular which prove so brutal for Anamika's freedom and her life.

Arun, having never had the choice of his surroundings or his life paths, tries to live as independently as possible in the United States. While in America, Arun tries to avoid situations that involve integrating himself into families and other tight-knot groups, feeling he can be himself only when he is by himself. For the Patton's, the family structure deteriorates, becoming oppressive in its ability to serve the needs and desires of its members. In their American individualism, they neglect each other. Mrs. Patton's determination to present a harmonious family image prevents her from seeing the real problems of her children. Mr. Patton tries to control his family by ensuring that everyone is productive. Neither parent nor child try to form genuine relationships, making family a false haven for its members.

### 2.4.3 Plenty versus Want

The very title of the novel *Fasting, Feasting* itself speaks about the important theme of the novel—on one hand there is plenty standing for feasting and on the other hand, there is want referring to fasting. Access to resources play a large factor in determining the quality of life and opportunity available to individual characters in the novel. Plenty and want are not what they appear to be, and characters who seem to have much are often found wanting; likewise, those who seem to have little are rich in spiritual ways. India is contrasted with America and Uma's lower middle class parents are contrasted with wealthier families in India. Seeking economic plenty is very important to characters in the novel. For example, MamaPapa are deeply interested in increasing their wealth and status by affording good marriages for their daughters and a good education for their son. Even within the same family, male characters have greater resources and opportunities, particularly in the Indian context. While MamaPapa put a great deal of money, time and attention into their son Arun's education and physical care, Uma is not even allowed to finish her basic primary education or receive needed medical care for her painful eyesight.

For women, personal traits like charm, domestic capability and physical attractiveness allow them access to higher status marriage partners and therefore greater social status. Aruna, being prettier and more outwardly charming is assigned a higher social value by her parents and by the community than her sister Uma. Yet, Uma has a different kind of plenty: she has a vast inner world. Her kindness, curiosity and her desire for freedom and autonomy allow her to engage her mind and her heart. These make her richer in many ways than the other characters. When Arun goes to United States, he discovers a land of economic plenty, even excess, which he compares to the modest means of his



own family in India. However, lacking the warmth and togetherness of Arun's family in India, the American family seems hollow to him, having a deeper kind of poverty. This is obvious to Arun than when he witnesses Melanie suffering from hunger and malnourishment due to her eating disorder, while there is a fridge full of food.

#### **2.4.4 Tradition in contrast with Modernity**

The novel shows the contrast between tradition and modernity through the different characters. Most frequently, tradition is associated with India/Rural/Home/Extended Family/ Poverty /Fasting and modernity is associated with Western/ Urban/ Individuality/ Commercialism/Feasting. MamaPapa, from rural humble roots, hold fast to traditional values, placing less value on daughters' education and more value on daughters' obedience and preparation for marriage. The nuns at the convent and the Christian missionaries represent a western perspective in India that challenges MamaPapa's traditionalism. Uma's parents see no need for Uma to go into the city with Ramu or to visit Aruna in Bombay, as they also see the urban settings as threatening. Yet, the 'Old/India' and the 'New/Western' paradigms are constantly shifting. Mira-masi dedicates her life to traditional Hindu Gods and Goddesses, yet to MamaPapa there is something very dangerous and progressive about Mira-masi's free-roaming, unmarried life. Arun's desire to be a vegetarian appears so old-fashioned to MamaPapa that it is almost defiant.

While western ideas may seem more liberating, its people more liberated, western society and the urban setting do not offer freedom from gender roles or social expectations. Aruna feels so pressured by the ideals of the wealthy urban India that she becomes anxious and obsessed with perfection. Through commercialism, wealth and image have become the new constraint. American society places high

expectations on women: while Melanie is not being pressured by her parents to marry as Uma and Aruna were, she is pressured by American ideals of beauty to achieve unhealthy thinness- at whatever cost. Mrs. Patton, trying to be the picture of motherhood, feels she cannot pursue vegetarianism because her husband won't approve. For the old-fashioned Mr. Patton, vegetarianism represents a threat to the American way.

#### **2.4.5 Pangs of Loneliness and Warmth of Togetherness**

Many of the characters suffer from the pangs of loneliness throughout the novel. The feeling of loneliness is shown in two different ways. On one hand, there is the sense of loneliness when one is alone and there is no one around him. On the other hand, the character feels mentally isolated even in the midst of the family members. Loneliness affects many characters-yet, togetherness, especially within families, doesn't always solve the loneliness of the individual. Balancing the needs for both community and solitude is a constant struggle, especially for Uma and Arun. Within Indian society, individuals experience mental isolation within tight-knit families. The obligation to maintain a pretense of family harmony is isolating because individuals have no recourse for expressing their true desires without rebelling against the family. Uma is constantly in the company of her parents or other family members-yet she is lonely and isolated within those relationships, because true friendship is lacking. Uma, social and curious in nature, hungrily seeks any opportunity to make new friends and interact with people outside of her nuclear family home. Arun is similarly isolated within his family, as he too has no friends, and his obligation to study takes up all of his time and energy. Yet, unlike Uma, Arun develops a preference for being alone, resisting groups and people who try to include him.

Within American society, the breakup of the family manifests itself more obviously on a daily basis. The barbecue dinner featured in

the Patton's house within the novel is a total failure- neither of the Patton children are present, the father is angry, the mother must cover her unhappiness about being forced to eat steak and the feeling that members of the household are disunited appears stark. Rather than spending time together, the family spends their meals as well as their leisure time apart. Melanie is isolated in her feelings and her struggle in the same way as Uma, except that in the American context, Melanie is openly defiant and individualistic as a way of covering her loneliness, while Uma appears obedient in comparison. Uma's loneliness goes unnoticed by her parents, just as Melanie's. The warmth of the Indian family, however can be a safe haven during sad times. When Anamika dies, Uma and Mama holds hands in mourning. There is no such mutual consolation to be found among the Pattons.

**Check Your Progress**

1. What are the Themes of Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*?  
Critically discuss.

Ans.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**2.5 Let us sum up**

After going through this unit, you have learnt that Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* deals with crucial issues like gender and society. Anita Desai, one of the leading Indian women novelists in her fiction beautifully portrays some of the burning problems faced by girl-child and women at familial as well as social level. The feminist theoretical

perspective has helped your understanding of feminism and its applicability to the novel. You are now acquainted with the various themes of the novel. The informations and the questions in the boxes have enhanced your knowledge as well as your writing skills. In the next unit, we shall discuss the symbols, the characters and the narrative technique in *Fasting, Feasting*.

## 2.6 Key-Words

- Fragile : Easily broken or destroyed and thus often of subtle or intricate structure.
- Seizure : A sudden attack or convulsion (e.g. an epileptic seizure)
- Scam : Fraudulent deal
- Entrapped : To catch something in a trap or snare; to lure someone either into a dangerous situation or into performing an illegal act.
- Porch : Roofed shelter over the entrance of a building
- Bulimia : A chronic eating disorder-extreme overeating followed by self-induced vomiting
- Grocery : Retail foodstuffs and other household supplies
- Rehabilitative: Tending to restore to a normal life or good condition
- Gender : The socio-cultural phenomenon of the division of people into various categories such as “male” and “female” with each having associated with clothing, roles, stereotypes etc.
- Irrational : Not able to reason
- Oppression : The exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel or unjust manner.
- Stereotype : A conventional, formulaic and oversimplified conception, opinion or image; a person who is regarded as embodying or conforming to a set image or type

- Derogatory : Disparaging
- Autonomy : Self-government; freedom to act or function independently
- Patriarchal : Relating to a system run by males, rather than females
- Gruesome : Filling one with horror or disgust
- Binary : Being in a state of one of two mutually exclusive conditions such as on or off, true or false, presence or absence of a signal.
- Subservience: The state of being obsequiously submissive
- Hysteria : Behaviour exhibiting excessive or uncontrollable emotion such as fear or panic; mental disorder
- Fortitude : Courage in bearing pain or trouble
- Claustrophobic: Suffering from claustrophobia; being scared of being enclosed in a confined space.
- Vulnerable : More or most likely to be exposed to the chance of being attacked or harmed either physically or emotionally
- Malnourishment: Under nourishment
- Paradigm : An example serving as a model or pattern; a conceptual framework- an established thought process
- Defiant : Hostile; showing or feeling defiance
- Barbecue : Frame for grilling food above an open fire
- Stark : Desolate, bare
- Haven : Refuge, harbour

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## BLOCK – I : FICTION

### UNIT - III

## ***FASTING, FEASTING : SYMBOLS, CHARACTERS & NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE***

#### 3.0 Objectives

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Symbols
  - 3.2.1 Water/River
  - 3.2.2 Seizure
- 3.3 Characters
  - 3.3.1 Uma
  - 3.3.2 Arun
  - 3.3.3 Aruna
  - 3.3.4 Mama
  - 3.3.5 Papa
  - 3.3.6 Mrs. Patton
  - 3.3.7 Mr. Patton
  - 3.3.8 Melanie
  - 3.3.9 Rod
  - 3.3.10 Anamika
  - 3.3.11 Lily Aunty and Bakul Uncle
  - 3.3.12 Mira-Masi
  - 3.3.13 Ramu
  - 3.3.14 Mrs. O’Henry
  - 3.3.15 Dr.Dutt
- 3.4 Narrative Technique in *Fasting, Feasting*
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Key-Words
- 3.7 References

Suggested Readings

### 3.0 Objectives

In the previous unit, you have gone through Anita Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting* and you have come to know about the theoretical perspective and the themes in the novel. This unit will help you to Identify the Symbols in *Fasting, Feasting*

Assess the major and minor characters in the novel

Acquaint yourself with the narrative technique of the novel

### 3.1 Introduction

You are already acquainted with the story of *Fasting, Feasting*. You have learnt to interpret the novel from feminist perspective. The discussion of the various themes has enhanced your understanding of the novel. In this unit, we shall discuss the symbols, characters and the narrative technique in the novel which will make your understanding of *Fasting, Feasting* more comprehensive.

### 3.2 Symbols

A symbol is a literary device that contains several layers of meaning, often concealed at first sight, and is representative of several other aspects, concepts or traits than those that are visible in the literal translation alone. Symbol uses an object or action that means something more than its literal meaning. Symbols play an important role in *Fasting, Feasting*. In this section, we shall discuss the symbols in the novel.

#### 3.2.1 Water/River

“Water” is an important symbol in *Fasting, Feasting*. Throughout the novel, submersion in water represents freedom from the constraints of society, family and the self. As a child restricted and unappreciated by her family and society, Uma feels drawn to the water's edge where she sees Mira-masi bathing in the “sacred” river that runs through the



village. Uma has no fear of drowning and against the warnings of her parents, she dips her feet in. Years later, when Aruna and her in-laws come to make a pilgrimage to the river with her family, Uma impulsively jumps off the boat and into the river, allowing herself to sink to the bottom. At a time in her life when there are no more prospects of education or marriage, nor any other feasible escape from Mama and Papa, Uma feels both neglected and trapped. She is drawn to the river, to the feeling of sinking, as if drawn to death as her only escape. It is unclear whether she is suicidal or not. Later, when cousin Anamika dies a tragic death at the hands of her abusive in-laws, Uma's parents and relatives go to the sacred river to sprinkle Anamika's ashes. Uma, cold and empty watches with longing as Anamika's ashes float out, freeing Anamika from the pain of an entrapped life.

“For a moment the jar seems to rest on the surface of the water as if it were a pane of glass; then it breaks through. Briefly it remains visible, bobbing like a swimmer trying to keep its head above water, the garland of marigolds floating about its rim.” (*Fasting, Feasting*, p.155)

In America in the second half of the novel, Melanie is also entrapped-by her emotional turmoil, her eating disorder and her inattentive parents. She spends long nights in the bathtub to escape. Arun finds himself trapped even in America by the memories of his family and the self-restraint he has developed throughout his life as a survival mechanism. The only instance in which Arun feels peace is toward the end of the novel, when he swims for the first time in his life in a pond outside the Patton's house. Arun's changed feelings at the time of swimming is indicated: “Surprisingly, it is due to the water, an element that removes him from his normal self, and opens out another world of possibilities.”(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.222)

There, he feels calm, as if freed from reality.

**Check Your Progress**

1. Critically examine the symbol of water/river.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

**3.2.2 Seizure**

Another symbol in the novel is Uma's seizure. Uma's seizure represents all of the nonconformist characteristics that make Uma different from the rest of her family and society. From an early age, Uma fails to meet her family and society's standards of self-restraint, passivity, beauty and femininity. When trying to escape back to her convent school, Uma has her first seizure just after Mother Agnes tells Uma that she can do nothing to fight MamaPapa on the matter of her education. It is indicated in the novel: "Uma suddenly went limp and crumpled and the next thing that Mother Agnes knew was that Uma was lying stretched out on the cotton rug by her desk. Nor had she simply fainted-she was writhing, frothing a little at the mouth and moaning, banging her head to one side, then the other." (*Fasting, Feasting*, p.29)

Mama blames the convent school for causing Uma's epilepsy and then uses the incident as further justification for keeping Uma at home and out of school. Uma's mother says,

"See what these nuns do,' she raged to Papa. 'What ideas they fill in the girls' heads! I always said don't send them to a convent school. Keep them at home, I said-but who listened? And now-!' (*Fasting, Feasting*, p.29)

Uma is as helpless to her seizures as she is to her family's decision to deny her education. She is equally helpless to the trouble her parents have in finding her a husband who wants her. When her younger sister Aruna marries, Uma has a seizure at the cocktail party the night before. Aruna blames Uma for ruining the party, as if Uma has done it on purpose. Aruna's anger at Uma's seizure mimics the cruelty of Uma's family blaming her for not managing to catch a husband. When Uma runs off with Mira-masi to the ashram, she has another seizure-yet this time, Mira-masi and the other pilgrims respond very differently. Rather than shaming Uma, they revere her as someone sacred, chosen by the Lord Shiva. Their response to her seizure reflects their acceptance of her generally-she is allowed to be herself at the ashram, to wander freely and without judgement. Mainstream society, as represented by her family, has no place for her. Yet religious devotees and others who form the outcasts of society are able to see what is special and unique about Uma's way of thinking and existing.

**Check Your Progress**

1. Critically examine the symbol of "seizure".

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3.3 Characters**

In the previous section, you have learnt about the symbols in *Fasting, Feasting*. Let us discuss the major and minor characters in the novel.

### 3.3.1 Uma

Uma is one of the major characters in the novel. Uma is the novel's spirited, oppressed heroine, the unfortunate daughter of a middle-class family in rural India. In case of Uma, it is parental authority which cripples her growing self. In the very beginning of the novel, it is noticed that her parents whom she calls 'mamapapa' treat her like a servant. She has to manage everything including the kitchen-work to the preparation of a package to her brother who is studying in America. It is indicated in the novel:

“All morning MamaPapa have found things for Uma to do. It is as if Papa's retirement is to be spent in this manner-sitting on the red swing in the veranda with Mama, rocking, and finding ways to keep Uma occupied.”(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.133)

She becomes a grey-haired spinster living under mamapapa's demanding rule. Her independence is lost under the demanding rules of her parents. She becomes a reluctant victim of entrapment at home. She notices both her father and mother merging into a single identity Mamapapa, so their authority becomes so powerful over her that she cannot defy it at all.

Uma's entrapment is further seen in her inability to have her own choice. She becomes the victim of traditional patriarchal values. Uma's mother, who is successfully conditioned in the patriarchal notions, becomes its agent, displaying not only partial behaviour towards her, favouring her son, but also opposing Uma's wish to continue her studies. Uma is deprived of schooling and marriage is seen as the only career for the girl and home is her confinement.

“Papa had not informed them when Uma was withdrawn from school well before that level (class eight).”(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.74)

Her marriage happens to be a mishap for her. She returns home frustrated after a deceitful marriage and subsequent divorce. She was

offered a job by Dr. Dutt. It was a good opportunity for her to escape the entrapped state. But again she could not accept the offer because of parental authority. Dr. Dutt insists Uma on accepting the offer, but her mother lies of an illness for which she needs Uma to nurse her. Dr. Dutt tells Uma,

“I wish your parents had agreed, but what could I say when your mother told me she was not well and needs you to nurse her?”

(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.145)

In the same way, the parents refuse to send her to a coffee party invited by Mrs.O’ Henry for her apprehension that Mrs.O’ Henry might ensnare her and convert her into a Christian nun. Uma’s independence is totally lost and she is further entrapped in parental authority. She has only a temporary moment of happiness when she is allowed to accompany her ailing aunt, Mira-masi on her pilgrimage. While staying at the ashram, Uma identifies her life with the barks and howls of the night. “That was what Uma felt her own life to have been-full of barks, howls, messages, and now-silence.”(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.61)

By sacrificing her life to the wishes of her parents, she feels that her innermost self has been isolated. There is no one to share her grief and loneliness. Out of embarrassment, she thinks of writing a letter to a friend to share her grief but it only ends up with the realisation that there is no one to rely on. Uma’s parents neglect her physical and emotional needs, demanding all of her energies and allowing her less freedom. Yet she loves people, poetry and wandering and is fearless and curious about new people and situations. She has seizures throughout the novel, a characteristic that represents her differentness from her family and society.

### **3.3.2 Arun**

Arun is the quiet, introvert brother of Uma and the youngest child of Mama and Papa. From Arun’s birth, Mama and Papa proudly

invest all of their hopes and dreams into Arun, smothering him with attention and forcing him to study until he has no energy left. It is indicated in the novel: “if there was one thing Papa insisted on in the realm of home and family, then it was education for his son: the best, the most, the highest.”(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.118)

To the disappointment of his parents, who value meat-eating and physical strength in males as signs of wealth and progress, Arun is a vegetarian who shows no athletic prowess. Prodded along by his father, Arun lethargically flies off to the university in Massachusetts. At college in America, Arun tries to free himself of his family and any other associations that threaten to entangle him. Arun fears being drawn into the judgement and expectations of others and seeks personal freedom by withdrawing from social interactions and both Indian and American society.

### **3.3.3 Aruna**

Aruna is the pretty, confident and socially ambitious younger sister of Uma and second daughter of Mama and Papa. As a child, school comes easily to Aruna, though she takes no interest in it. While she is kind and helpful to Uma during their childhood, she becomes snappy and superior when they approach adolescence, laughing at Uma’s rejection by prospective husbands. Aruna, on the other hand is so graceful that marriage proposals pour in for her.

“There were so many marriage proposals for Aruna that Uma’s unmarried state was not only an embarrassment but an obstruction.”(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.85)

She marries Arvind, a wealthy westernized socialite-visiting her family only on occasion. While her treatment to Uma is unkind, her struggle to free herself from her roots and her family’s limitations reflects in her tendency to criticize them and her ultimate decision to live a life apart from them.

### 3.3.4 Mama

Mama is the mother of Uma, Aruna and Arun. Throughout the novel, her first name is never revealed. She is just called Mama, defined by her roles as wife and mother. It is indicated in the novel:

“MAMANDPAPA. MamaPapa. PapaMama. It was hard to believe they ever had separate existences, that they had been separate entities and not MamaPapa in one breath.” (*Fasting, Feasting*, p.5)

Mama is the picture of a proud, submissive wife, seldom expressing an opinion different than her husband's. She pursues her own interests only on the sly, making it her mission in life to cater to her husband's needs and to work with him in controlling the destinies of their three children. Uma can recall few instances of Mama's separateness from Papa. The most noteworthy example is her failed plea to her husband that he let her terminate her late-in-life pregnancy with Arun, which is both painful and dangerous to her health.

“Mama was frantic to have it terminated. She had never been more ill, and would go through hellfire, she wept, just to stop the nausea that tormented her. But Papa set his jaws. They had two daughters, yes, quite grown-up as anyone could see, but there was no son. Would any man give up the chance of a son?” (*Fasting, Feasting*, p.16)

Later, when Uma is older and complains of pain in her eyes, Mama pleads with Papa to allow Uma to visit a specialist for her eyes. On occasion, Mama shows some comradery with Uma, such as when her niece Anamika dies and Mama draws close to her daughter, realizing perhaps for the first time how lucky she is to have Uma.

### 3.3.5 Papa

Papa is a proud, yet insecure middle-class legal magistrate, the husband of Mama and the father of Uma, Aruna and Arun. Papa grew up in great poverty and delights in reminding his children that he worked very hard in school to climb the social ladder and make a better life for

himself and his family. Threatened by modern ideas of women's liberation, Papa is content to allow Mama to wait on him and obey his requests. Yet, he supports Mama's authority before his children and the two have a complicit, cooperative marriage. Papa ignores people and ideas who challenge his authority, such as Dr. Dutt and on occasion, Mama. After his retirement, he dedicates his energies to acting as an academic drill sergeant for Arun, forcing him through school and college. He habitually criticizes and neglects Uma, particularly her physical needs.

### **3.3.6 Mrs. Patton**

Mrs. Patton is the sister of Mrs. O'Henry, wife to Mr. Patton and mother of Rod and Melanie. Being a suburban American stay-at-home mother, Mrs. Patton is obsessed with shopping, particularly for groceries. Lonely and fascinated by Arun's culture and vegetarianism, Mrs. Patton tries to befriend him. Mrs. Patton routinely denies her own inclinations and feelings, not even allowing her instinct for most of her life to go vegetarian for fear that her husband will disapprove. Mrs. Patton tells Arun:

“My sister told me many Indians were vegetarians. I've always wanted to be one myself. I've always hated eating meat....-but never could- never knew how-you know, my family wouldn't have liked it.”(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.179)

Cheerfully trying to preserve her image of a perfect family, Mrs. Patton does not try to get to know herself or her children-especially Melanie, whose emotional and physical problems beg Mrs. Patton's attention. Toward the end of the novel, she begins to explore eastern spirituality in an attempt to find peace.

### **3.3.7 Mr. Patton**

Mr. Patton is the husband of Mrs. Patton and the father of Melanie and Rod. Working full-time in an office, Mr. Patton leaves housekeeping



and cooking to his wife, with the exception of the barbecue. Athletic, macho and nationalistic, Mr. Patton places great value on work and gets frequently frustrated by his family for not being more in-line and productive. Showing little interest in his wife and daughter, Mr. Patton only interacts with his son Rod.

### **3.3.8 Melanie**

Melanie is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Patton and the sister of Rod. Struggling with bulimia and anorexia that go unnoticed by her parents, Melanie is frequently bitter, angry and difficult to talk to. Arun becomes preoccupied with Melanie's bad nutrition and defensive attitude, seeing a similarity between her bitterness and that of his own neglected sister, Uma. Melanie's eating disorder is not treated until her mother and Arun catch her nearly unconscious, writhing in the forest. Towards the end of novel, Melanie

“has been taken to an institution in the Berkshires where they know how to deal with the neuroses of adolescent girls: bulimia, anorexia, depression, withdrawal, compulsive behavior, hysteria” (*Fasting, Feasting*, p.226)

### **3.3.9 Rod**

Rod is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Patton and the brother of Melanie. Even-tempered and unemotional, Rod betrays little reaction to the conflicts and tension within his home. He knows about Melanie's eating disorder and while he disapproves, he accepts it as an unfortunate reality. Athletic and accomplished, Rod is usually found working out or watching sports and eating with his father. For Rod, sports are an escape from the difficult reality of his family life. Rod makes some effort at befriending Arun, but for the most part keeps to himself. In the end, he like Arun escapes his family by going away to college.

### **3.3.10 Anamika**

Anamika is the beautiful, graceful, intelligent daughter of Lily Aunty and Bakul Uncle, niece to MamaPapa and cousin to Uma. Kind

and sweet, Anamika is the favourite girl of everyone in the family, and as a children, Uma and Aruna fight for her affections. An excellent student, Anamika wins a scholarship to Oxford, but her parents do not even consider allowing her to go. It is indicated in the novel how Anamika's parents uses the scholarship as a tool for finding out a suitable groom for her:

“The scholarship was one of the qualifications they were able to offer when they started searching for a husband for her, and it was what won her a husband who was considered an equal to this prize of the family”(Fasting, Feasting,p.69).

When the girls reach adolescence, marriage proposals abound for Anamika. Looking for a man who matches Anamika's accomplishments, Lily Aunty and Bakul Uncle marry her off to a rich, educated man from another town. The marriage proves tragic for Anamika, whose husband and mother-in-law treat her like a household servant, beating her on a regular basis. She becomes infertile from beatings and after twenty-five years of marriage is found burned to death on her porch. The novel never reveals whether Anamika's death was suicide or murder. Anamika's husband and her mother-in-law have their own versions:

“What the husband said was that he had been away on a business trip and returned only that afternoon on hearing the news. What the mother-in-law said was that she always had Anamika sleep beside her, in her own room, as if she were a daughter, her own child. Only that night Anamika had insisted on sleeping in her own room. She must have planned it, plotted it all.” (Fasting, Feasting, p.151) Anamika's parents accepted her death as mere fate.

### **3.3.11 Lily Aunty and Bakul Uncle**

Bakul Uncle is the brother of Papa and Lily Aunty is his wife. Almost always mentioned together, Bakul uncle and Lily Aunty have a

marriage much like Mama and Papa- neither one expresses a different will or opinion than the other. The parents of Anamika and Ramu, Bakul uncle and Lily Aunty live in the city and are wealthier than Mama and Papa, due to Bakul uncle's successful career as a popular attorney. To the traditional minded Lily Aunty and Bakul uncle, success and social approval are very important, which is why they do not allow Anamika to go to college, instead pursuing the wealthiest husband for Anamika- with no consideration for the man's character. It is also their fear of social disgrace that prevents them from rescuing Anamika from what they know is an unsafe marriage. When she dies a violent death, they refuse to acknowledge what really happened, saying it was destiny.

### **3.3.12 Mira-Masi**

Mira-Masi is the widowed, religious wife of a distant relative of Uma's mother. It is shown in the novel:

'Mira-masi was not her sister but a very distant relative, the second or possibly even the third wife of a relative Mama preferred not to acknowledge at all.' (*Fasting, Feasting*, p.38)

Mira-Masi has dedicated her life to her worship of the Hindu god Shiva and spends her days travelling the country, making pilgrimages to sacred rivers and temples. Untethered by the authority of either husband or any other male relative, Mira-masi has more freedom than any other female in Uma's family. Fanatical in her devotion, Mira-masi who is kind and attentive to her, and sees her as especially chosen by the Lord Shiva. MamaPapa disapprove of Mira-masi, seeing her religion as too traditional and disapproving of her independent lifestyle. Mira-masi tries to free Uma from MamaPapa by bringing her with her to an ashram, and even fights with Ramu when he comes to bring her back. Mira-masi is delineated on a religio-spiritual level but so far as worldliness is concerned, she presents a picture of contentment by her compromise with life. As a widow she made this self-discovery that she has always to play a subsidiary role amongst her relatives. Hence she remains satisfied with minimum interaction and by small requirements

in life. Ever since Mira-masi became a widow, her religion became a source of solace to her. “Her day was ruled by ritual, from the moment she woke to make her salutations to the sun, through her ritual bath and morning prayers, to the preparation of her widow’s single and vegetarian meal of the day.”(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.39)

She travelled all over the country from one place of pilgrimage to the other. Uma as a child was fascinated by Mira-masi, would snuggle beside her and listen attentively to the ancient myths of Hinduism being narrated in a realistic and lively manner.

Anita Desai through the portrayal of Mira-masi’s character brings out the practicality of the confluence of the social, the religious and the spiritual. Mira-masi was involved in religious pursuits no doubt, but when she travelled from place to place and met her relatives, she participated whole heartedly in their lives, indulged in animated conversations, gave advice and even provided companionship and comfort to girls like Uma. She emerges as a perfect link between the spiritual and the social sides of human existence.

### **3.3.13 Ramu**

Ramu is the son of Lily Aunty and Bakul uncle, brother of Anamika and cousin of Uma. Rebellious and adventurous, Ramu is the “black sheep” of the family. Spending his youth travelling on the seas and throughout the country, Ramu disappears for long periods of time. Uma loves Ramu, ignoring her parents’ disapproval of his attitude and ways. When he visits Uma’s family, he behaves irreverently and with entitlement, bringing Uma along to dine at the Carlton hotel in the city. Sweet and doting with Uma, he flirts and laughs with her and encourages her to be herself. Yet, his character and allegiance are not consistent, as in his youth, he followed MamaPapa’s bidding in bringing Uma back from the ashram against her will.

### **3.3.14 Mrs. O’Henry**

Mrs. O’Henry is the American Baptist missionary who lives in Uma’s village and the sister to Mrs. Patton. Intent on proselytizing,

Mrs. O’Henry uses social events to spread her Christian message to the Indian women in her village. Yet, she is kind and helpful, always making an effort to invite Uma to social events, to correspond with her and to involve her in the community. Mrs. O’Henry is one of the few friends Uma keeps as an adult.

### 3.3.15 Dr. Dutt

Dr. Dutt is the confident, smart village doctor. An unmarried, independent woman, she is the daughter of an important politician. Dr. Dutt saves Uma when she has a seizure at Aruna’s wedding and later comes to MamaPapa’s house to offer Uma a job at the nursing school she is supervising. Dr. Dutt like Mira-Masi represents female independence- only, Dr. Dutt represents the modern female, who is establishing herself within the male-dominated professional world.

#### Check your Progress

1. Critically analyse the art of characterization in *Fasting, Feasting*.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. “Uma is the oppressed heroine” Do you agree? Examine the statement in the light of the novel *Fasting, Feasting*.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Compare and contrast the characters of Uma and Melanie.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. To what extent are Mama and Papa responsible for the oppression of Uma? Discuss in the light of the characters of Mama and Papa.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Critically examine the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Patton.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What role does Mira-Masi play in the life of Uma? Discuss.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Assess the character of Arun in *Fasting, Feasting*.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
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### 3.4 Narrative Technique in *Fasting, Feasting*

In this section, we shall discuss the narrative technique in *Fasting, Feasting*. Though a novel gets its main sustenance from the story it intends to tell, its success depends on how it is narrated. The quality of readability, the most important of all the desirable qualities of a novel, may be achieved when there is compatibility between the narration and the narrative technique. Anita Desai is a great writer with a remarkable and astounding technical efficacy. *Fasting, Feasting* has a unique technique being an amalgamation of direct narration, flashback and present-past technique. Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* reveals a greater economy of time, exercising a better control over episodes thereby extending the novel a forceful dramatic anticlimax. The entire story is structured around Uma and her family to a period extended to almost four and a half decades beginning in India and culminating in a small town in America. However, the time of action is confined to the period of sending a parcel to Arun and his receiving it in America. Uma is engaged in packing and addressing the parcel containing a shawl and a packet of tea when the novel begins. When Arun receives this parcel and presents it as his parents' gift to Mrs. Patton, the novel suddenly ends. "He withdraws quietly, going up to collect his suitcase and then finding his way out by the kitchen door, leaving her sitting on the porch

with the box of tea on her knees and the shawl around her shoulders.”  
(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.228)

The rest of the story is a sort of mixed recollection of Uma and her mother through retrospective rumination in Part One of the novel. Part One deals with family intrigue through socio-cultural and spiritual experiences in India. Part Two describes familial existentialism in a small town in America. The main fabric of the plot is deftly woven around female characters giving the novelist ample scope of comparing the tradition bound life style of India and the materialistic scenario of the West. In Part One we are introduced to an apparently close knit family with the parents and their three children-Uma, Aruna and Arun. While the mother was a sly lady indulging in clandestine activities such as playing cards with the neighbours or chewing betel leaves in the absence of her husband, her prejudicial attitude to Uma was obnoxious and uncalled for. Uma, a girlchild was forced to live a life of subjugation-first in her parents' home and later in her in-laws'. She was compelled to quit her academic pursuits after the birth of her brother Arun. The mother thought it was essential for Uma to learn the art of baby sitting and household affairs because that ultimately was the future of an Indian girl. Soon a conflict arises between Uma and her parents and she begins to feel suffocated in the confines of the family. Uma was losing faith in the protection afforded by a close-knit tradition bound family. Even in a joint family she was tightly gripped by the pangs of isolation. Part Two is a complete narrative situated in America dealing with the lives of Arun in his hostel and later in the household of the Pattons.

Though the novel is distinctly divided into two parts, yet the narrative does not project any indication of being disjointed. Episodes are dexterously correlated, characters are realistically delineated and reminiscences are nicely interwoven into a single fabric of a fine narrative. The novel is written in the third person narrative. The author



tells the story from an objective position. The title of the novel is meaningfully symbolical. Fasting refers to the life of self discipline, renunciation, inner purification which are essential rungs of the ladder leading to spiritual gnosis. Here fasting is used both as signifying spiritual austerity through the character of Mira-masi and as ironic whimsicality through the forced vegetarianism of Arun and Mrs. Patton as well as through the bulimia of Melanie. Fasting on the other hand is used to signify materialism and pleasure of the body which provide a short term ecstasy but lead to a total destruction of the body and the mind, an aspect shown through the three male characters, Uma's father, Mr. Patton and his athletic son Rod. Uma and Melanie experience these dual intricacies of life because whereas Uma can relish both the vegetarian and the non-vegetarian food, equally enjoying the bland uncooked food recommended by Mira-masi, Melanie over-indulges in eating junk food as a severe reaction against the American family structure and immediately soon after forcibly vomits everything. In fact, Uma and Melanie present two women of different cultures each reacting to the unwanted social norms in their own way but somehow not having enough will power, they fail to emerge out successfully in their efforts to rebel against the existing norms.

Anita Desai's technique does not only suit the theme dwelt upon in the novel but also go a long way in her externalising the inner turmoil of her protagonists. Uma's inner turmoil is beautifully visualized in the following lines: "Uma could not visualise escape in the form of a career...She had no idea. Her vision of an escape, a refuge, took the form of a huge and ancient banyan tree with streaming grey air roots, leafy branches in which monkeys and parrots feasted on berries."(*Fasting, Feasting*, p.131)

Desai's language is marked by sensuous richness, a high strung sensitiveness and a love for the sound of words.

**Check Your Progress**

1. Discuss the narrative technique in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

**3.5 Let us sum up**

After going through this unit, you have understood the symbols in the novel. You have also learnt about the major and minor characters which play significant roles in the novel. The discussion of the narrative technique has enhanced your understanding of Anita Desai's writing style in *Fasting, Feasting*. The questions in the boxes have enhanced your comprehension as well as your writing skills. Now, you will be able to relate Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* with the other Indian novels.

**3.6 Key-Words**

Literal : Exactly as stated; read or understood without additional interpretation; according to the letter or verbal expression; real; not figurative or metaphorical

Feasible : Able to be done, plausible

Seizure : A sudden attack or convulsion (e.g. an epileptic seizure)

Epilepsy : Disorder of the nervous system, causing fits

Cripple (verb) : To make someone a cripple; to cause someone to get a physical disability; to damage seriously; to destroy

Spinster : A woman who has never been married, especially one past the typical marrying age according to social traditions.

Ensnare : To entrap; to catch in a snare or trap; to entangle; to enmesh

Pilgrimage : A journey made to a sacred place, or a religious journey

Introvert : Introspective and shy person

Smothering : Suffocating, stifling, suppressing

Prowess : Great ability or daring

Lethargically : Extreme lack of energy or vitality

Prospective : Likely or expected to happen or become; anticipated in the near or far future.

Comradery : Close friendship in a group of friends or teammates; a spirit of familiarity and closeness

Barbecue : Frame for grilling food above an open fire

Bulimia : A chronic eating disorder-extreme overeating followed by self-induced vomiting

Anorexia : Loss of appetite especially as a result of disease

Sly : Unpleasantly cunning and secret

Attorney : A lawyer; one who advises or represents others in legal matters as a profession

Untethered : Unrestrained

Fanatical : Having an extreme, irrational zeal or enthusiasm for a specific cause

Snuggle : To lie close to another person or thing, hugging or being cosy; to move or arrange oneself in a comfortable and cosy position.

Confluence : The place where two rivers, streams, or other continuously flowing bodies of water meet and become one, especially where a tributary joins a river; A combination of forces, people or things.

Irreverently : In an disrespectful manner

Proselytizing : Seeking to convert; to convert (someone) to one's own faith or beliefs

Compatibility : The state of being compatible; in which two or more things are able to exist or perform together in combination without problems or conflict.

Efficacy : Ability to produce a desired amount of a desired effect.

Amalgamation : The process of amalgamating; a mixture, merger or consolidation

Rumination : Deep thought or consideration.

Existentialism : A twentieth century philosophical movement emphasizing the uniqueness of each human existence in freely making its self-defining choices.

Clandestine : Done or kept in secret, sometimes to conceal an illicit or improper purpose

Obnoxious : Extremely unpleasant, offensive, very annoying, odious or contemptible

Reminiscence : An act of remembering long past experiences, often fondly.

Renunciation : The act of rejecting or renouncing something as invalid

Gnosis : An immanent form of knowledge or transcendent insight; act or process of knowing; an altered state of awareness in which the will is magically effective

Austerity : Severity of manners or life; extreme rigor or strictness; harsh discipline

Turmoil : A state of great disorder or uncertainty

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### Suggested Reading

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**BLOCK – I : FICTION**  
**UNIT - IV**  
**AMITAV GHOSH: *THE SHADOW LINES***

**Structure**

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 A Brief outline of Amitav Ghosh's Life and works
  - 1.2.1 His Life
  - 1.2.2 His Works
- 1.3 Amitav Ghosh and the contemporary period.
  - 1.3.1 Background of the novel.
  - 1.3.2 An Introduction to the novel.
  - 1.3.3 Structure of the novel.
- 1.4 Different themes of the novel *The Shadow Lines*:
  - 1.4.1 Representation of Memory and Imagination in *The Shadow Lines*.
  - 1.4.2 Nationalism in *The Shadow Lines*.
  - 1.4.3 Diasporic sensibilities in *The Shadow Lines*.
- 1.5 Characterisation in *The Shadow Lines*
  - 1.5.1 Tridib
  - 1.5.2 The Unnamed Narrator
    - 1.5.3 Tha'mma
    - 1.5.4 May Price
    - 1.5.5 Ila
- 1.6 Let us Sum Up
- 1.7 Terminal Questions
- 1.8 Suggested Readings

## 1.0 Objectives

After reading this unit you will be able to understand the following objectives. This unit will help you to

- Have an idea about the writer Amitav Ghosh and his works.
- Identify his novels and based upon which these novels are written
- Find out the aspect of memory and its impact upon the characters of the novel
- Analyse the concept of nation and how the concept of identity is interlinked in the novel
- Understand some of the post-colonial aspects of the novel *The Shadow Lines*.

## 1.1 Introduction

This unit introduces you to the novel *The Shadow Lines* written by the 54<sup>th</sup> Jnanpith Award-winning novelist Amitav Ghosh. He has basically known as a novelist for his works *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *The Ibis Trilogy: Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015). *The Shadow Lines*, which won him the prestigious award of Sahitya Akademi deals with the communal violence and its aftermath in a clear manner. His works of non-fiction include *In an Antique Land* (2002), *Dancing in Cambodia and at Large in Burma* (1998), *Countdown* (1999), *The Imam and the Indian* (2002) and *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) which is the recent non-fictional work of Ghosh.

In this unit, you will get an overview of the life and works of Amitav Ghosh and literary trends of his age. And you will also be given an idea about the background of the novel.

## **1.2 A Brief outline of Amitav Ghosh's life and works**

### **1.2.1 His Life**

Amitav Ghosh, born in Calcutta on 11 July 1956, is an Indian writer and the winner of the 54th Jnanpith award in the year 2018, for his work in English fiction. He grew up in three different places like India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka respectively. From his early childhood, he was brought up on the stories of partition, the struggle for independence. He has used his memories to develop many of the structure of his novel as the outburst of the people's condition of that period. He did his graduation from Delhi University and further went to pursue his D.Phil. degree in Social Anthropology at Oxford. Later he taught at the Delhi School of Economics and appointed as Visiting Professor at Colombia University and Virginia University in the United States. Among the Indian writers of English, Amitav Ghosh stands as a writer who tries to focus on the contemporary issues of India.

In the year 1990, he was awarded the Prix Medicis Estrangere award for the novel *The Circle of Reason* and in the same year, he received another two awards Sahitya Akademi and The Ananda Puraskar for the novel *The Shadow Lines*. **The Calcutta Chromosome** won the Arthur C. Clarke award for 1997 and **The Glass Palace** won the International e-Book Award at the Frankfurt book fair in 2001. In January 2005, **The Hungry Tide** was awarded the Crossword Book Prize, a major Indian award. His novel, **Sea of Poppies** (2008) was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, 2008, and was awarded the Crossword Book Prize and the India Plaza Golden Quill Award. *River of Smoke* was shortlisted for Man Booker Asia Prize (2012). In the year 2018, he was awarded the Jnanpith Award.

### Check Your Progress 1

1. In which year he was awarded the Jnanpith Award?

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2. Which novels are included in the Ibis trilogy?

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### 1.2.2 His Works

Amitav Ghosh mainly deals with novel and non-fiction as we already discussed above. Now here we will concentrate upon some of his novels and non- fiction:

#### *The Circle of Reason:*

*The Circle of Reason* published in the year 1986 is the first novel of Amitav Ghosh. It is based on the problem of the modern world and its impact on the characters. The alienation, migration, and the existential crisis goes hand in hand in the novel. The novel is divided into three sections representing three phases of human life. This novel deals with the adventures of Alu, a young master weaver who is wrongly suspected of being a terrorist.

#### *The Shadow Lines:*

The Shadow Lines published in the year 1988 is the second novel for which Amitav Ghosh was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award. This novel delineates the unnamed narrator's family in Calcutta and



Dhaka and their intimacy with an English family in London. The unnamed narrator who went to London for his studies remembers his Uncle Tridib's description of London. This novel depicts the characters of two families belonging to two different places.

***The Calcutta Chromosome:***

Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* published in the year 1995 has been described as "a kind of mystery thriller" by *India Today*. It deals with three searches: the first is of an Egyptian clerk, Antar, working alone in a New York apartment in the early years of the twenty-first century to trace the adventures of L. Murugan, who disappeared in Calcutta in 1995; the second search concerns on Murugan's obsession with the missing links in the history of malaria research and the third search is that of Urmila Roy, a journalist of Calcutta in 1995 who is researching the works of Phulboni, a writer who produced a strange cycle of "Lakhan stories" that he wrote in the 1930s but suppressed thereafter.

***The Glass Palace:***

*The Glass Palace* published in the year 2000 is a historical novel written by Amitav Ghosh. It is a story about Rajkumar, who lands in Burma in rags but later becomes one of the richest timber traders in Burma. The novel is set in Burma, Bengal, India, and Malaya. The novel discusses various issues of the colonial period, including the economic fall of Burma, the rise of timber and rubber plantations, the dilemmas faced by the common people because of the devastating effects of World War II. Besides these, it also examines a broad range of issues starting from the changing economic scenario of Burma and India and it also questions the nation and how the wave of modernity affects the entire society.

### ***The Hungry Tide:***

Amitav Ghosh's sixth novel *The Hungry Tide* is published in the year 2004. The novel explores topics like humanism and environmentalism. The novel depicts the incident of 1978-79 in Marichjhanpi island when the government of West Bengal forcibly evicted thousands of Bengali refugees who had settled on the island. Set in the backdrop of the Sundarban Island where tidal floods devastate the place and people. Ghosh introduces three characters of different worlds in this novel. Piyali Roy is a young marine biologist who is search for a rare endangered river dolphin. Her journey begins with a disaster when she is thrown from a boat into crocodile-infested waters. Fakir, a young illiterate fisherman rescues her and thereafter they powerfully are drawn to each other and she takes help from him for her research. She finds Kanai Dutt as a translator who is a businessman from Delhi.

### ***The Ibis Trilogy:-***

#### ***i) Sea of Poppies:***

*Sea of Poppies* (2008) is a novel by Amitav Ghosh which was shortlisted for Man Booker Prize in the year 2008. It is the first volume of the Ibis trilogy. The novel is about Deeti, an ordinary village woman, an American sailor Zachary Reid, an Indian zamindar called Neel Rattan Haldar, and Benjamin Burnham, an evangelist opium trader. The story of the novel is set prior to the First Opium War on the banks of the holy river Ganges and in Calcutta. The novel interrelates different stories of the characters and how they met each other while taking a passage from Calcutta to Mauritius on a ship named Ibis.

#### ***ii) River of Smoke:***

*The River of Smoke* (2011) is the second volume of the Ibis trilogy which deals with the opium trade and how it remained the pivotal cause of the financial bankruptcy in China and India. The novel is about

characters like Ah Fatt, an illegitimate son of a rich Parsi opium trader Bahram Modi and a Chinese boat woman in Canton Chei Mei. Ah Fatt symbolizes the pathetic conditions of Chinese opium addicts who lose their life and belongings because of the illegal flow of opium inside China. This life of Ah Fatt is exposed when he speaks this to Neel.

*iii) Flood of Fire:*

This novel is the third volume of the Ibis trilogy published in the year 2015. It follows the story of the previous two volumes of the Ibis trilogy.

**1.3 Amitav Ghosh and the contemporary period**

Amitav Ghosh along with an eminent writer he is a renowned anthropologist. He tries to observe the feelings of the individual and studies their problems in an efficient manner. He mainly deals with the problems of the displaced migrants and their attachments to the society. In his novels, he tries to delineate the conditions of the victims of diasporas who are very much attached to the nostalgic past and are detached from their present situation. Amitav Ghosh describes himself as a traveler interested in men, places, and scenery. He advocates that traveling enables man to expand his awareness into realization. This is due to the fact that Amitav has traveled extensively in the Middle East, South Asia, North Africa, Europe, America, and Egypt. Amitav Ghosh's personality is stamped in his fiction, which show that he appears as a scholar-writing fluently with an exactness of what he wants to tell. Ghosh has the ability to combine personal and historical events in an aesthetic manner. A better sense of personality is revealed in his personal life's decision pertaining to his doctoral study at Oxford, London, and finally settling in New York, USA. Even though, as a post-colonial writer, cultural heritage and identity have become important facts of Amitav Ghosh's personality.

### **1.3.1 Background of the novel:**

The year 1947 in Indian history has been a year when India got freedom with the partition of the country in three parts- East Pakistan, West Pakistan, and India. This partition came out because All India Muslim League led by Mohammad Ali Jinnah wanted a homeland for Muslims on the basis of what they called the two-nation theory. The two-nation theory meant that there was not one nation in India, a position held by the Indian National Congress but that there were two nations- of Hindus and Muslims. This led to the creation of Pakistan carved out of the Muslim majority areas of Sind, Baluchistan, Punjab, Bengal, etc. Thus Punjab became West Punjab and East Punjab and Bengal became East Bengal and West Bengal and along with it West Punjab and East Bengal enter into Pakistan after the partition. In the year 1971, East Pakistan broke away from Pakistan and emerged as Bangladesh under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This partition leads to communal violence and communal riots among the different peoples. Although the novel *The Shadow Lines* is based on the partition of India but along with it the novel is basically about the conflicts faced by the narrator and the family throughout the novel. The partition and the riots have a great impact on the characters of the novel.

### **1.3.2 An Introduction to the novel**

This part will give you a general introduction to the novel *The Shadow Lines*. *The Shadow Lines* is a Sahitya Akademi Award-winning novel by Amitav Ghosh. Set against the backdrop of the historical events like Swadeshi Movement, Second World War, Partition of India and the communal riots of 1963-63 in Dhaka and Calcutta, the novel is divided into two parts 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home'. The novel depicts the life of a young boy or the unnamed narrator growing up in Calcutta, educated in Delhi, and then proceeds with the experiences he

has in London. The novel begins with the outbreak of the Second World War in the year 1939 when the protagonist and the narrator's cousin, Tridib went to England. The unnamed narrator remembers his grandmother and her younger sister Mayadevi. Mayadevi along with her husband, who was an officer in the Foreign Service and their four sons Jatin, Kaku, Tridib, and Robi used to stay away from India. Their elder son Jatin who was two years older than Tridib was an economist in U.N. for which he lives abroad with his wife and daughter Ila. Tridib used to spend most of his time in Calcutta. He was twenty-one years elder to the narrator. He is the one who gave a huge knowledge about the real world to the narrator. He was working on a Ph.D. in Archeology. He used to tell the narrator about the world he had seen and about his experiences and the story of his journey to England, about his stay in England and about his girlfriend May Price. The family of Datta Chaudhari's to which the narrator belongs and the Price family who lives in London are family friends through their grandfathers-Justice Datta Chaudhuri who was a judge in the Calcutta High Court and another one Lionel Tresawsen lived in India during the British rule. The unnamed narrator was influenced by his uncle Tridib who possesses such qualities which gave rise to a new attitude regarding the world and the places. Tha'mma, the grandmother of the unnamed narrator did not appreciate Tridib's idea and his knowledge regarding the places and incidents. According to her, he used to get rid of the family matters rather than his career. But the narrator loves to listen to Tridib who gave him the space to see a new world through the depiction of various places and new ideas through his own imagination. Although the narrator lives in his small and compressed private world in Calcutta through his imagination and Tridib's experiences take him across boundaries and his limited world of Calcutta. Tridib's niece Ila has been a wanderer from her childhood who plays a pivotal role in the narrator's psychic growth. In

Dhaka in the year 1964, Tridib lost his life in the communal violence near his mother's old house. It is after his death, May Price, Tridib's girlfriend narrates the incidents and experiences of Tridib in London. Tridib's death has been seen as a sacrifice because he was killed by the mob when he ran out of the car to save May Price. The narrator when later in 1980 searches for details of the riots through archives and libraries only then he finds it out.

### **1.3.3 The Structure of the Novel**

The *Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh shows the writer's attitude towards the diasporic aspects. He himself admits that the novel deals with issues like nationalism, multiculturalism, and diaspora in South Asia. The novel describes the unnamed narrator's search for the meaning of violence through his memories. As it is already discussed in the introduction of the novel that the novel is about two families the Datta-Chaudhuri's of Calcutta and the Prices of London. And how the narrator's uncle Tridib was killed by the mob in the riot. Now here we will try to discuss the structure of the novel how it is structured. The novel is not in a chronological order where every event happens after another in a plain way. But here the narratives jumped into another. It is only through the memories and the imagination that the unnamed narrator received from his uncle Tridib he tries to live a 'truer life in his memory and imagination'. Tridib's girlfriend May Price also provides him information's about Tridib's dream and his death in Dhaka. Tridib's character always inspires the narrator for which he becomes Tridib's alter-ego.

The two parts of the novel 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home' is symbolic and significant. The first part Going Away comes to an end with the marriage of Ila and the second part Coming Home denotes Thamma's retirement along with Tridib's death. Throughout the novel

flashback, technique has been used to construct and reconstruct the narrative of the novel by Amitav Ghosh. Hence this novel is not a conventional novel whose storyline and narration never showed as fragmented but here we find a fragmented kind of narration which is not in a linear way. Amitav Ghosh tries to impose a new way while discussing the novel *The Shadow Lines*.

#### **1.4 Different themes of the novel *The Shadow Lines*:**

##### **1.4.1 Representation of Memory and Imagination in *The Shadow Lines***

The novel is directly linked with history from the very beginning when the narrator unfolds the history and begins the novel by taking war, riots, and partition as the background of the novel. The narrator refers to the news and articles regarding the riots of 1964 and the political condition of India during this period. Like Tridib, his mentor who bestowed the narrator, the gift of imagination, the narrator has a deep desire to travel around the world. Both enjoyed a distinct sense of mental journey to locations they had not visited at all. This special relationship is so close and intimate that the narrator can remember almost everything about the time and place they had been together even after Tridib's murder in a communal riot. It is the space of memory and imagination that links them together emotionally. The deep and powerful effect of Tridib on the narrator that is unilateral and reminiscent of the colonizer-colonized relationship scares the grandmother and makes her order her grandson (the narrator) to avoid Tridib. Being tired of all social pressures, the narrator regards Tridib as a hero who can help him get rid of all kinds of restrictions. For him, Tridib represents openness toward space and place, capable to use his memory from the past to connect with the present. The narrator symbolizes a colonized nation who is in quest of anything or anyone who renders him a sense of triumph, openness, and freedom.

Memory functions a pivotal role in this novel as it determines one's perception of time and our identity. Due to being unable to change history, one usually takes advantage of memory compatible with his or her viewpoint. Yet, the memories that one chooses to forget are more important than the ones one chooses to remember, and this is the key point that Ghosh attempts to impart to his readers. Memory as an abstract entity exceeds the bounds, transcends the time scale, and moves beyond any kind of restrictions. Therefore, the constant shift of time, going back and forth, and incessant transfer from present to past and conversely, is another appealing factor attracting the readers' attention. Since a young age, Tridib persuades the narrator to use his mental faculty and imagine places he has never been to and conjure up the incidents he has never experienced in real life. Through the narrative, historical facts and personal experiences simultaneously dwell in his memory, "Tridib had given [him] worlds to travel in" (Ghosh 21). This natural conceptualization and power of fancy ultimately becomes the narrator's guide in his life and helps him mentally see almost everywhere outside Calcutta. Imagination even enables him to invent and see places in his mind that do not exist at all. Such imaginative faculty becomes so deep-rooted in the narrator's character that forms his new identity and makes him distinct from the others. Having used the power of imagination, the narrator is able to see various places or spaces. As a young schoolboy, he imagined London so clearly that he could easily recognize places just by their names when he visited London some years later. The power of imagination enables him to travel in real and imaginary places in 'fading photographs'(Ghosh 59), reading maps in 'his tattered old Bartholomew's Atlas' (Ghosh 230), the old newspapers, 'faint recollections' (Ghosh 19) of childhood memories and games. In this narrative, Tridib and the narrator are the only people who attempt to run and conduct their own lonely lives and create their own stories. The



fact that they want to be different from the others corresponds to the element of alterity or otherness. In *The Shadow Lines*, there is a persistent emphasis on the freedom of individuals to create their own stories distinct from the others to avoid being mixed with someone else's construction of reality. Perhaps that is why Tridib persuades the narrator to learn imagining precisely and creating his own world. Being able to invent stories makes one independent from other people's invention. Such persuasion and encouragement can metaphorically denote independence, autonomy and freedom from everything that are presented or imposed on one by others. In a larger scale, it seems that Ghosh attempts to impart that there are no subaltern people or any colonized state as long as they are independent from the other's invention.

#### **1.4.2 Nationalism in The Shadow Lines**

According to Hutchinson and Smith, "Nationalism was, first of all, a doctrine of popular sovereignty. The people must be liberated - that is free from any external constraints; they must determine their own destiny and be masters in their house; they must control their own resources; they must obey only their inner voice... The people must be united; they must dissolve all internal divisions; they must be gathered together in a single historic territory, a homeland; and they must have legal equality and share a single public culture."(4) In simple terms, Nationalism can be defined as patriotic feelings or principles, love, and pride in a country showed by its people, the desire of people to form an independent country. The term nationalism can also be referred to as an ideology, a sentiment, a form of culture, or a social movement that focuses on the nation.

*The Shadow Lines* focuses on the narrator's family in Calcutta and Dhaka and their connection with an English family in London. The relationship between the narrator's grandmother and her animosity

towards her sister's granddaughter Ila emblemizes the conflict between nationalism and migrant cosmopolitanism, even as it makes visible the limits and failures of both these middle-class women. *The Shadow Lines* is a perfect example of the tendency of the crossing of frontiers — especially those of nationality, culture, and language. The novel focuses on nationalism, the shadow lines we draw between people and nations, which is both an absurd illusion and a source of terrifying violence. *The Shadow Lines* sets out to uncover the confronted, fearful, suppressed memories in an attempt to unsettle the simplified seamless narrative of national identity. The unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines* comes in contact with different, often contradictory, versions of national and cultural identity through the main characters in the novel – his grandmother Tha'mma, his cousin Ila and his uncle Tridib and Robi. Growing up in a middle-class professional family in Calcutta, the narrator acquires the sensibility of a metropolitan, bi-lingual, English speaking, and post-colonial subject. His interaction with his cousin and uncles whose fathers are globe-trotting diplomats and his own stint in London for research work make his attitude and approach to issues of national and cultures more cosmopolitan. However, one of the most powerful influences on his life is his grandmother who is a fiercely independent, militantly nationalist woman.

Tha'mma's settled convictions about nationality, religion and belonging start getting disturbed when she returns to her birthplace in Dhaka, after a gap of many years, and for the first time after partition. She is startled when told that she would not be able to see any dividing distinction between India and East Pakistan from the plane since in the modern world borders are crossed within airports when disembarkation forms are filled out.

In contrast to Tha'mma nationalist militant fervor and hysteria, Ghosh presents the quiet strength and sanity of the narrator's uncle,

Robi. He is an upright, principled, moral man who has not been swayed by socio-political pressures, but who is at the same time intrinsically Indian in his culture and values. Born in the post-colonial era, Robi grows up with the certitude of a unitary identity as a citizen of independent, secular India, and does not have to confront the necessarily fractured sense of self as do those who experienced decolonization and partition. The senseless violence that kills Robi's brother and makes him victim to mob fury becomes part of his identity as post-colonial Indian. After relating the incident of Tridib's death, Robi articulates his formulation of freedom and nationhood, "Free... You know, if you look at the pictures on the front pages of the newspapers...dead people in Assam, the northeast, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura—people shot by terrorist and separatists and the army and the police,...everyone's doing it to be free...Why don't they draw thousands of little lines...and give every little place a new name? What would it change? ...How can anyone divide a memory?" (247).

Ghosh attempts a critique of the shadow lines of borders as signifiers of freedom and nationhood. Through his critique of Tha'mma's version of nationalism, and the naiveté of placing faith in national borders, and Robi's rejection of the dominant ideology of freedom, Ghosh points to the limitations of realizing identity through the discourse of the nationhood. He articulates the need to conceptualize issues of identity in terms of larger cultural and historical collectivities. Ghosh seems to be indicating that Indian nationalism omitted the problematic issue of gender, not including it as an item on its agenda."How totally invisible the subjugation of women had been rendered in the ideology of liberal nationalism" (Tharu and Lalita 88). The general tendency, during the nationalist period, was to believe that universal suffrage would automatically guarantee equality, and, until after the independence Congress Party never made an effort to ensure electoral seats for women.

*The Shadow Lines* reveals the fragility of Partition's border between nations as etched out in maps, and of the frontiers policed by nation-states that separate people, communities, and families. He suggests that the nature of boundaries understood through the metaphor of looking glass: the national border between the people of India and West Pakistan resembles the mirror's boundary in which self and reflected other are the same. Thus, Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* claims a unique position in the postcolonial literature that explores the hybridity of post-colonial nationality and migration. Ghosh, instead, points to the transnationality of community and memory through the critique of the gendered violence inflicted on minor bodies and minor lives by the structures and politics of both nationalism and globalization. As such, they are interventions that urge us to re-narrate national modernity as marked by the failure of state institutions and by the persistence of transnational memory and modes of community.

#### **1.4.3 Diasporic sensibilities in *The Shadow Lines***

Amitav Ghosh in his fiction depicts the changing scenario of Indian pluralism and cultural multiplicity. His fiction brings into focus a diasporic community that is varied and complex. His novels center on the characters who long for their own homeland. *The Shadow Lines* provides diasporic imagination through his characters. Diaspora literally means the dispersion of Jews to the place outside Palestine. This novel defines the dispersion, scattering, or decentralization of national or religious groups living outside their homeland but maintaining their cultural identity. He depicts life in Bengal during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This novel incorporates the aspects of diasporic imagination. The unnamed narrator in the novel reminds the violence of Dhaka that took place in 1964 through his memories of migration. Through the metaphor of looking glass implies Ghosh's diasporic imagination. The partition of Bengal has been a great shock to the people and many refuse

to believe in the existence of the imaginary ‘shadow lines’ between diasporic identities of his family in Dhaka. Besides this, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* deals with many postcolonial elements such as communal riots, migration, cultural diversities, identity crisis, etc. Ghosh sets his novel in the backdrop of historical events like Swadeshi Movement, Second World War, Partition of India, and Communal riots that took place in Dhaka. It is the story of those people who suffered a lot during the communal riots and violence. He has fabricated different characters to portray the real difficulties of the common masses. In an essay published in 1995, Ghosh stated that he got the inspiration to write this book from the anti- Sikh riots of 1984 in Delhi. Throughout the novel, Amitav Ghosh tries to depict the violent scenario of the country in his own ways.

The novel delineates a cross-cultural relationship between India and England. Through the characterization of characters like Tridib, an Indian who falls in love with May who is a British woman, and another instance where Ila who is an Indian and marries Nick Price who is again an Englishman. The interaction among these characters shows the aspirations, defeats, and disillusion of the colonized people when they try to carve out their place in the world. They belong to two different worlds.

In a post-colonial society, we often confront that sometimes the colonizer’s attitude undergoes a change. They try to understand the cultures of the colonized people and try to respect their cultural aspects. It is seen in the incident when May Price comes to Calcutta and she greets Tridib on the Railway platform by hugging and kissing him, but she realizes her mistake as people around them jeer at them. But later when the narrator visits England after twenty years he finds the situations are not like before. The English have changed. They try to please Indians by treating them as equals but still there is a difference between them.

**Check your progress 2**

1. What is memory?

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2. What do you mean by nationalism?

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3. Define diaspora?

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**1.5 Characterisation in The Shadow Lines**

**1.5.1 Tridib**

Among all the characters of The Shadow Lines, Tridib is an important character who influences the unnamed narrator. He is the narrator's uncle and son of a high official in the foreign office Hemangshu Shekhar Datta Chaudhury and Mayadebi. He initiates the narrator into a different and new world of dreams and imagination. It is because of his fond of reading and his eagerness to visit different places which helps him to teach the narrator how to use his imagination. He settled in Calcutta and pursues his Ph.D in archaeology. His experience in England and India helps him to use his imagination and to develop his own point of view. He always provides a new perspective on things.

He is the person who helps the narrator to travel to the places which he had already traveled. Tridib often points out to the map and started to tell him different stories about his experiences. The description of different places by Tridib makes him able to understand the places without having any personal experiences of the place. Later on, when he went there for his own work he feels like he visited these places before and he tries to remember the experiences and events of Tridib. The narrators' grandmother Tha'mma is of the opinion that Tridib is a loafer and a wastrel who does not do any work and lives on his father's earning. She asks the narrator to maintain a distance from Tridib. According to Tha'mma, he wasted his time by gossiping with people in the street corners. But in reality, he comes out to the streets when he is tired of long hours of study. He finds it comfortable to share his experiences and want to share new aspects to the people he met in the street corners. Tridib is the person who gives the narrator a different world to travel in his imagination. He is responsible for the growth of the character of the narrator. His imagination knows no boundaries. Like him, the narrator too talks to Ila that a place does not merely exist but it has to be invented in one's imagination.

Tridib becomes a victim of the communal violence that took place in Dhaka in 1964. He is killed by the mob while he went to Dhaka with his grandmother and his beloved May Price to meet his maternal uncle. He was killed by the communal mob when he tries to rescue May Price from the mob. The death of Tridib is seen as a sacrifice because he sacrificed his life for his beloved.

### **1.5.2 The Unnamed Narrator**

The unnamed narrator in the novel *The Shadow Lines* is the one who narrates the whole story of the novel from the beginning. It is the narrator, through whom the novelist tries to describe the happenings

and different events in the novel. The unnamed narrator is the grandson of Tha'mma and the cousin of Tridib. The unnamed narrator from the very beginning of the novel remembers his Uncle Tridib and his experiences in different places. Tridib becomes his mentor and guide who taught him how to use his imagination. Through his imagination, the unnamed narrator travels different places without visiting it physically. It is through the unnamed narrator Ghosh tries to connect different stories from a different timeline. He tries to link up different stories and characters. He was not physically present in the situation when Tridib was killed in Dhaka. At that time he was in Calcutta for his research work but he came to know about the real facts after many years from May Price and his uncle Robi.

The novel tries to depict the growth of the narrator from his childhood to his adulthood. By listening to his Uncle's experience and new ways of the world he seems to be grown up as a person who already knew different places and their cultures without having attached to it. Throughout the novel, he describes the impact of other peoples on him and how they influenced him in his works and his life. He is the one in the novel who gives us a glimpse of the characters. His attraction towards his Uncle Tridib shows how that person helps his journey to his imagination. Although the narrator's grandmother asks him to keep a distance from Tridib the narrator never listens to her advice. For him it is because of Tridib he came to know about new ideas and aspects of the world.

### **1.5.3 Tha'mma**

Tha'mma, the narrator's grandmother is one of the important characters who are born in Jindabahr in Dhaka. She was grown up in a period when the Indian National Movement was gaining its peak. It is because of this situation she faced in her life, she gained the spirit of nationalism. She is presented as a character that is always against the



ideals of younger generations. She is very much critical about the present generations for which she used to offer her advice to the young people to stick to their cultural roots and past. As she herself was born in a joint family in Dhaka she believes in traditional faiths. She reveals to the narrator that she had once dreamed of joining the Bengali revolutionaries who stand against the colonial exploitation. She was grown-up in Dhaka and living in Burma where her husband's work, she went to Calcutta after her husband dies. After this, she engaged herself in a school as a teacher and works for the betterment of society. Her attitude towards Tridib and Ila is a perfect instance of how she is critical to the new generations. She always asks her grandson i.e. the narrator to get rid of Tridib because he used to waste his time by gossiping with people near the street rather than helping his father's work. And her dislike towards Ila, the daughter of her sister Mayadebi is because she is not like other Indians and her way of dressing is not acceptable to her Bengali middle-class society.

She is portrayed as a nationalist who had a strong affection towards her birthplace Dhaka and for her family. It is because of the partition she left Dhaka and settled down in Calcutta. For her, her present stay in Calcutta and her birthplace Dhaka does not make any sense to her. The partition has a political impact on the borders, but for her, these borders have nothing much than a weaker existence upon the people. She had believed that she would be able to see the borders between India and East Pakistan from the plane. She believes that there must be some trenches or soldiers or guns pointing at each other in the borders. For her nostalgia is a weakness for which she often says that we must forget our past and look towards our future. But she experienced a different kind of picture in Dhaka which makes her realize that people like her who once was displaced have no home in reality but it is only in memory. The instance which she herself experienced in Dhaka when

her nephew Tridib was killed by the mobs during the communal riots in Dhaka develops a great hatred for Pakistanis. It is seen that when the war between India and Pakistan starts she gifted her necklace as a war fund. She is one of the characters throughout the novel who does not want to deal with the globalized world and the society, what she wants is to be attached with the old traditions and the Indian way of her life.

#### **1.5.4 May Price**

May Price is the granddaughter of Lionel Tresawson. He was in India during the British rule. Here he met Tridib's grandfather Justice Datta Chaudhuri and both the families used to be in friendly relations. May was actively engaged in social work. She had planned a project for the earth-quake survivors in Central America. She had a feeling of compassion. When in Dhaka Tridib and May accompanied Thamma and others to bring Jethamosai, they confronted the communal mob. When May was surrounded by the Muslim mob, Tridib runs to rescue her and he got killed. May was filled with a sense of remorse because of Tridib's death. It is only because of her he was killed. He sacrificed his life to save her from the mob in Dhaka. Later she tells the narrator about this incident in detail. She carries the memories of Tridib with her as a sacrificing symbol. Through the character of May Price, Ghosh presents a character who leaves a permanent mark on the narrator's imagination.

#### **1.5.5 Ila**

Ila is the granddaughter of Mayadebi and she was grown up in different parts of the world. Because of her father's works she used to hover over different places. She went to international schools and visited India during the summer holidays. Ila is fascinated by the freedom she achieved from her life in London. For her, freedom means liberation from the restrictions imposed upon women in India. Thamma, the

grandmother of the narrator thinks that Ila lives in London for material comfort but what actually she wants is actually freedom. She wants freedom from its middle-class orthodoxy. She belongs to the new generation who believes in internationalism. Ila represents those Indian youths who don't care whatever is happening in their own country and did not try to set things right but want to escape from all this stuff. They are under the illusion that the west is a heaven of freedom. Ila represents those who want to live and find a sense of fulfillment in her presence. She has a practical and empirical bent of mind. She loves to travel to different places. She has traveled a lot at her young age but experienced nothing. She feels suffocated in Calcutta and finally settled in London by marrying an English youngman, Nick. She is an extrovert character who gets involved in outdoor activities. She works for the poor and needy people.

#### **1.6 Let us sum up:**

- The Shadow Lines is one of the best novels in Indian English fiction. It deals with the Hindu- Muslim riots and the characters are engaged in a quest of their own freedom
- Amitav Ghosh through his novel provides different aspects of post-colonial elements like memory, nation, borders, diasporic sensibilities, etc.
- Through the depiction of different characters Ghosh tries to reflect the condition of the people across the country during those days of riots.
- Mingling of different characters from East and West shows a mixture of different cultures.

### **1.7 Terminal Questions:**

1. Discuss Amitav Ghosh as a postcolonial writer?
2. Discuss the theme of nationalism and how it is relevant throughout the novel *The Shadow Lines*?
3. Discuss the major themes of the novel *The Shadow Lines*?
4. Discuss the diasporic elements in the novel *The Shadow Lines*?
5. Critically examine the role of the unnamed narrator in the novel *The Shadow Lines*?
6. Elucidate the relationship between the unnamed narrator and Tridib? How Tridib did influence the narrator?
7. Discuss briefly the women characters of the novel and examine how they are different from each other?

### **1.8 Suggested Readings:**

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*, New Delhi: OUP.1995.Print.

Hutchinson, John and Anthony D. Smith ed. *Introduction, Nationalism*, Oxford: OUP.1994. Print

**BLOCK – I : FICTION**  
**UNIT- V**  
**RAJA RAO : *KANTHAPURA***

**Structure**

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 About the Novelist: Raja Rao
  - 1.2.1 His Life
  - 1.2.2 His Works
- 1.3 About the Novel: *Kanthapura*
  - 1.3.1 Title of the Novel
  - 1.3.2 Summary of the Novel
- 1.4 Let us Sum Up
  - Possible Questions
  - Suggested Readings
  - References
  - Glossary

## 1.0 Objectives:

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- *discuss* the life and works of Raja Rao
- *elucidate* the formative influences on the writer
- *explain* the aptness of the title of the novel *Kanthapura*
- *summarize* the story of *Kanthapura*

## 1.1 Introduction:

In this unit you will be acquainted with a classic of Indo-Anglian fiction named *Kanthapura*, written by Raja Rao, one of the most acclaimed writers of Indian English Literature. Rao is one of the pioneers of Indian Writing in English. The novel *Kanthapura* deals with the Gandhi movement and its impact on a small south Indian village named Kanthapura. Rao's fictional work *Kanthapura* is a recreation of the Indian struggle for Independence in Kanthapura. It depicts India's freedom movement by taking into account the ideals and achievements of Gandhi, who dominated the Indian political scene from 1916 till his death in 1948.

### Stop to Consider

The term "Indo-Anglian" is used to denote original literary creation in the English language by Indians. As C.R. Reddy in his Foreword to Srinivasa Iyengar's work *Indo-Anglian Literature* points out, "Indo-Anglian literature is not essentially different in kind from Indian literature. It is part of it, a modern facet of that glory which, commencing from the *Vedas*, has continued to spread its mellow light, now with greater and now with lesser brilliance under the inexorable vicissitudes of time and history ever increasingly upto the present time of Tagore, Iqbal and Aurobindo Ghosh, and bids fair to expand with our, as well as humanity's expanding future." There are a large number

of educated Indians today who use the English language as a medium of the creative exploration and expression of their experience of life. Their writing has now developed into substantial literature in its own right and it is this substantial body of literature which is referred to as ‘Indo-Anglian’ literature. This term is to be distinguished from ‘Anglo-Indian literature’ which is used to denote the writing of Englishmen in English about India and Indian life. There is another term ‘Indo-English Literature’ which is used to denote translations into English from literature in Indian languages.

Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan are the three foremost Indian writers of fiction in English. They three popularised the genre of the novel in India. While English prose for social and political purposes was written by Indians from earliest times, excellence in the writing of creative prose could be achieved much later than in the writing of verse. It was only with the Gandhian struggle for freedom that the Indo-Anglian novel really came to its own. The ideals of the Indian struggle for freedom are reflected in novels like K.S. Venkataramani’s *Murugan, The Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, The Patriot* (1932). With the publication of Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938), the novel in English may be said to have come of age.

Before going to the novel, it is necessary to know briefly about the life including the formative influences on him along with his works.

## **1.2 About the Novelist: Raja Rao**

### **1.2.1 His Life**



**Raja Rao (1909- 2006)**

Raja Rao was born in 1909 in the village of Hassana, in the state of Mysore in Karnataka (India), into a very old South Indian Brahmin family. His father taught Kannada in Nizam's College. His mother was a homemaker who died when Raja Rao was only 4 years old. Raja Rao was very short in stature, hardly five feet tall but his features were aristocratic. He had a personality of his own and his appearance was that of a great intellectual.

Rao was brought up in the neighbouring state of Hyderabad and was the only Hindu student in the Muslim Public School of Hyderabad where the only teachers to impress him were British. Rao hence came under the influence of the West at a very young age. Later, he went for higher education to Aligarh Muslim University, where one of his teachers was Prof. Eric Dickinson, poet and painter, who taught him the appreciation of European art and philosophy. He was inspired by Prof. Dickinson to study French language and literature. After graduating with English and History, Raja Rao in 1929 went to study at Montpellier, France. He studied French language and literature, and later at Sorbonne in Paris, he explored the Indian influence on Irish literature. Raja Rao worked for a Doctorate degree at the University of Sorbonne under the supervision of an eminent scholar Prof. Cazamian.

Later, in 1931 Raja Rao married a French school teacher, Camille Mouly. She had a role in Rao's development as a writer since she advised him to explore the possibilities of writing in his own mother tongue. He therefore wrote a long poem and a few short stories in Kannada. But his first noteworthy work in France was his first novel in English, *Kanthapura* (1938) which dramatizes the national struggle of Gandhian Satyagraha as a mythic and symbolic event in the history of a South Indian village. Rao's marriage with Mouly lasted until 1939. His marriage failed as it was regarded as an act of rebellion by his orthodox Hindu family.



Rao returned to India on the outbreak of World War II in 1940, and again went to France in 1946 and lived there till 1956. There he married an American actress Katherine, and he has a son by her. Besides his novel *Kanthapura*, Rao's collection of stories entitled *The Cow of the Barricades*, was published in 1947, most of the stories contained in it were also written in France. His second novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), published after a gap of twenty-two years, has France as its scene of action. In it Rao has fully absorbed and assimilated the culture of the West.

Raja Rao along with Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan is the pioneer of the Indian Novel in English. Though Raja Rao shares much with them, yet he has a place of his own in the history and development of the Indian writing in English in the last sixty years of the twentieth century.

Raja Rao's mind is firmly rooted in the Hindu culture and philosophy, but he is not averse to receiving ideas from the Western thinkers. His sense of nationalism does not prevent him from assessing the narrowness and limitations of some of his countrymen. Being a product of the Gandhian Age, he believes in the free exchange of ideas between India and the West. Elements of Indian and Western philosophy and cross-cultural concerns are projected in *The Serpent and the Rope*.

Among the Indian works that have influenced and shaped Raja Rao's mental outlook are the two classical epics, *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the Buddhist texts in English translation, medieval Kannada poetry, the autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi, and the philosophy of Ananda Coomaraswamy. Among the Western influences on him, Raja Rao himself mentions the Bible, Plato, Shakespeare, some Russian as Dostoevsky and Gorky, French novelist Malraux, Jewish writer Kafka, German poet and stylist Rilke and French novelist, dramatist and poet Andre Gide.

Raja Rao lays more stress on the spirit of human beings than on their physical aspect. For him, literature is not a profession but a vocation. In his writings, Rao like an Indian writer in English would like to discover and identify himself as an Indian first, and then commence to write. He believes that one cannot communicate unless one has the desire to communicate, and it is this very desire that makes writers possible. For Raja Rao literary creation is the transformation of subjective experiences into a work of objective art. His models in the narrative art are the ancient Indian *Puranas*, which are characterized by a lack of personal involvement of the writer. Rao's *Kanthapura* is a novel that belongs to this very tradition. Its narrator Achakka tells the story of the action involved objectively even though she is part of it.

Raja Rao has been awarded the Padma Bhushan in the year 1969. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award for Literature in 1964 for his philosophical novel *The Serpent and the Rope*. As a writer, Rao has received national and international fame and recognition. In 1988 he was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, and in 2007 received the Padma Vibhushan, India's second highest civilian award. He died of a cardiac attack on July 8, 2006 at Austin, Texas, at the age of ninety seven.

## **1.2.2 His Works**

### **Fiction: Novels**

*Kanthapura* is the first novel written by Raja Rao. It is his most widely acclaimed work which gives a vivid and realistic account of the Gandhian freedom struggle in the 1930s and its impact on the masses of India. Rao published his second novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* in 1960. It was appreciated as an exploration of intercultural encounter and won for Raja Rao the Sahitya Akademi Award. The novel is regarded as the spiritual autobiography of the novelist. Through this novel Raja

Rao founded a new genre called the philosophical novel and has vividly shown the confrontation between eastern and western cultures. Rao's third novel *The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of Modern India* was published in the year 1965. It is a short novel of great merit with some philosophical content and has evoked conflicting reactions from literary critics. The novelist has subtitled it as "a philosophical comedy". Rao's next novel, *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) explores the depths of the mind and soul of an orthodox Brahmin communist who is a confused bundle of contradictions. It is also a spiritual autobiography like *The Serpent and the Rope*. Rao in his ambitious work of fiction—*The Chessmaster and His Moves* (1988) returns to the theme of multi-cultural confrontation. It was meant to be the first part of a trilogy. The work was awarded a prize by the Oklahoma University, USA.

#### **Fiction: Short story collections**

Raja Rao has been writing short stories all through his career. The earliest collection of his short stories *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947) contains nine stories including remarkable stories like 'Javni', 'Akkayya', 'Narasiga' etc. written in France during the early period of his career from 1930 onwards. The stories written after 1947 have been brought together in the collection entitled *The Policeman and the Rose and Other Stories*, 1978. These later stories reflect the metaphysical and religious concerns of the writer of the *Serpent and the Rope*. In these stories there is a frequent mixture of fantasy and realism as is also in evidence in *The Cat and Shakespeare* and *The Cow of the Barricades*. Rao's *On the Ganga Ghat* (1989) is a collection of 11 stories with exquisite and evocative prose exploring the play of life as it unfolds in Benares, the holy city to die in.

Apart from novels and short stories, Raja Rao's non-fictional works are: *Changing India: An Anthology* (edited with Iqbal Singh)

(1939), *Tomorrow* (edited with Ahmed Ali) (1943–44), *Whither India?* (edited with Iqbal Singh) (1948), *The Meaning of India*, essays (1996), *The Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, biography (1998).

### Check Your Progress I

1. Where was Raja Rao born?  
(a) Abbur (b) Hassana
2. Name Raja Rao's supervisor for his doctoral research at the University of Sorbonne.
3. When was Rao's first novel *Kanthapura* published?  
(a) 1938 (b) 1936
4. For which novel Rao won the Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 1964?  
(a) The Cat and Shakespeare (b) The Serpent and the Rope
5. Name the new genre of novel founded by Raja Rao.

## 1.3 About the Novel: *Kanthapura*

### 1.3.1 Title of the Novel

*Kanthapura* is Raja Rao's first major Indian novel in English. The title '*Kanthapura*' is apt and suggestive for the novel is about a south Indian village named Kanthapura. The significance of the title also lies in the way in which it evokes Indian sensibility. *Kanthapura* is a microcosm of modern India. It is the microcosm of the Indian ethos and culture embodied in a tale for freedom movement from foreign rule. It is not a novel dealing with the life and doings of any individual hero. *Kanthapura* is not even the story of Moorthy, but of the entire people of the village of Kanthapura, of their suffering, of their quest for freedom, of their exile, of their momentary defeat. A defeat which has in it seeds of ultimate victory. It ends with an account of their life in Kashipur and gives us a sense of abiding fulfillment which they have attained.

Rao's title shows the importance of community life in India. Hence if there is any hero or protagonist in the novel, it is the community, the people of Kanthapura. One cannot therefore talk about a single protagonist in this novel. Even the figure of Gandhi is very skillfully presented so that Gandhi does not become an overbearing presence among the common villagers. Gandhi does not make any physical appearance in the novel although the impact of his ideals is strongly felt. This suggests the importance that community life of Kanthapura has in the novel. The title therefore can be said to be apt and suggestive. The novelist is right in naming it as '*Kanthapura*.'

### **1.3.2 Summary of the Novel**

Through the mouthpiece of an old Indian grandmother Achakka, the novelist in *Kanthapura* narrates an enchanting story of how independence movement becomes a tangible reality in Kanthapura, a tiny and secluded village in South India. Kanthapura is situated in the province of Kara in the former princely state of Mysore, which is now part of Karnataka. Far above the port city of Mangalore, it is high on the Western Ghats, up the steep mountains that face the Arabian sea. Cardamon, rice and coffee are the chief crops of the region. The nearby forests are full of teak, sal and sandal trees.

The village is divided into several quarters. In the Brahmin quarter there are twenty-four houses. In addition to the British quarter there are four more quarters- the Pariah quarter, the Potter's quarter, the Weaver's quarter, and a Sudra quarter- altogether nearly one hundred huts. The prominent among those who live in the Brahmin quarter are postmaster Suryanarayana, Patwari Nanjundia, Bhatta, Achakka, Front-House Akamma, Waverfall Venkamma, Rangamma and Corner- House Moorthy.

In the Kanthapurishwari temple, on the occasion of Shankar and Ganesh Jayanti 'Harikathas' were held. The temple being a central place

serves as a common meeting place for the village people, and it is from here that the Gandhian freedom movement launched by Moorthy is controlled. It is the harikatham, Jayaramachar from the city who through his harikathas sows the seed of Gandhiji's movement. He tells strange harikathas, for along with the gods and goddesses, he brings in Gandhi, the Swaraj and the Red-Men. Gandhi is glorified and raised to the level of Ram and Krishna who fought the Demons, as Gandhi fought the Red-Men. The harikatha was political propaganda in disguise. The harikatham is seen to have been influenced by Gandhi who consciously appropriates the significance of religion to convey his ideals and also to revolutionize the traditionalist society.

Soon the news reaches the British Government and the harikatham, Jayaramachar is arrested. In his absence, Moorthy takes the lead and at times the harikathas are conducted by Ratna, a young progressive widow, along with the Sevikas, that is, the women folk of the village of Kanthapura.

With the arrest of the harikatham, the freedom movement begins to gather momentum. Moorthy, 'the little Gandhi' as a true disciple of Gandhi begins to organize harikathas and asks people to cast off the foreign clothes and become Gandhiji's followers. The influence of Gandhi transforms Moorthy from a common village lad to a man capable of leadership and self-sacrifice. Moorthy has not met Gandhi physically but he sees a vision of Gandhi addressing a public meeting and he himself makes his way through the crowd and receives inspiration from a touch with Gandhi's hands.

Moorthy goes from door to door in his village carrying the message of the Mahatma and explains the importance of '*khadi*' and '*charkha*' to the villagers. He soon becomes a Gandhi- man in right earnest. He returns from the city with necessary instructions and brings with him publicity material, cotton and spinning wheels. He along with

the educated boys of the village distributes free charkhas to all the village people and tells them to make their own clothes and boycott the foreign clothes. Here Moorthy follows the Gandhian ideal to boycott the British goods which is traded into India to exploit the villagers. When they asked Moorthy if Mahatma also spinned, Moorthy replied that Gandhi spun for two hours in the morning and that Gandhi believed that spinning was as purifying as prayer. Hearing this, the villagers eagerly took the spinning wheels from Moorthy and carried out the activity. Patel Range Gowda explains to the people the significance of spinning and weaving, non-violence, and of the value and meaning of independence. Later during Moorthy's independence, he boosts the morale of the people, guides and encourages them and sees to it that their spirits do not wane away.

The tension and conflict of the novel results from the clash of the two opposite forces- The Gandhi movement for freedom, and repression by the British government. The one is represented by Moorthy and his supporters, and the other by Bhatta, (a greedy Government agent to work against Moorthy and other Gandhimen of the village) and Bade Khan--the policemen who represents the rule of the British Empire in Kanthapura. His duty was to maintain law and order in Kanthapura and suppress the Gandhian freedom movement.

One of the important aspects of the Gandhian movement is the eradication of Untouchability. This ideal is very much embedded in the novel. In the novel, we find Moorthy mixing up with the pariahs (the untouchables whom Gandhi bestows a divine status by naming them as 'Harijans' or 'sons of God') and working for their upliftment. Moorthy as a result is excommunicated from the Brahmin community by Swami (a government man and anti-Gandhi). Shocked at hearing the news, Moorthy's orthodox mother Narsamma dies out of grief due to Moorthy's excommunication. But Moorthy is a strong man who continues to initiate the momentum of rebellion against caste as well as slavery.

After this, we get a vivid description of the abject servile condition of the coolies and labourers of the Skeffington Coffee Estate. This Estate is situated not far from Kanthapura. The coolies and labourers are humiliated and tortured by the English officers. It is only under the impact of Moorthy's efforts to educate the coolies and labourers of Skeffington Coffee Estate that they became conscious about their position and started to prepare to face challenges. Truth is central to Gandhian ideals and the villagers as a whole began to seek truth.

In the novel Moorthy is seen to follow Gandhi's ideal of non-violence or '*ahimsa*' which envisions purging of any form of hatred towards other from one's heart because it is contempt and derision that causes hostility and violence. One day, Moorthy enters the Skeffington Coffee Estate though Bade Khan prevents him. As a result, a fight takes place, Bade Khan hurl blows on Moorthy's head. The non-violent Moorthy becomes rather sorrowful and calm and decides to start the movement: "Don't touch the government campaign." He is determined to face and resist violence only through non-violent means. Therefore, before starting the campaign, Moorthy undertakes a fast in the temple for self-purification for three days. When he breaks the fast, Moorthy becomes more non-violent and free from any ill-feeling towards others. Moorthy stresses Gandhian ideal of *ahimsa* or non-violence upon Range Gowda when he communicates his wish to teach Puttaya a lesson for unfairly drawing the canal-water to his fields.

After this we find Moorthy forming the Congress group of 23 elected members in Kanthapura which joins the Congress of all India. Moorthy is elected their president and is called Mahatma by their supporters. All vows to spin everyday, to practice *ahimsa* and seek truth.

Soon Moorthy is arrested by policeman Bade Khan and several others of his kind. There were lathi charges, people shouted 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai'. Moorthy tried to console his supporters by saying that



even Gandhi had to go to jail several times. Moorthy after arrest is taken to Karwar jail, in Karnataka, Bangalore. Before the judge Moorthy said that truth is God, and that he does not need any defence. The Secretary of the Karwar Congress Committee appreciated Moorthy's stand, and on his suggestion Moorthy agrees to meetings being held for him.

After his return to Kanthapura, Moorthy and his followers follow the Karwar instructions of the Congress Committee at the centre. They soon hear that Gandhi is arrested and sent to jail along with his followers manufacturing salt illegally at Dandi and allowing his followers to carry salt to home. The people of Kanthapura also get ready for the non-violent fight in their own village. In this way the entire drama of the freedom struggle is re-enacted.

Toddy is an intoxicating drink made out of the leaves of the toddy trees. It is considered an evil, a means of corrupting and exploiting people. According to the instructions from the Karwar Congress, with slogans 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai', Moorthy along with 77 Satyagrahis offered Satyagraha in front of the Toddy shop of the Skeffington Coffee Estate. The purpose is to prevent the coolies from drinking it. The Satyagrahis squatted before the toddy booth and prevented the coolies from entering. The police kicked, humiliated and tortured the Satyagrahis. 67 of them left and 10 sent to jail. Range Gowda and others are arrested except Moorthy. On return they are appreciated for their non-violent heroic acts. The success of the Satyagraha in the Toddy Booth encouraged people of other villages. 26 booths near Kanthapura are closed. As a result, Moorthy's fame spread. He is considered a hero.

The account of the Satyagraha shows Raja Rao at his most inspired. The lathi-charges, the beatings, the slogan shouting, the thrills and sensations, of those stirring days have been fully captured and vividly narrated. We feel that we are living once again in those historic times, when the Mahatma did his charisma and brought a dead nation to life.

The success of the Satyagrahis were retaliated by intensification of Government repression in the village of Kanthapura. New Patel is appointed to collect revenue. It is a ruling policy of the British Government to bring the people under control. One morning, road and lanes leading to Kanthapura is blocked. The government action begins. The whole village Kanthapura is full of policemen. Hearing the news, Moorthy's supporters begin to beat the drums. During the night Moorthy, Rangamma and Ratna goes from door to door telling the people that the fight had begun. Bhatta's house is set on fire and women and children are tortured. Women for refuge goes to the temple. But the policemen seals the temple, the women therefore lights and prays bhajans for people to hear them. Later they are released.

Three days later, city coolies are brought in. The British Government says the villagers to pay revenue otherwise their land would be auctioned. The climax reaches at this point with a headlong collision between the fearless Satyagrahis and the policemen. Looking at their fearless effort, city-coolies, Indian Sahibs working for Britishers becomes for the Satyagrahis.

The Satyagrahis also retaliates with violence. They are killed in large numbers. Police beat and open fire on them. As the policemen follows them, they including women and children goes to the Maddur Mountains, crosses Mysore and reaches the village of Kashipur. Everywhere they are given hero's welcome by the people. They decide to stay there. Acts of violence on the part of Satyagrahis are more or less based on contemporary history and is treated by Raja Rao as such.

After a period of fourteen months, we find that Kanthapura has undergone a change and a process of urbanization has started in the village. While people from Bombay came to live in Kanthapura, villagers like Bhatta and Range Gowda left Kanthapura. Peace prevailed in Kanthapura as well as Kashipur. Moorthy and Ratna are released from

jail. Ratna leaves for Bombay. Moorthy becomes a follower of Nehru as well as of Gandhi. During this time Nehru is rising on the political scene of India, attracting the masses of India. Then they hear that the Mahatma is going to the Red-men's country, and they are sure he would bring Swaraj for them. The novel ends here with a note of hope.

### **Check Your Progress-II**

1. What are the formative influences on Raja Rao.
2. Write a note on the works of Raja Rao
3. Discuss the significance of the title of *Kanthapura*.

### **1.4 Let us Sum Up**

Thus in this unit you have learnt about the life and works of the great Indo-Anglian novelist Raja Rao along with the formative influences on him. A summary of the text has also been given in order to give an overview of the novel *Kanthapura* along with a discussion on the appropriateness of the title of the novel. It is expected that the discussion contained in this unit will further motivate you to learn more about the novelist and his novel *Kanthapura* along with his other creations and formulate your own ideas about him.

## **ANSWER KEYS**

### **Check your Progress I**

1. (b), 2. Prof. Cazamian, 3. (a), 4. (b), 5. Philosophical novel

### **Check your Progress II**

1. See section 1.2.1
2. See section 1.2.2
3. See section 1.3.1

### Possible Questions

1. Discuss the presentation of Gandhian freedom struggle in the novel *Kanthapura*.
2. Write a note on the exploitation of the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate by the Britishers.

### Suggested Readings

Apart from the proper study of this study material, you may also log on to Internet websites. The prescribed novel should first be studied thoroughly. If you are interested to know more about Raja Rao and *Kanthapura*, you may read some of the other works written by Raja Rao alongwith some reference books on him. You may find some of the books in the library—both in the form of ebooks which you have to download, and hardcopies. Some others might be available in the bookshops or you may have to order online.

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### Glossary:

**Achakka:** Achakka is the narrator of *Kanthapura*. She is a garrulous grandmother of the village of Kanthapura interested in all the

happenings, gossip and inter-relations of characters. She is a Brahmin woman who is gifted with a sense of the past and is a wonderful storyteller who grips the attention of the reader till the end. She tells the story with rapidity and in her peculiar flowing style. The tone of her narrative is confident and cheerful until she comes to describe the dreadful sight of death and destruction in the wake of the headlong confrontation between the Satyagrahis and the Government officials. The narrator sounds authentic in the way she describes in minute details the places, people and their politics. In this way she tries to create an atmosphere as it were of what had actually happened in Kanthapura, which is a microcosm of India.

**Ahimsa:** A Sanskrit word meaning ‘non-violence’. It means ‘not to injure’ and ‘compassion’ and refers to a key virtue in Indian religions.

**Allegory:** a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.

**Dandi March:** The Salt March, also known as the Dandi March and the Dandi Satyagraha, was an act of nonviolent civil disobedience in colonial India led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to produce salt from the seawater in the coastal village of Dandi (now in Gujarat), as was the practice of the local people until British officials introduced taxation on salt production, deemed their sea-salt reclamation activities illegal, and then repeatedly used force to stop it. The 26-day march lasted from 12 March 1930 to 6 April 1930 as a direct action campaign of tax resistance and nonviolent protest against the British salt monopoly. Thousands of people joined him and made it one of the biggest marches in Indian history. Gandhi’s Salt March is considered to be a pivotal incident in the history of freedom struggle.

**Harijan (Untouchable):** ‘Harijan’ was a term popularized by Indian political leader Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi for referring communities traditionally considered ‘Untouchable’.

**Harikatha:** It is the the story of the Hari (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu) or any other god or goddess. It is a religious ritual that a devout Hindu is expected to organize or attend from time to time. It may be held at home or at a temple. It is a form of Hindu religious discourse in which the storyteller explores a religious theme, usually the life of a saint or a story from an Indian epic. Most prevalent in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, Harikatha is a composite art form composed of storytelling, poetry, music, drama, dance and philosophy.

**Harikathamam Jayaramachar:** Jayaramachar is the famous Harikatha-man in the novel *Kanthapura*. He has a special way of doing the Harikatha. Somehow or other, he brings in an element of Gandhian teaching into the stories that he narrates. While telling the story of Siva and Parvati, he says that Siva is three eyed and Swaraj too is three-eyed, referring to the Gandhian message of self-purification, Hindu-Muslim unity and Khaddar. The villagers of *Kanthapura* had never heard Harikathas like this before. Since Jayaramachar could sing too, he keeps them rapt in tears for hours together. They can never forget the Harikathas he did about the birth of Gandhi, which is a fine example of how the religious plank is suitably used for political awakening. The people of *Kanthapura* find no harm in this as both are desirable ends.

In his special Harikatha, Jayaramachar recall the ancient glory of India that produced such great kings as Asoka, Chandragupta, Vikramaditya and Akbar, and such sages as Krishna, Buddha, Sankara and Ramanuja. But this very land of the Himalayas, Ganges and Cauvery

is enslaved by a nation of the Red-men from across the seas. The rishis beseech the Brahma to do something to free the nation from foreign bondage. With the blessings of all the gods, there is born in a family in Gujarat a son such as the world never beheld before. He is named Mohandas and grows up to become Mahatma Gandhi, who wages a relentless fight against the serpent of foreign rule, and one day he will destroy it and bring Swaraj (self-rule) to India. The police take away Jayaramachar away after this Harikatha, and he is never again seen in Kanthapura. His story of Gandhi is an allegory of India's freedom struggle. Jayaramachar's story of Gandhi, apart from its appropriateness as a Harikatha, also serves to introduce the political theme of the novel. Being a true follower of Gandhi, Jayaramachar dedicates his art of narration to political education of the common people as also to free public entertainment. He gives his stories of the gods a contemporary relevance that educates the illiterate villagers of *Kanthapura*. Jayaramachar's recounting of the birth of Gandhi as a symbolic saviour of the Indian people, and his pursuit of the chosen mission of eradicating the British rule in India, are politically effective ways of introducing Gandhi to the illiterate villagers in his role of the national leader of India.

**Pariah:** a member of a low caste of southern India; an untouchable; an outcast.

**Satyagraha:** a Sanskrit word meaning a moral force born from Truth and Love (non-violence). It is a form of nonviolent resistance (fighting with peace; resisting without taking action) initiated in India by Mahatma Gandhi in order to oppose British rule and to hasten political reforms.

**Skeffington Coffee Estate:** During that period in the history of India with which the novel deals there were many such estates all over India which were owned by white men. Many workers were employed

in these Estates and they were mostly Indians. They were exploited by the owners and this kind of exploitation and ill treatment was there in all Estates. This is an example of economic exploitation of the Indians by the British. So, by depicting the condition of workers in the Skeffington Coffee Estate the novelist gives us a vivid description of the atrocities of the Britishers.

The coolies were lured into this work by false promises and by the maistri and were misled by the impression of a comfortable life once they reach the estate. These coolies came from far-off places. Some of them spoke Tamil or Telugu. The people of Kanthapura spoke Kannada. They came from the plains below the Ghats stretching upto the river Godavary. The maistri promised them that they will be given a four-anna bit for a man and a two-anna bit for a woman. He further told them that they will just have to pick up coffee seeds. They were told that the Sahib was a good man and a generous man. People came in large numbers to work on the estate.

The coolies living in the Skeffington Coffee Estate were exploited and ill-treated. They had to go through all kinds of physical torture and humiliation. They had to get up at five o'clock in the morning and work the whole day without any break. The maistri did not allow them to rest even for a single second. They were beaten mercilessly. The men had to dig pits and to hew woods and the women were made to pluck weeds and to kill vermin. The weather was very hot and there were many snakes in the Coffee Estate. They had to work in the scorching heat with perspiration flowing down their bodies. During rainy days, the people suffered from diseases. The Sahib distributed medicines among the coolies. The coolies were uneducated and superstitious people and they did not eat the medicines given to them by the Sahib. The arrival of Bade Khan, the policeman, further strengthened and encouraged the Sahib because an officer of law was with him then.



Compared to his uncle, the present owner of the Skeffington Coffee Estate was less cruel. He did not beat the coolies but he had a weakness for women. He wanted any woman who caught his fancy. If any woman said no to his sexual advances, her family members were harassed and tortured by the Sahib.

Whatever life may be like on the Estate, no one that came from the Godavary has ever been able to go back. They were given small huts to live in and no wages were paid. They were exploited and treated like animals. They were given just ragi and rice water. The happenings in the Skeffington Coffee Estate constitute the subplot of the novel, the main plot dealing with the impact of Gandhi Movement on the village Kanthapura. The novelist very graphically depicts the condition of the coolies living on the Estate. They were oppressed, exploited and treated very badly by the owner who was an Englishman. It shows the exploitation and brutality to which the Indians were subjected by the British.

Though the majority of the coolies were pariahs, there were also a few Brahmins who could be easily suppressed. Among them there were two young Brahmin clerks, Gangadhar and Vasudev, with progressive and enlightened views. They later took the pariahs to Kanthapura to take part in the Gandhi-bhajan and invited Moorthy to come to the Estate to teach the ignorant coolies

**Swaraj:** Self-government or independence for India.

**Toddy:** A kind of country liquor popular in South India. It is made from the fermented sap of any of several toddy palms.

**Untouchability:** a menace and social evil associated with traditional Hindu society. It is a practice whereby a particular class or caste of persons are discriminated with on the ground of their being born in that particular caste or on the ground of their being members

of those social groups involved in menial jobs. The discrimination can be in the form of physical or social boycott from the society. It was believed that people of higher castes could become impure even if a shadow of an untouchable person touches him and to re-gain his purity he had to take a dip into holy waters of the Ganga. Untouchability was also practiced as a form of punishment to the law-breakers and criminals. They were socially boycotted for their misdeeds. Gandhi, and his true follower Moorthy in Kanthapura, made it their life's mission to wipe out untouchability and to uplift the depressed and the downtrodden people.

## BLOCK – I : FICTION

### UNIT-VI

## ***KANTHAPURA*: PREFACE AND CHARACTERS**

### **Structure**

- 1.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Preface to *Kanthapura*: Its significance
- 2.3 The Characters: Rao's Art of Characterisation
  - 2.3.1 Moorthy
  - 2.3.2 Other Characters
  - 2.3.3 Women Characters
- 2.4 Let us Sum Up
  - Possible Questions
  - References/ Suggested Readings
  - Glossary

### **2.0 Objectives:**

- *explain* the significance of the 'Preface' to *Kanthapura*
- *discuss* Raja Rao's art of characterisation in *Kanthapura*
- *critically comment* on the depiction of women characters in *Kanthapura*.
- *analyse* Moorthy as a true picture of a typical Gandhian

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this unit we will discuss the significance of the 'Preface' or 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura*. Along with it, we will learn about Rao's art

of characterisation in *Kanthapura*. This will be followed by a discussion on some of the characters including women characters of the novel.

## 2.2 Preface to *Kanthapura*: Its significance

The 'Preface' or 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura* is an important critical document and a minor classic in itself. Raja Rao has added this 'Preface' to his novel *Kanthapura* on request of his publishers 'to say a word of explanation'. It can be considered as Rao's manifesto of his artistic creed. As such, a study of Raja Rao and his novel *Kanthapura* should begin with a study of the 'Preface' to *Kanthapura*.

Raja Rao knows that in India every village is rich in local myths and legends, and there are frequent references and allusions to such myths and legends, *sthala-purana*, as he calls them. He thus begins his 'Preface', "There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich *sthala-purana*, or legendary history, of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village—Rama might have rested under this pipal-tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals of my village I have tried to tell."

*Kanthapura* is a great regional novel, an interesting *sthala-purana*, that is, the mythic tale of a particular place. The novelist in the above paragraph rises from the particular to the general. This is done in the novel *Kanthapura* by the weaving of ancient myths into the structure of the novel which gives it the quality of timelessness which all great works of art have. The novel illustrates how new legends or *sthala-puranas* are made, how the ordinary and the commonplace acquires larger than life dimensions in the imagination of poets and bards. In other words, Rao has made ample use of such legendary and historical

associations, the present is constantly glorified by juxtaposition with the past, and the simple and the petty is thus raised to epical heights. *Kanthapura* infact becomes a Gandhian epic. The use of this mythical technique is indeed an important part of the novelist's art of narration.

Rao then comes to the most valuable part of the 'Preface' in which he expresses his views on the use of English by Indian writers. In this connection he tells us, "One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it."

After discussing the problem of language the novelist considers the problem of style. He says: "The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs. We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on. And our paths are paths interminable. The Mahabharata has 214,778 verses and the Ramayana 48,000. Puranas there are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us—we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling. I have tried to follow it myself in this story:

It may have been told of an evening, when as the dusk falls and through the sudden quiet, lights leap up in house after house, and stretching her bedding on the veranda, a grandmother might have told you, newcomer, the sad tale of her village.”

Talking about the style, Raja Rao says that the style must be characteristically Indian. It must capture the tempo or the flavour of Indian life. Indians think quickly, talk quickly and walk quickly, and according to him, this quickness must be infused into the style of an Indian novelist writing in English. Rao further says that like the paths, the verses of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas are endless and innumerable. One episode leads to another, and so the tale tends to be interminably long. This was and still is the ordinary style of story-telling which the novelist follows in the story of *Kanthapura*. This makes the narration episodic. There are many digressions, superfluities in the novel and the narration is characterised by verbosity and garrulity, right in the Indian tradition of story-telling. The novelist has not divided the novel into chapters. The sentences are interminably long, often only one sentence covering one full page. In this way, Raja Rao makes it quite clear that the novel is to be judged with reference to the Indian tradition and not with reference to western techniques and western theories of the novel-form.

Indians have been great story tellers since times immemorial. Indian grandmothers and grandfathers, sitting cosily by the fire on long winter evenings, have narrated interminable tales for the benefit of their grandchildren. Their tales have tended to be richly reminiscent. With the passing of time, outlines lose their sharpness and get blurred, and so fact and fancy, memory and imagination, jostle each other in wild profusion. *Kanthapura* is just such a tale. It is narrated by an old grandmother Achakka for the benefit of a newcomer, years after the events narrated in the novel had taken place. From her home in some distant village in Mysore, she remembers wistfully the events of those

stirring days, and as the story proceeds much that is purely fictional and imaginary mingles with the factual. Memories grow dim with the passing of time, much is forgotten, and much else is unconsciously modified and glorified. The petty and the trivial acquires new dimensions and viewed in retrospect, events acquire a significance which they did not possess at the time. This is what actually happens as the grandmother Achakka proceeds with her narration.

Thus, Raja Rao's 'Preface' or 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura* contains significant comments on his literary style and diction. It throws valuable light on his views regarding (a) style and Indianness (b) the use of English by Indians, and (c) the art of storytelling. Through it, the novelist highlights some of the problems faced by the Indian creative writer writing in English, and tries to solve it.

**Check your Progress-I**

1. Write the reason behind Rao's adding of the 'Preface' or 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura*?

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2. What is *sthala-purana*?

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3. Write a note on the significance of the 'Preface' to *Kanthapura*

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**2.3 The Characters: Rao's Art of Characterisation**

Raja Rao is a gifted writer who possessed the art of creating living characters. His characters are not mere symbols, but like us,

creatures of flesh and blood, weaknesses and virtues. There is a great variety of characters in *Kanthapura*. The novelist here is interested in the depiction of the surface personality of the characters. He visualizes their outward idiosyncrasies vividly and unerringly, their manner, their charm and their tricks of speech. The characters are not viewed from within and they do not evolve or develop. Rather they remain the same from beginning to the end. Yet the novelist has lent them a certain liveliness. Though his characters lack depth, they are more or less made good by their outer warmth. They carry about them the remnants of their environment and heredity. They are all sons and daughters of the soil mostly with a strong aroma of the village folk around them. Their personality is manifested through their typical conversation and their limited aspiration. We see only much of their exterior in *Kanthapura*, their limited ideas of life, actions and reactions at the introduction of the ideas by Moorthy, their hero and follower of Gandhi.

In *Kanthapura* the novelist aims at the development of action and not the expansion or evolution of character. The latent characteristics of the characters remain dormant as the novelist is concerned mainly with the action- the depiction of the mass movement and its impact, marching rapidly towards its destined goal.

In the foreground there are a number of major figures, with a host of minor figures in the background, taking part in the action and throwing the major figures into sharp relief by contrast. For instance, the goodness of Advocate Shankar is focused by contrasting it with the meanness and greediness of Advocate Seenappa. The characters in *Kanthapura* are drawn from all sections of village society- the Brahmins, the Sudras, the Potters, the Weavers and the Pariahs. There are no villains as such among his characters. Bhatta or Waterfall Venkamma, although they oppose the movement in the village, are not villains at all in the real sense of the term. The spiritual presence of Gandhiji dominates the scene and he is an invisible god whose avatar or physical manifestation



is the Corner-House Moorthy. Beginning with Moorthy, let us now discuss some of the characters of the text under study:

### **2.3.1 Moorthy**

The protagonist of *Kanthapura* is a young and city-educated man called Moorthy. He is one of the staunch followers of Gandhi. The civil disobedience movement finds its way into this remote south Indian village, Kanthapura, with the arrival of Moorthy from the city who has some messages from Gandhi to deliver. Moorthy is called 'Village Gandhi' who makes an endeavour to go to every house in the village, also to the pariah quarters, to pass on Gandhi's message and explain how important this struggle for Independence was for all of them.

In *Kanthapura* Moorthy is a sort of miniature Gandhi. He is the central figure in *Kanthapura* and a true Satyagrahi who follows in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi. An ardent disciple of Gandhi, Moorthy, like him, is self-sacrificing and he draws the villagers towards him by his virtuous living. He spreads the idea of spinning wheel and propogates Gandhi's message of love and non-violence. He does good work in Kanthapura and rises to be a hero on account of his devotion to duty. He is a leader in the true sense of the word. The villagers like him and refers to him as 'Corner-house Moorthy'; 'our Moorthy who has gone through life like a noble cow, quiet, generous, deferent, Brahminic a very prince' a 'sacred eagle', the 'saint of our village'. They consider him to be honest like an elephant and calls him as 'our Gandhi'. While Gandhi is the 'big mountain', Moorthy is the 'small mountain'.

Moorthy derives spiritual strength from a vision of Gandhi. This very vision transforms him to such an extent that he gives up his college education and devotes his life to the struggle for independence and the upliftment of the poor and uneducated people of his village. In spite of opposition, he works for upliftment of the pariahs living in Kanthapura. According to C.D. Narasimhaiah, the author's own self is projected in the character of Moorthy.

Moorthy forms the Congress Committee of Kanthapura and is chosen its President. Even people like Range Gowda regards him and has faith and confidence on him. Being a staunch supporter of the Swadeshi movement, Moorthy tells the villagers to shun foreign dress and spin on their own. He distributes the charkhas to them which the Congress has given free of cost. Moorthy also keeps a fast after the violence at the Skeffington Coffee Estate. He organizes picketing of toddy grove and toddy booths. He also organizes meetings and Satyagrahas and is sent to jail like other freedom fighters.

Towards the end of the story, Moorthy becomes a little disillusioned with the ways and ideas of Gandhi. He becomes a supporter of the more pragmatic philosophy of Nehru in order to achieve their goal. However, Moorthy continues to remain loyal to the Gandhian doctrine.

### **2.3.2 Other Characters**

#### **Bhatta**

Bhatta is the First Brahmin, or chief priest at ceremonial feasts, and primary landlord of Kanthapura. He is Moorthy's foil, the agent of the British government, in league with the Swami in the city, to frustrate and defeat the Gandhi movement in Kanthapura. According to C.D. Narasimhaiah, "[Bhatta] is one of the most interesting man in Kanthapura, and the novelist has given us a detailed account of his past, of his crooked nature, and the way in which he sets about doing the work of the red-man and opposing the Gandhi movement."

Bhatta begins his life with a loin cloth at his waist and a copper pot in his hand. He becomes rich after he starts the business of money lending to the poor peasants. He cheats and exploits them and goes on adding several acres of the peasants' land to his own domain. Bhatta is always the first to reach the home of his host on a ceremonial occasion, such as, a death anniversary. He is very fond of food and is very greedy. This is evident from the way he eats the obsequial dinner: "...But Bhatta

goes on munching and belching, drinking water and then munching again.” Narasimhaiah points out that Bhatta is an unworthy husband with his lack of consideration for his wife at home. On the days he dines out, his poor wife has only dal soup and rice. His wife soon dies and soon this middle-aged, pot-bellied priest marries a girl of twelve and half years old.

Bhatta is the only one who has nothing to do with the Gandhi bhajans. Besides his business contracts, he owes to Government patronage. He is also the Election agent and has got two thousand for it. He is clever, overweight and self-centred with deep seated and devastating prejudice against the ‘Pariahs’ (the Untouchables). It is he who is responsible for the excommunication of Moorthy. He keeps the Swami in the city informed of happenings in the village, incites the people against Moorthy and other Gandhites, and does his best to sabotage the Gandhian freedom movement. He sides with Bade Khan, sets afloat the rumours regarding Moorthy’s excommunication and so hastens the death of Moorthy’s mother. Through Bhatta the novelist has exposed the greed and gluttony of the Brahmins, as well as the crooked ways of those who work as stooges of the imperial rulers of the country. He is the symbol of usury and false orthodoxy and low cunning. When Kanthapura is nearly destroyed in the police assaults on the freedom fighters, the untouchables burn Bhatta’s house. He sells the deeds that he holds to Bombay land speculators and moves to Kashi.

### **Range Gowda**

Range Gowda is a fat, wealthy and sturdy man with a powerful voice. He is a forceful and commanding personality, a man of courage, determination and authority due to which he is known as the ‘Tiger’ of the village. Nobody dares to oppose him or disobey his orders. He is on the same time kind, honest and sympathetic and does his best to help the poor, the needy and the suffering of the village.

He is the Patel of Kanthapura, and as such a government servant. His duty is to collect tax from the villagers. But he is also a Gandhi man and a staunch supporter of Moorthy and the freedom fighters. He explains to the people the importance of spinning and weaving, non-violence, and the value and meaning of independence. He actively participates in the Congress work in Kanthapura. Range Gowda tells Moorthy that he is not able to agree with Gandhi's view that enemies can be won over by a loving attitude but even then he is a follower of Gandhi. Though Moorthy is much younger, Range Gowda respects Moorthy and has great faith and confidence in him. On the other hand, he is disrespectful of Bade Khan when the latter comes to him searching a place for rent. Range Gowda supports Moorthy and later, during Moorthy's imprisonment, he guides and encourages the people of Kanthapura to carry on their nationalistic struggle. He is the only one among the people of Kanthapura who goes back to Kanthapura after the social upheaval and political turmoil and after they start living in Kshipur. And it is rumoured that he has stayed only long enough to retrieve his jewels buried under the earth.

### **The White Owner of Skeffington Coffee Estate**

The founder owner of the Skeffington Coffee Estate is an Englishman who was known as the "Hunter Sahib" as he used to move about with a hunter in hand, whipping his workers to make them work faster. By the time of the present story, he is dead, and his place has been taken by his young nephew. Though the workers continue to be economically exploited and live under inhuman conditions, the nephew is less cruel compared to his uncle. He does not beat the coolies and distributes medicines among the coolies to prevent fever or to cure the people suffering from fever. It is not that the life of the coolies is very good and comfortable under him. This nephew has a weakness for women and wants any woman who catches his fancy. He sexually exploits them and even lures large number of workers from distant parts

of Mysore with false promises. If any woman dares to say no, her family members are harassed and tortured by this Sahib. He is therefore the representative figure of the British exploitation of the Indians.

### **Bade Khan**

Bade Khan is the policeman in the village of Kanthapura. Bade Khan comes to live in Kanthapura after the harikathan Jayaramachar is arrested. He is a symbol of the law and authority of the British rule. His main job is to provide information to the British government about the activities of the freedom fighters of Kanthapura and to curb the freedom movement. He is an agent of the government and does his duty sincerely. Though he is an Indian, he is against the freedom fighters. He is a loyal and faithful servant of the Britishers and does his best to oppose the freedom movement. He is described by the novelist as a hefty, bearded man. His presence in the Skeffington Coffee Estate is helpful to the White Owner of the estate because he did the job of terrorising the coolies. When Moorthy tries to enter the coffee estate, it is Bade Khan who prevents him from entering. He dominates in the novel only at intervals as a fearful personality. He is uneducated and crude in manners and speech. He is foul-mouthed, vulgar and unrefined. In the beginning, he found it very difficult to get a house for himself in Kanthapura as he is a Mohammedan. Ultimately he finds a hut in Skeffington Coffee Estate and starts living there with a pariah woman. Like other characters in the novel, Bade Khan too has been faithfully portrayed although he has not been completely developed therein.

### **The Swami**

He is a supporter, a stooge of the British Government due to which he has received twelve hundred acres of wet land from the government. He outwardly pretends that he respects Gandhi but he is against his movement for the upliftment of the pariahs or the untouchables. The Swami never comes to Kanthapura. He never appears

on the scene and remains almost in the background throughout. But his influence in the novel is devastating and pernicious. He is a conservative man who is very traditional in his views and ideas. He is an orthodox Brahmin and is able to influence the Brahmins living in Kanthapura. It is Swami who gives orders to Bhatta to excommunicate Moorthy from the village for mixing with the pariahs and working for their upliftment. Swami does all this by his dirty tricks and manipulations. Though Moorthy is not much affected by it, his mother Narsamma however is so shocked hearing the news of his excommunication that it ultimately led to her death.

### **Advocate Shankar**

Shankar is a twenty-six-year old secretary of the Karwar Congress Party. He is a saintly, ascetic widower with a young daughter. He is an honest lawyer who does not take a false case. He hence is different from the other lawyers. He withdraws himself as soon as he discovers that the case of his client Rama Chetty is false. He has earned a reputation of an “ascetic advocate”.

Shankar is a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and second only to Moorthy in the novel. He is a staunch follower of Gandhi’s principles. He is a fanatic regarding dress. He wears khadi and does not attend weddings where people wear dresses made of foreign material. Like Moorthy, Advocate Shankar regards fasting as an excellent method for purifying the mind. His whole family fast on the anniversary of the imprisonment of Gandhi. Bold and fearless, he takes up the defense of Moorthy when the latter is arrested and sent to the city courts. Unlike Bhatta, Advocate Shankar refuses marriage after marriage after his wife’s demise as he has to look after his child from her.

### **2.3.3 Women Characters**

Raja Rao sees woman as *Shakti* (power), as *Mother-Earth* and the theme of *Shakti-worship* runs through his novels. There are a number

of women characters in *Kanthapura* and each one of them expresses one aspect or the other of *Shakti*. In this connection Uma Parmaswaram writes: “Voluble, with an infinite capacity for love and for passing malice, quick to spark into enthusiasm and into cynicism, the women of Kanthapura are more human than those created by Raja Rao elsewhere. They become woman at certain times, but there is no incongruity between their actions and the author’s claim. One realizes that the immanent *Shakti* rises in every woman at certain pivotal points of life.”

“Different forms of *Shakti* are manifested through the women of Kanthapura. *Shakti*’s indomitable spirit possesses them in their Satyagraha (non-violent) procession against the British government. When the police ill-treat them with their sticks and boots, the women think, move, and act as one for they are one. Inspired by Gandhi they become the very incarnation of *Shakti*, and they sing:

*There is one Government, sister,  
There is one Government, sister,  
And that is the Government of the Mahatma.*

More distinct and pervasive is the devotional aspect. Woman as the Eternal Devotee, *Shakti* kneeling in rapt adoration in front of *Siva*, reveals herself through them as they listen to Jayaramachar retelling epic stories and to Ramakrishanyya reading passages from the scriptures.” Some important women characters of the novel are discussed below:

### **Ratna**

Ratna is a fifteen-year old progressive widow and one of the supporters of Moorthy in his nationalistic struggle. She is the daughter of Kamalamma, sister of Rangamma who is a wealthy young Brahmin widow. Ratna is bold and courageous and does not dress up in the conventional manner like a widow. She is a young woman with liberal thoughts. She wears bangles, uses kumkum and wears colourful saris instead of the white dhoti of the widow. She parts her hair like a concubine, as Venkamma puts it. But Ratna does not care and lives and

behaves the way she wants. Ratna is educated and hence people in Kanthapura asks her to read the religious texts after Ramakrishnayya's death. When Jayaramachar, the harikatha man is arrested, it is she who conducts the harikathas. She possesses the characteristics of a leader as her participation in the freedom movement exhibits. In Moorthy's absence, due to his arrest, Ratna becomes the leader of the freedom fighters of Kanthapura. Ratna alongwith Rangamma carries on the work of the Congress in the village. She plays an active part in the formation of the women's group called the Sevika Sangha. In the face of government suppression and police action, Ratna exhibits immense courage and resourcefulness. Consequently, she too like Moorthy is beaten and sent to jail. After being released from jail she leaves Kanthapura to continue her activism in Bombay. She becomes more mature and determined and wants to play her part in India's struggle for freedom. In the novel Ratna is very close to Moorthy and there certainly is a kind of attraction between them but very little is said about this aspect.

### **Waterfall Venkamma**

She is a typical old woman living in the village of Kanthapura. Her character is not strong enough, although it is amusing and interesting. She keeps on complaining against everybody, as she is more or less prejudiced against everybody. She nurses a grudge against Moorthy who did not consent to marry her second daughter. She invents facts which do not exist, and pours venom on Rangamma. She is not taken seriously by anybody and no one tries to dare silence her. She is not content with remaining within the range of her own interests and invariably meddles into the affairs of others, as such her mind is seldom at rest. She remains the same throughout the novel. She is interested in the ignoble trivialities of life which others ignore. She is different from Rangamma and is peculiar, cynical, fact-distorting, grudge-bearing and a venom-pouring creature. She symbolizes all the pettiness, jealousy, triviality and



orthodoxy of Indian village life. Just like a waterfall, Venkamma in the novel is always found to be shedding tears and roaring and railing against others. She remains out of the pale of the freedom movement and is not with Moorthy.

**Narasamma:**

Moorthy's mother, Narsamma, is a conservative and orthodox woman. She is rather old-fashioned and cannot go beyond her limited vision. She is the mother of eleven children, five of whom died and of the remaining six, Moorthy was the only son. She is a pious old Hindu woman, tall and thin, and her big, broad ash marks gave her such an air of ascetic holiness. She has great love for her son and has high hopes of his brilliant career. But her hopes and dreams about him are shattered into pieces when he joins the freedom movement launched by Gandhiji. She is literally shocked and her feelings are intensely hurt when Moorthy is ex-communicated by Swami, through the intrigues of the wicked Bhatta. She cannot see through the conspiracy of the evil-minded orthodox people like Swami and his mercenary agent, Bhatta. Being the youngest of her sons, Moorthy is regarded by her as "the holy Bull". Instead of becoming a sub-collector as she hopes he would become, she is told instead, that he frequently mixes up with the pariahs. This serves to be a terrible blow to her. She regards excommunication of Moorthy nothing less than a sin. As a result, she is terribly shocked and dies out of grief. Her portraiture is artistically consummate though not drawn sharply at length.

**Rangamma**

Rangamma is an educated widow whose character is set into bold relief by the presence of Waterfall Venkamma who hurls abuses on her day and night. We learn many things about her through the mouth of Venkamma. She is a wealthy young Brahmin, a childless widow who owns a big house. Her younger brothers are in Bombay. They are city-

bred, so they are not liked by her. Rangamma is liberal in nature, as she gives a ten-rupee note to Moorthy. She could read newspapers and thus keep herself acquainted with the day-today developments elsewhere. She knows many things of general interest as of the plants that weep, of the monkeys that were the men they have become, of the stars that are so far. Rangamma is different from the other village women while they enter into a good verbal wrangle with Bhatta, yet she does not choose to do it on her part. She is a lady who is “deferent, soft-voiced, gentle-gestured.” She is roused to a righteous indignation, which has a cooling effect on Bhatta. Though her character is fascinating enough, yet it does not seem to come off with prominence. By and large she is a lovable character whose contribution to the development of Gandhian movement with courage and gentleness is not insignificant.

The minor characters in *Kanthapura* are important in so far as they show peculiar habits. Phrases are coined sometimes to describe the appearance, e.g., pock-marked Sidha, sometimes the profession viz., rice-pounding Rangamma, sometimes the location of the house viz. front-house Akamma. These minor characters serve two functions in the novel, firstly, they provide a contrast with the major characters for their ideals, and secondly, they help the novel to attain an epic vision. Life is incomplete without them, nor is the sacrifice for noble ideals can be justified. The narrative would be insipid and dull in their absence.

**Check Your Progress-II**

1. Discuss Raja Rao’s art of characterisation in *Kanthapura*.

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2. Examine Moorthy as a true picture of a typical Gandhian.

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3. Critically comment on the depiction of women characters in *Kanthapura*.

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### 2.4 Let us Sum Up

Thus in this unit we have discussed the significance of the ‘Preface’ to *Kanthapura*. We have further learnt about Raja Rao’s art of characterization and the role of some of the characters including women characters which are significant to the development of the plot of the novel.

### ANSWER KEYS

#### Check your Progress I

1. Raja Rao has added the ‘Preface’ to his novel *Kanthapura* on request of his publishers ‘to say a word of explanation’. This is the sole reason behind his adding of the ‘Preface’ to *Kanthapura*.
2. The mythic tale of a particular place is called *sthala-purana*.
3. See section 2.2

#### Check your Progress II

1. See section 2.3
2. See section 2.3.1
3. See section 2.3.3

#### Possible Questions

1. Critically examine *Kanthapura* as a portrait gallery.

2. Write a note on all the characters who followed the ideals of Gandhi in Kanthapura.
3. Present a brief character-sketch of either the White Owner of Skeffington Coffee Estate or Waterfall Venkamma.
4. Write briefly on the role of any two of the following characters of *Kanthapura*:  
Bhatta, Range Gowda, Ratna, Bade Khan

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### Glossary

**Ascetic:** characterized by severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons.

**Concubine:** mistress, paramour, kept woman

**Cynical:** sarcastic; mocking; showing contempt for accepted standards of behaviour, especially of honesty or morality.

**Deferent:** marked by or showing polite submission and respect.

**Excommunicate:** to exclude or expel from membership or participation in any group, association, etc.

**Fanatic:** a person filled with excessive and single-minded zeal, especially for an extreme religious or political cause.

**Gandhian doctrine:** a doctrine is a principle or set of principles that are followed by a particular group or in a particular situation. Gandhian doctrines or principles include Ahimsa (Nonviolence), Self-sufficiency, Communal harmony, Simple Living and Truth, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya (Universal uplift or welfare) etc.

**Hurl abuses:** to throw or impel insults, accusations etc. at somebody with great force.

**Idiosyncrasy:** a mode of behaviour or way of thought peculiar to an individual.

**Ignoble:** capable of base or mean behaviour

**Incarnation:** a person who embodies in the flesh a deity, spirit or quality.

**Incongruity:** the fact that something is different, incompatible; lack of harmony.

**Indignation:** anger or annoyance provoked by what is perceived as unfair treatment.

**Indomitable:** impossible to subdue or defeat

**Insipid:** lacking vigour or interest

**Orthodox:** someone or something that strictly adheres to religious beliefs or the conventional, normal way of doing things or normal accepted standards

**Pernicious:** having a harmful effect, especially in a gradual or subtle way.

**Picketing:** a form of protest in which people (called picketers) congregate outside a place of work or location where an event is taking

place. Often, this is done in an attempt to dissuade others from going in (“crossing the picket line”), but it can also be done to draw public attention to a cause. Picketers normally endeavour to be non-violent.

**Pragmatic :** dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations.

**Prejudiced:** showing an unreasonable dislike for something or someone.

**Righteous :** morally right or justifiable

**Staunch:** very loyal and committed in attitude.

**Stooge:** a person who is forced or paid by someone in authority to do an unpleasant or secret job for them.

**Trivialities:** not very important things in life; petty; minor; insignificant

**Voluble:** speaking a lot with confidence and enthusiasm

## **BLOCK – I : FICTION**

### **Unit - VII**

#### ***KANTHAPURA: TECHNIQUES***

##### **Structure**

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 *Kanthapura*: Techniques

3.2.1 *Kanthapura*: Plot and Structure

3.2.2 *Kanthapura*: Art and Technique of Narration

3.2.3 *Kanthapura*: Mythology and Symbolism

3.2.3.1 Use of Myths in *Kanthapura*

3.2.3.2 Use of Symbols in *Kanthapura*

3.2.4 *Kanthapura*: Its Language and Style

3.3 Let us Sum Up

Possible Questions

References/ Suggested Readings

Glossary

### 3.0 Objectives

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- *analyse* the plot and structure in *Kanthapura*
- *discuss* the art and technique of narration in the novel
- *explain* the use of myth and symbolism in the novel
- *analyse* the language and style of *Kanthapura*

### 3.1 Introduction

In this unit, first of all, we will analyse the plot and structure in *Kanthapura*. Next, we will discuss the art and technique of narration which Raja Rao employs in the novel. A section of the unit is devoted to myth and symbolism, the two elements which the novelist uses as aids to his narrative technique. This will be followed by a discussion on the language and style of *Kanthapura*. Thus, in this unit we have given you information about the important aspects related to the technique of *Kanthapura*.

### 3.2 *Kanthapura*: Techniques

#### 3.2.1 *Kanthapura*: Plot and Structure

Raja Rao in his novel *Kanthapura* follows the old Indian tradition of story-telling. The narration consists of the stream of memory of its old garrulous narrator, named Achakka. Though the plot abounds in digressions, the novel is not formless. Instead, it has a well-organised structure and a coherent and well-knit plot. In *Kanthapura* Rao superimposes the Indian tradition of imaginative romance over the Western form of the realistic novel, and mingles actual history with mythic 'Purana' to create a poetic work in prose. The novel therefore shows Rao's artistic skill in achieving a fusion of theme, form and narration in a literary form which is Indian and modern at the same time. The sequence of events of the novel is chronological and the plot is episodic in nature. The novel has a beginning, a middle and an end. It is an account of India's freedom struggle. It deals with the impact of Gandhi movement on a small village called Kanthapura.



The plot of *Kanthapura* consists of a main plot and a sub plot. Every aspect of the plot is controlled by novelist Raja Rao with consummate skill. The main plot deals with the impact of the Gandhi movement on a remote South Indian village called Kanthapura, a village which is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Because what happens in the remote village was happening all over India in those stirring decades. The sub-plot deals with the happening on the Skeffington Coffee Estate in the neighbourhood and throws a flood of light on the exploitation and brutality to which the Indian people were subjected by the foreign rulers. The two plots are fused into a single whole, for both expose the brutality of the Englishmen and the several ways in which they exploited the people. Later in the novel, the coolies of the Skeffington Coffee Estate join the Satyagrahis from Kanthapura in their satyagraha outside the toddy booth.

Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* does not strictly adhere to the unity of time. While handling the plot he has not bothered much about it, for his main interest rests basically on the social ferment and nothing else. The scope, that is, the incidents of the plot is limited and as such the contours of the plot can be seen easily. The movement of action is restricted. It is not rambling and everything remains within the specific scope of evolution which the novelist has set before himself.

The unity of place in the novel is well within the control of the novelist. He does not go beyond the limits of a few streets, fields and the coffee plantation in Kanthapura. The activities of its protagonist, Moorthy, are confined strictly to the length and breadth of the village. After his arrest he is taken out of the village which it is not the objective of the novelist to throw glaring light upon. The action is fully covered by the plot and not a chain of actions, which builds up the plot and one action runs in different directions.

The unity of action in *Kanthapura* is well-linked. It has a rounded wholeness about it. There is only one single action in the novel and it

goes on smoothly in it. The basic cord of the plot is the Gandhian movement, which has been sketched without any digressions. The hero comes upon the scene once and does not go from it until he is arrested by the police force. The beginning of the novel is not the beginning of the plot. It portrays a locale full of people who will be of significance directly or indirectly in the future course of events. The appearance of the hero in the plot enables the novelist to expose the contours of the plot. Before the arrival of the hero at the scene, the people were involved in their petty rivalries and affairs in the small village of Kanthapura. Things begin to quicken into a new programme, which is not liked by the men of the Government. The coffee plantation henceforth becomes the scene of the struggle, if not the battlefield. The plot develops when the villagers willingly join the Gandhian movement to accomplish the programme of their leader. We are in the thick of the struggle and excitement when we are in the middle of the plot. It is the direct outcome of the events which preceded it. The action reaches the climax resulting in the arrest of Moorthy, the hero of the novel before the denouement. The denouement in the novel is reached with the release of the hero.

According to Narasimhaiah, "There are at least three strands of experience in the novel: the political, the religious and the social, and all the three are woven inextricably into the one complex story of Kanthapura." Thus, *Kanthapura* depicts India's struggle for political freedom. The novel has a political background. The central action of the book is Gandhi's Satyagraha Movement and how Moorthy draws his community into it. There are many references to Gandhi and his activities, to episodes from his life, and, in particular, to his famous Dandi March during the Salt Satyagraha. The villagers keep track of the march and celebrate it by their own march to picket the toddy shop near the Skeffington Coffee Estate.

The social content of the novel is found on the interrelations and inter-actions of the villagers. It is also found in the extended space that

is allotted to the considerations of caste and how it divides the community into distinct groups. Moorthy is singled out for special treatment in this regard on account of his voluntary mixing with the untouchables. It affects his prospects of marriage though he is not keen on it. Since he is the unchallenged leader of the village, social and political strands of the action mingle in him. But when he follows the Gandhian method of rallying the common people for a political purpose in the name of prayer and religion, the three levels of action are unified to form the triple-pillared structure of the novel. Supporting the same view, Esha Dey writes that with the Mahatma's political programme translated into the paraphernalia of worship as practiced in the Hindu religion, the whole political action of *Kanthapura*, generated by an *avatar*, an incarnation, has to centre in a temple, the temple of Kanthapurishwari. The election of the Congress Committee is preceded by a god's procession and devotional song. The aim of the Congress has to be explained with an offering of camphor and coconut to the gods. It is right in front of the gods in the temple that the very vow of spinning, practicing non-violence (ahimsa) and of speaking the truth, is to be sworn.

According to K.R. Rao the three levels of action in the novel, political, social, and religious, are all related to a unified concept of India both as a tradition and as a living culture, as a magnificent past to be rediscovered in the enormous present. The entire plot of the novel is simple and straight and is without any complexity. There are some lines of demarcation which divide the incidents from one another, but the plot is not rambling, it only fixes the dividing points in it. The mythological stories may be regarded as digressions but since Rao's model of narration is the Puranas, such digressions are not unexpected. Moreover, they serve their purpose in underlining the theme of the novel. The subject with which the novel deals is very vast. It is extremely difficult to give artistic form and unity to a work which aims at chronicling this freedom struggle. Raja Rao has certainly succeeded in doing so.

### 3.2.2 *Kanthapura*: Art and Technique of Narration

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a triumph of narrative art. It is perfectly suited to the ends he wanted to achieve, as he tells us in his classic 'Preface' to *Kanthapura*. That the telling has not been easy as he had to capture in a foreign language the quick tempo of Indian life. It is the swiftness of movement which an Indian novelist must capture, he must tell a tale in which episodes follows episodes in an endless succession. *Kanthapura* is just such a tale and Raja Rao has been eminently successful despite the difficulties of the task. He succeeded in bringing into his compass an amazing amount of heterogenous material, and still move ahead swiftly towards the end he had in mind.

The tale of *Kanthapura* has not been narrated by the novelist himself, but by a 'persona', (imagined character) called Achakka. Achakka is an old grandmother, that most ancient of story-tellers. She had been personally involved in the events which form the substance of the novel and she narrates them years later for the benefit of a new-comer. The narrator of the story relives in memory an unforgettable experience of the heroism and tragedy of the entire village. Since *Kanthapura* is a novel of memory, Raja Rao freely uses reflection, dream, flash-back, reminiscence and narration of inter-connected episodes. Rejecting the 'stream of consciousness' technique, he employs the local form of narration, which is a kind of non-stop, breathless style of story-telling. Starting with an account of the village and its surroundings, the narrator passes on to introducing the main characters, and straightaway plunges into describing how the Gandhian Satyagraha Movement came to the village and what repercussions it had on the village community. From the beginning to the end, it is a non-stop emotion-packed narration that is bound to touch the heart of the reader.

According to Meenakshi Mukherji the choice of such a narrator serves several purposes. It enables Raja Rao mingle fact and myth in an effective manner. For the old woman, Jawaharlal is a Bharata to the

Mahatma—the Mahatma who, she believes, will slay Ravana so that Sita may be freed. For her Gandhi has attained the status of God, and Moorthy is regarded as his *avtar* in Kanthapura. The second advantage is that the language used by her is of an elemental quality. Her reaction to things is direct and vivid. For example, she talks of “the pumpkin moon”; “Young boys bright as banana trunks”; these are images taken from familiar phenomena which would come naturally to a village woman. The character also enables Raja Rao to achieve his professed aim of reproducing the rhythm of Indian speech in English, as well as of coming closest to the oral tradition of story-telling. The narrator thus provides a convenient point of view, though she is never sharply individualised. We know nothing about her beyond the fact that she is a widow who has now no one except Seemu and has seven acres of wet land and twelve acres of dry land. Her function is representative and her strength lies in being anonymous. She is just one of the many women of Kanthapura who responded to the call of the Mahatma, conveyed through Moorthy. Her faith in the Goddess Kenchamma, her respect for the local scholar Rangamma, her unquestioned affection for Moorthy and her trust in him, all these feelings she shares with other women of the village. No quality is given to her that detracts from her representative nature. In this sense she has a choric function.

Achakka is both the narrator and the commentator and her comments are balanced and shrewd. They serve to place both character and incident in a correct perspective, and are a constant check on over-idealisation. They serve to impart realism and authenticity to the narrative. Here are a few instances of her racy comments. 1. “To tell you the truth, Bhatta began all this after his last visit to the city.” 2. “Rangamma did not understand all this, neither, to tell you the truth, did any of us.” 3. “Bhatta left us after harvest on a pilgrimage to Kashi. I tell you, he was not a bad man, was Bhatta”.

Achakka's manner of telling the tale is, according to Srinivas Iyengar, "characteristically Indian, feminine with a spontaneity that is coupled with swiftness, raciness suffused with native vigour, and exciting with a rich sense of drama shot through and through with humour and lyricism." The learned critic adds, "the telling of the story gives the whole affair an 'itihasic'—atleast a 'puranic'-dignity. The narrative is hardly very straightforward: there are involutions and digressions, there are meaningful backward glances, there are rhythmic chains of proper names (Rachanna and Chandranna and Madanna; Satamma and Rangamma and Puttamma and Seethamma), there are hypnotic repetitions and refrains, and there are also sheer poetic iridescences. A village, a picturesque region, an epoch of social and political change, a whole complex of character and motive, reason and superstition, idealism and cold calculation, all spring up before our eyes demanding recognition and acceptance; it is almost a *tour de force*. Although Raja Rao has put the story into the mouth of a grandmother, although the feminine touches and mannerisms, the seemingly effortless rotation of the tongue, the meandering sentences and massive paragraphs are characteristic of the narrator—there is nevertheless consummate art in all this riot of artlessness, there is careful selection behind the apparent abundant detail."

The descriptions of the narrator are comprehensive, vivid and picturesque, whether she is engaged in describing the activities of the villagers in Kartik, the month of lights or Vaisakhi, the month of sowing seeds, or whether she describes the various quarters, houses, additions or alternations in the houses of Kanthapura, or whether she describes the patter of the rains, or the clash between the Satyagrahis and the Government officials with the variation in the tone of the commentator and the speed of description according to the situation, the language, the accent, the tone and emotion also vary. The narrator tries her very best to be inclusive despite her complete involvement in the story and the heavy strain on her mind to visualize and express whatever she can.

There is a mingling of fact and fancy and sheer poetry comes out of the narrator's lips in the rhythmic account of the coming of Kartik, the month of the festival of lights. In such passages the narrator becomes an inspired poet. Short epithets (adjectives) viz., Postmaster Suryanarayana, Waterfall Venkamma, Corner-house Moorthy, Coffee-planter Ramayya, Nose-scratching Nanjamm etc. are used before names of the characters of the novel in order to impart them a distinctive character and may not be mistaken for other characters.

The narrator in a very concrete and realistic way uses images which are taken from life to describe changes in the appearance or attitude of a character. For instance, on hearing of the excommunicating of her son, Moorthy, Narsamma got mentally upset and "was growing thin like a bamboo and shrivelled like banana bar". And in another instance, after breaking his fast Moorthy emerged a different man and a peace so vital entered his soul that the "radiance of the earth filled till the soul shone like an oleander at dawn".

Rao excels in his narrative art in *Kanthapura*. Its narrator Achakka's gossipy digressions and circumlocutions represent the Indian tradition of story-telling. As Raja Rao himself tells us in the 'Preface' that the repertory of a grandmother is always bright, fact and fancy, reality and imagination, men and gods, constantly mingle in her narration, and in this way the happenings in a remote, obscure, out of the way village are transformed into a Gandhian or Gandhi-epic. In this way instead of remaining a mere *sthalapurana* or regional novel, *Kanthapura* acquires the dimensions of an epic—the epic of India's struggle for freedom.

### **Check Your Progress I**

1. There are three levels of action in *Kanthapura*— political, social and\_\_\_\_\_.
2. Give the meaning of *tour de force*.
  - (a) An evergreen shrub
  - (b) writing accomplished with great skill and hence well done

3. Is *Kanthapura* a formless novel? Give reasons.
4. Comment on the role of the narrator in *Kanthapura*.

### **3.2.3 *Kanthapura*: Mythology and Symbolism**

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a novel in which myth and symbolism mingle to lend an exclusive colour to the narrative. The main reason for this is that the novel is conceived and structured as *sthalapurana* and myth and symbol are unavoidable elements of the Puranic tradition. Secondly, the author prefers to use these elements as aids to his narrative technique.

#### **3.2.3.1 Use of Myths in *Kanthapura***

Raja Rao's myths are integral part of his novels and they are an effective means to integrate and shape his experiences. In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao has made effective use of myths. By using myths the past is juxtaposed with the present and thus it serves as a criticism of the present or heightens and glorifies the present. While in *The Waste Land* T.S. Eliot has used myths to criticize the present, in *Kanthapura* Raja Rao has used it to glorify the present and to impart to the novel the dignity and status of an epic.

#### **Stop to Consider**

Mythology is a collection of myths, especially one belonging to a particular religious or cultural tradition. Myth is defined as an ancient traditional story of gods or heroes, especially one offering an explanation of some fact or phenomenon. It is a story of allusion with a suggestive meaning. Myths are traditional as well as inventions of poets and writers.

According to Meenakshi Mukherjee in *Kanthapura* the novelist gets its narration narrated by an old woman to a hypothetical listener, and this is useful to him in many ways. Making this old woman the narrator enables Raja Rao to mingle facts and myths in an effective manner. The narrator being an old woman is in a better position to explain



to them the subtle thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, and the complications inherent in the contemporary situation through the popular fables, legends and religious tales of gods, demons and supermen.

Because of the fact that even the most illiterate Indian is well acquainted with mythological stories, myths play a significant part in Indian life. It is common for Indian preachers to give a mythological or spiritual significance to physical phenomena. Indians at every level are also extremely well acquainted with the stories in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. It is quite usual to compare two loving brothers, or friends, to Rama and Lakshmana, and the narrator does that in the case of her Seenu and Moorthy.

In the myth that Jayaramachar invents about the divine birth of Gandhiji, he is held to be an incarnation of Siva, but Achakka compares him with Rama, and India with Sita. Gandhi's going to England to participate in the Round Table Conference is compared to Rama's exile, and the Indians who participate in the process of Government are compared to Bharatha who worshipped Rama's sandals in his absence. The foreign rulers are compared to Ravana, and Gandhi is to kill the demon, and bring back enslaved Sita, that is, India who is under the domination of foreign rulers, back with him after liberating her. His return is expected to be like the triumphant return of Rama to Ayodhya when there was a shower of flowers from the sky. The followers of Gandhi are like Hanuman, and they are equally ready to carry out his instructions at any time. Similarly, the Satyagrahi in prison is the divine Krishna himself in Kansa's prison.

In this way, by the use of mythic reference in *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao makes the spirit of Kanthapura to participate in the epic struggle and identify the contemporary struggle for India's freedom as sacred as the tradition could sanction.

### **3.2.3.2 Use of Symbols in *Kanthapura***

Raja Rao also makes a wide use of symbols in *Kanthapura*. Most of the characters in the novel are projected as symbols, which adds to

the significance of their roles in the story. A Brahmin in his novels stands as a symbol of wisdom and purity of mind. In *Kanthapura*, Moorthy is also called a prince, for he is dignified and has an impressive demeanour. Being simple, pious and innocent, Moorthy is compared with a cow, who, as the tradition goes is treated by the Hindus as a mother and is held in high esteem.

### **Stop to Consider**

A symbol is an image which suggests or evokes an idea or conception. Symbolism is a technique used in literature when some things are not to be taken literally. A literary symbol is something that means more than what it is. It can be an object, person, situation, or action that in addition to its literal meaning suggests other meanings as well. Often, the thing or idea represented is usually something immaterial or abstract, and the symbol is usually something material or concrete

When the village leaders are arrested by the police, the women of Kanthapura form a 'Sevika Sangha' or women's group to fight the forces of oppression. At that time, they are not ordinary helpless women, but manifestations of Durga or Shakti, the destroyer of demons. Moorthy, again is Gandhi's man or the symbol of Satyagraha. Bade Khan the policeman is the symbol of oppression. Bhatta is the symbol of false orthodoxy and Waterfall Venkamma symbolizes superstition and blind tradition.

Srinivasa Iyengar adds to the list of symbols: "There is Range Gowda the symbol of sense and solidity, a sort of Sardar Patel to Moorthy the village Mahatma. The river Himavathy is herself a Presence, and the Goddess Kenchamma of the Hill is a Presence too, the protectress of the people, the guardian of *Kanthapura*". Though it is nowhere clearly stated in Raja Rao's novel, but Great Britain, the island beyond the seas is obviously the Kingdom of Ravana. The red colour of the British (the red-men) indicates their

violence, and the Skeffington Coffee Estate is a symbol of the impact of European industrialization on the Indian way of life.

Symbols of kumkum, bangles and sari are symbols of traditional India and references to these are found throughout the novel. A shaven head without the kumkum is an inauspicious sign. Widows in southern part of India have shaven heads. Married women wear coloured saris and bangles and widows wear white saris. Those women as the widow Ratna, who did not follow it were severely criticized by others. A temple is a symbol of ancient culture. It is a place where man discards rational thinking in preference of emotional acceptance and forgets his differences. The people of Kanthapura have always been going to the temple of Kenchamma to pray for love, guidance and charity. They gather in the same temple to discuss and find ways for protecting the interest of the country and also discuss various issues. In this way, they come to know about the happenings in their country and about Gandhi and the struggle for freedom. The Kashi represents two things in the novel. It stands for a miniature, traditional and conservative India. It also symbolizes a place where a Brahmin received a rupee for 'every hymn and hiccup'.

Thus, myth and symbolism are very important aspects of the structure of *Kanthapura*.

#### **3.2.4 *Kanthapura*: Its Language and Style**

Raja Rao's 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura* contain significant comments on the use of language and style in the novel. He pays full attention to the practical task of bending and stretching the English language to adjust it to the shape and rhythms of Indian life and thought. The task is not too easy as Rao acknowledges in the 'Preface' or 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura*:

“[English] is the language of our intellectual make-up— like Sanskrit or Persian was before— but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our

own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American.”

Rao’s style in *Kanthapura* is unconventional as he profusely tries to introduce into English local speech rhythms of his own mother tongue, Kannada. The English he uses is the natural speech of the South Indian villagers rendered into simple English. It is not the English of the educated and sophisticated Indians. The novelist deliberately makes an effort to make the language shed its European connotation and hence tries to transform it into what is generally known as ‘Indian English’. For instance, he writes ‘a crow-and-sparrow story’ instead of ‘a cock-and-bull tale’ and instead of the English ‘nip in the bud’ he uses the Kannada ‘crush it in its seed.’

Rao invariably draws upon the speech flavours of Kannada and Sanskrit, idiomatic and syntactic equivalences and the imitation of native-style repertoires. He finds words for culturally bound objects by contextualizing them so that their meanings are self-evident. It is within the frame of Kannada that the tale is told. Rao’s use of English suggests the appropriation of the structural characteristics of Kannada as in the following example: “... High on the Ghats is it, high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast is it, up Mangalore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane.” Images, metaphors and descriptions combine a special Indian peasant flavour with a sense of immediacy.

The sensibility of the novelist expressed in his novels is essentially Indian, and the novelist’s main contribution consists in conveying the wide variety of emotional and mental states with suitable stylistic devices. His sentences are breath-takingly long and names and words are repeated to build up the tempo of commotion in *Kanthapura*.

But it is not easy to express the Indian sensibility or the flavour of Indian life by using English. Raja Rao has done this very skillfully. Meenakshi Mukherjee has rightly said that he has done it so effectively and skillfully, “that even those who are not closely acquainted with the rigid social structure of a south Indian village will notice how a man’s caste can be ascertained from his mode of speech. The evolving of an Indian-English which is adequate enough to express Indian, even regional flavour, without ceasing to be English, is Raja Rao’s most significant contribution.” Raja Rao has been able to achieve this by making literal translations of Indian idioms, phrases, proverbs etc. and using them in the novel. He has introduced changes in the syntax or structure of the language. According to the specific requirement modifications have been made.

Raja Rao has used imagery which is very familiar to Indians, specially people living in south Indian villages. He has used certain terms and certain phrases from Kannada which help in creating the whole atmosphere and feel of an Indian village. The following sentences from the novel are worth noting:

- (1) Postman Subbayya, who had no fire in his stomach, and was red with red and blue with blue.
- (2) You are a Bhatta, and your voice is not a sparrow voice in your village and you should speak to your people and organize a Brahmin party. Otherwise Brahminism is as good as kitchen ashes...
- (3) ...and mother and wife and widow grandmother went up to their lighted lizard-clucking homes.

Meenakshi Mukherjee in this connection points out, “the important point in these three instances is not that the expressions used are literal translations, but that they serve their purpose in their context, and they are more vivid than any other accepted English expressions that might have been used in their place. In quotation 3, the words “lighted lizard-clucking homes,” for example, convey a completely

satisfying sense of security associated with the interior of a house after lighting time which is essential to these women (mother and wife and widow godmother), who have spent a long and uncertain day of struggle, picketing toddy-booths. Moreover, these sentences contain nothing that would be unintelligible or jarring to the reader who does not know Kannada, and that is more than what can be said about the linguistic experiments of most other Indo-Anglian writers.”

Meenakshi Mukherji comments on Rao’s language in *Kanthapura* to be richly strewn with similes which serve to illustrate the elements of his style. Raja Rao’s style shows two distinctive phases of development. In the earlier phase, which includes *Kanthapura*, there is a fond dwelling upon the concrete and the particular, be it the sky, “as blue as a marriage shawl” or women, “bright as banana trunks”. In his later books as, *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare* this concrete imagery is replaced by general reflections and abstract speculations.

Raja Rao has used literal translations of Indian proverbs, phrases, idioms etc. very skillfully. Such phrases and idioms add to the beauty of the novel *Kanthapura*. Examples of translation directly into English are: (1) He wanted me to be his dog’s tail. (2) Every enemy you create is like pulling out a lantana bush in your backward. (3) Range Gowda had a golden tongue and a leather tongue.

In *Kanthapura* Rao though very sparingly, has used words from Indian languages without translating them. For example: ‘*Ahimsa*’, ‘*Dhoti*’, ‘*Harikatha*’, ‘*Mandap*’ etc. are not English words. They are words from Indian languages. The way Rao has modified the English syntax is really amazing. Only his words are English, their organization is Indian and entirely his own.

Many critics have praised Raja Rao’s style and language and V.Y. Katak is one of them Indian’s “creative use of English”. His English seems to spring from the Indian scene, the Indian manner, gesture and

speech absorbs it, and yet suffers no distortion. “Word, phrase, or sentence structure, the shifts and the modulations—all grow from the root. And it is English, chaste English, not borrowed and applied but taking the shape of a new material. The fluent, simple prose has a harmony which is the fruit of a complete interpretation of matter and manner. His early classic *Kanthapura* shows him at his best in this respect. Raja Rao has added a new dimension to his language, that of symbolic suggestion. “The language has shaken off all traces of foreign acquisition and begun to assert its inalienable rights as an independent idiom. The word has become the perception.”

### **Check Your Progress-II**

1. Myth and symbol are unavoidable elements of the \_\_\_\_\_ tradition.
2. What is a symbol?
3. Write a short essay on the use of myths by Raja Rao in *Kanthapura*.
4. Discuss the language and style of *Kanthapura*.

### **3.3 Let us Sum Up**

The purpose of this unit was to discuss the important aspects related to the technique of the novel under study. By now, you should have formed some idea about the plot and structure, art and technique of narration, mythology and symbolism along with the language and style of *Kanthapura*.

## **ANSWER KEYS**

### **Check your Progress I**

1. Religious
2. (b)
3. See section 3.2.1
4. See section 3.2.2

## Check your Progress II

1. Puranic.
2. A symbol is an image which suggests or evokes an idea or conception.
3. See section 3.2.3.1
4. See section 3.2.4

## Possible Questions

1. Write a note on the plot and structure of *Kanthapura*.
2. Discuss the art and technique of narration in *Kanthapura*.
3. Explain how myth and symbolism are integral parts of Raja Rao's fictional art in *Kanthapura*.

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## **Glossary**

**Allusion:** It is a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage.

**Circumlocution:** the use of many words where fewer would do, especially in a deliberate attempt to be vague or evasive.

**Climax:** it is usually the turning point and includes the highest level of tension; the most intense, exciting or important point of something; the culmination.

**Demeanour:** outward behaviour or bearing.

**Denouement:** the final part of a play, film, or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are explained or resolved.

**Digression:** a temporary departure from the main subject in speech or writing.

**Epic:** As a literary term, 'epic' denotes a type of long, narrative poem, one that celebrates heroic achievement and themes of cultural significance

**Garrulous:** excessively talkative, especially on trivial matters.

**Indian English literature (IEL):** It is the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. Its early history began with the works of Michael Madhusudan Dutt followed by R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao who contributed to Indian fiction in the 1930s. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian diaspora who are of Indian descent. It is frequently referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. As a category, this production comes in the broader realm of postcolonial literature—the production from previously colonized countries such as India.

**Involution:** The act or an instance of enfolding or entangling; an entanglement, complication, or intricacy.

**Iridescence:** Showing many bright colours that seem to change in different lights; (here) producing a variety of pleasing rhythmic effects.

**Juxtaposition:** It is a literary technique in which two or more ideas, places, characters, and their actions are placed side by side in a narrative or a poem, for the purpose of developing comparisons and contrasts.

**Lantana:** the lantana plant is a unique weed that bears clusters of beautiful flowers. It was originally cultivated due to its pretty blooms as an ornamental plant. However, due to its aggressive weed-like growth and toxic nature, it is now classified as a weed.

**Narrative Technique:** Narratives are works that provide an account of connected events. To put it simply, a narrative is a story. There are many types of literature that are considered narratives, including novels, dramas, fables, folk tales, short stories, and poetry. In addition to literature, narratives are found in cinema, music, and theatre. Narrative techniques provide deeper meaning for the reader and help the reader use imagination to visualize situations. Narrative Techniques include plot structure, characters, points of view, setting, theme, atmosphere etc. And examples of narrative techniques in style are: imagery, simile and metaphor, hyperboles, personification, irony etc.

**Oleander:** an evergreen tree or shrub that has white, pink, or purple flowers.

**Plot:** It is a literary term used to describe the events that make up a story, or the main part of a story. These events relate to each other in a pattern or a sequence. The structure of a novel depends on the organization of events in the plot of the story. The plot is characterised by a beginning, middle, climax (conflict) and end.

**Purana:** any of a class of Sanskrit writings not included in the Vedas, characteristically recounting the birth and deeds of Hindu gods and the creation, destruction, or recreation of the universe.

**Radiance:** Radiance is a glowing light shining from something; a quality of brightness and happiness that can be seen on a person's face.

**Refrain:** It is a phrase, line, or group of lines that repeats, at regular intervals, in different stanzas throughout a poem or song.

**Repertoire:** All the musical or theatrical works of a particular category, or of a particular writer, composer, etc.

**Shrivelled:** wrinkled and shrunken, especially as a result of loss of moisture or old age.

**Structure:** Narrative structure, a literary element, is generally described as the structural framework that underlies the order and manner in which a narrative is presented to a reader, listener or viewer. The narrative text structures are the plot and the setting. The parts of narrative plot include exposition (the beginning), rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The resolution is also called the denouement.

***tour de force:*** a performance or achievement that has been accomplished with great skill and is therefore extremely good or extremely well done.

## **BLOCK – I : FICTION**

### **UNIT-VIII**

#### ***KANTHAPURA: THEMES***

##### **Structure**

##### 4.0 Objectives

##### 4.1 Introduction

##### 4.2 *Kanthapura*: Themes

##### 4.2.1 Nationalism and Resistance in *Kanthapura*

##### 4.2.2 East-West Theme in *Kanthapura*

##### 4.2.3 Theme of Regionalism in *Kanthapura*

##### 4.3 Let us Sum Up

Possible Questions

References/ Suggested Readings

Glossary

##### **4.0 Objectives**

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- *discuss* how *Kanthapura* offers a glimpse of Indian nationalism under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.
- *elucidate* the East-West theme in *Kanthapura*
- *explain* the theme of regionalism in *Kanthapura*

##### **4.1 Introduction**

In this unit you will be acquainted with some of the major themes of the novel *Kanthapura*, an understanding of which is essential to

appreciate the text in its totality. The theme is the central point of the story, the message revealed in the story. The theme is expressed by what the characters say, do, think and the actions that take place within the story. In this unit we will discuss some of the themes of the novel *Kanthapura*, viz., theme of Nationalism and Resistance, East-West encounter and Regionalism.

## **4.2 *Kanthapura*: Themes**

### **4.2.1 Nationalism and Resistance**

*Kanthapura* offers a glimpse of nationalism in India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Nationalism can be defined as a sentiment of loyalty and devotion towards the nation, especially a sense of national consciousness, which is shared by the people. And a nation is a cultural-political community that has become conscious of its autonomy, unity and particular interests. In the novel, we see how Gandhi was able to hold almost the entire nation together and work towards the Independence from British rule. The novel depicts the Gandhian era very realistically. The amount of influence that Gandhi had on the masses was unbelievable. He had the ability to motivate people and was able to make an entire nation into an army of non-violent freedom fighters. Though in the novel Gandhi remains in the background and never appears on the scene yet his presence is always felt throughout the novel.

The setting of the novel *Kanthapura* is the pre-independence period of India. M.K. Naik rightly reviews the novel and remarks that “*Kanthapura* is, thus a brilliant attempt to probe the depths to which the nationalistic urge penetrated, showing how, even in the remote villages, the new upsurge fused completely with traditional religious faith, thus rediscovering the Indian soul.” *Kanthapura* deals with a specific period of the Indian history and basically with the impact of the non-violent, non-cooperative movements during the period from 1919 to 1931. The novel is a portrayal of the situation of India during this

tumultuous period. In other words, *Kanthapura* and its scene of action is a representation of what was happening all over India during those years. It depicts the social conditions in Indian villages during the period. It also gives an insight into their way of thinking, their views and attitude towards things in general. Most people are uneducated and superstitious and the society is caste-ridden. Religion is very important to them and they are basically deeply religious people.

We find a complex structure of caste division in the village of Kanthapura. It has four and twenty houses in Brahmin quarter, it has a Pariah quarter too, Potters' quarters, Weavers' quarters, and a Sudra quarter. These socio-economic divisions in the village Kanthapura has in all 60 to 100 houses. In this way, by telling us of the various quarters into which the village is divided, the novelist has highlighted the fact that the Indian villages are caste ridden. The caste system is based on endogamy and there is no free mixing of the people even in the small and limited community of the villages. In spite of different castes and creeds, the people of Kanthapura work in harmony and demonstrate the principle of "Unity in Diversity". They fight back the injustices meted to them by the British officers in Kanthapura. In the second half of *Kanthapura*, the Gandhian nationalist villagers stop worrying about caste and nonviolently resist the British colonial government in the name of the Indian nation. Gandhism inspires Kanthapura's residents to fight against the oppression of the British colonial government in the name of India.

Thus, in *Kanthapura*, we have more than a glimpse of freedom movement in India under the leadership of Gandhi. We see how the name of Gandhi acts like a charm in every nook and corner of the country and how the people in remote and far-away places like Kanthapura observe a fast in order to show their solidarity with Mahatma Gandhi as he sets out on his historic Dandi March. Moorthy is a typical example

of the thousands of young men who were fired with patriotic zeal by Gandhi's inspiration and who, under his programme, left schools, colleges and universities or resigned from their jobs.

Rangamma and Ratna depict how the spirit of nationalism fired the consciousness of the women of the country. The participation in the movement shows how women took an active interest in politics at the time. Rachanna and Range Gowda show how the people of the lower castes picked up courage, and accepted the voluntary restraint of non-violence. Peasants refused to pay revenue and other taxes to the Government, with the result that many were evicted from their lands and lost all means of earning a livelihood. When Moorthy is arrested his place is taken by Ratna, and so the struggle continues. There were 'dharnas', 'picketings' and 'Satyagrahas'. People including children and women were beaten up but their spirit could not be crushed. The villagers together shouted, "Bande Mataram", "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" and "Inquilab Zindabad" when the police assaulted them throughout their resistance campaign. The shouts resounded in the air and fostered a spirit of patriotic and nationalistic zeal among the people.

Just as *Kanthapura* is not merely a political novel, the Gandhi movement also is not just a political movement. There were several strands in the Gandhian Movement—the political, the religious, and the social (including the economic), and the three have been inextricably woven into the story of regeneration of Kanthapura as a result of the freedom struggle. It is not merely a novel that talks about the political condition of its times, but a novel concerned as much with the social, religious and economic transformation of the people. The Gandhian movement was based on 'Satyagraha', firmness in truth. Gandhi added an ethical dimension to what was basically a social and political movement. Gandhi believed that the strength of his 'Satyagraha' alone would result in freeing India and establish a system of pre-capitalist,

agrarian village community. The Gandhian influence is obvious: moral revolution takes precedence over social and political revolutions. It is significant that Moorthy enters the untouchable's house in his own village first before his imprisonment as a revolutionary. For the villagers, the politics of the country is inseparable from Gandhi, and Gandhi is inseparable from divinity: 'Rama, Krishna, Sankara and the Mahatma' are always mentioned in the same refrain. This speaks of Gandhi's birth as a divine visitation on earth to destroy sin and sinners alike in order to re-establish the hold of religion. The political struggle is, thereby, largely ritualized, and nationalism filters down into the village through religion.

Finally, in the novel *Kanthapura* the policemen's and the British officer's attack on the villagers succeeds in part because the villagers, comprising of the Satyagrahis, the city volunteers and the coolies of Skeffington Coffee Estate, rush to hoist the national flag of India on Bebbur Mound outside the village and refuse to honour the British one. Throughout their resistance campaign, the nationalist villagers act for the sake of a sacred land as nation even though most of them have never travelled outside Kanthapura. Though the villagers ultimately lose their village for the sake of an imagined nation, Gandhi's nationalism helps them develop an identity as Indians to fight for freedom from colonial rule.

#### **4.2.2 East-West Theme in *Kanthapura***

The differences, that is, the divisions and synthesis, between the East and West reverberate throughout *Kanthapura*. Political confrontation is the life-blood of the novel, in which the favourite Indian topic of Gandhism receives the most original though a distracting treatment. Raja Rao uses the devices of innuendo and exemplum feelingly delivered by his grandmotherly narration, to portray a rather pathetic and ironic picture of Britain's vain fight to forestall the inevitable. Two strands are noticeable in *Kanthapura*, viz., dislike for



the British and sympathy for the Gandhi movement. Some specific grievances which we find are the injustice done by the Red-men's court in forgiving without penalty the cruel Sahib of the Skeffington Coffee Estate for shooting a Brahmin who refused to let him rape his daughter, and the excommunication of Moorthy by a Swami who was paid by the British to do their work.

In the novel we also find concentration on the anti-Gandhian feelings within the Indian community. To many persons, Gandhi is an agitator whose desire to eliminate untouchability poses a more serious danger than British rule in caste-conscious villagers. Moorthy and others make efforts to rouse the peasants of Kanthapura gradually and convincingly to the need for change. They eventually get ready to die for the goals of Gandhiji. They picket the toddy shops for which they have to suffer gross maltreatment and are ultimately routed forever from Kanthapura by a brutal act of the British vengeance. The ring-leaders of Kanthapura are subjected to indignity and torture and are compelled to salute the British flag in prison. But their invincible spirit remains unconquerable and unsubdued. *Kanthapura* is a nationalistic novel, and not mere political propaganda. It is full of hope and courage and looks to the future instead of the past.

More than *Kanthapura*, *The Serpent and the Rope*, another novel of Raja Rao, written after independence, is predominantly illustrative of East-West differences. In *Kanthapura* the racial-cultural conflict between East and West is rather understated, but it exists there as much more than a tangential issue. The Skeffington Coffee Estate is a stronghold of racial superiority where the coolies must fall down to touch the feet of the Sahib, give their daughters for his enjoyment and be whipped while they march in a chain-gong fashion through the street in order to show who their true masters are. A cultural crisis is noticeable in the fears of coolies not to take the pills of the Sahib to cure fevers for

fear of incurring displeasure of the deities. The Indian problem of untouchability, which the novelist makes much of in the earlier part of the novel but passes of regardless of it in the later part brings about the predominant racial cultural issue. Indian villagers were not willing to accept social equality with the untouchables as a necessary stepping-stone of political freedom.

The key motif of *Kanthapura* is that of oneness where Moorthy announces, “The temple is the temple of one, and we are one with everything that is in the one, and who shall say he is at the head of the one and another at the foot? Brothers,...whether Brahmin or bangle-seller, pariah or priest, we are all one, one at the mustard seed in a sack of mustard seeds, equal in shape and hue and all.” The religious philosophical concept of oneness is a symbol or metaphor for national unity against the western intruders. The non-violent villagers of *Kanthapura* are soldier-saints or model Christians, who turn the other cheek to receive more blows and heeding the commandments of Moorthy: “Obey your chief and love your enemy, that is all asked of you.” There is an implicit irony in India’s acceptance of the tenets of the west to achieve freedom from the west.

#### **4.2.3 Theme of Regionalism in *Kanthapura***

The regional novels have their plots and characters set in a particular locality which portray such details as affect the lives and fortunes of its inhabitants. Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* is a novel with a regional setting. It presents a topography which becomes a vivid reality at the very opening of the novel. *Kanthapura* is its name and it is in the province of Kara. It is situated:

“High on the ghats... high up the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast is it, up Mangalore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane... over elephant-haunted valleys they turn now to the left and now to the right

and bring you through the Alambe and Champa and Mena and Kola passes into the great granaries of trade. There, on the blue waters, they say, our carted cardamoms and coffee get into the ships the Red-men bring.”

This setting in *Kanthapura* is of the regional sort and the place assumes a vivid shape in the mind. The village of Kanthapura proper is delineated with the places abounding “ Main Street and through the Potter’s Lane, Chennayya’s Pond and on the other side the Tippur Hill and Himavathy, like Saryu in the novels of R.K. Narayan. There are the Potters’ quarter, a weavers’ quarter, and a Sudra quarter. Then there’s the Skeffington Coffee Estate rising beyond the Bebbur Mound over the Bear’s Hill and hanging over Tippur and Subbur and Kuntur, it swings round the Elephant Valley and rising to shoulder the Snow Mountains and the Beda Ghats, it dips sheer into the Himavathy and follows on from the Balepur Tolegate Corner to Kenchamma Hill, where it turns again, and skirts Bhatta’s Devils, fields, and Range Gowda’s coconut-garden, and at the Tippur stream it rises again and is lost amidst the jungle growths of the Horse-mad Hill...and then it began to grow from the Bear’s Hill to Kuntur Hill, and more and more coolies came from beneath the Ghats and from the Bear’s Hill and Kuntur it touched the Snow Mountains... passed by the Kenchamma Temple...” The landscape is presented by heaping details upon details which makes the whole description not only fascinating but also a skilled portrayal from the brush of a seasoned painter. The novel is extremely graphic and pictorial due to its strong regional flavour. The readers’ attention is drawn towards its detailed points and the characters are to play their distinct roles in such an environment.

Thus, Achakka’s narration pays close attention to the geography of Kanthapura and the region around it. The village and Western ghats are saturated with symbolic significance, demonstrating the way the villagers’ identity is founded on place. In the book’s opening paragraph,

Achakka situates Kanthapura in relation to the broader world by telescoping out from the village to the mountains that surround it and the global networks of colonial power in which it is embedded. Kanthapura is clearly a peripheral place in relation to global networks of power, since the goods that traverse it are sent across the “seven oceans into the countries where our rulers live,” but it is also clearly the centre of her own universe and therefore the book *Kanthapura*'s. Kanthapura also has its own local goddess, Kenchamma, to whom villagers pray for rain and good health; the red Kenchamma Hill, which is always on the horizon and which Achakka almost always mentions when anyone travels into or out of town, symbolizes the goddess' providence over Kanthapura's people and marks the boundary of the territory in which the villagers' identity is embedded.

At the beginning of the book, Achakka explains that the hill is red because, ages ago, Kenchamma killed a demon there—the people's connection to the land is so ancient that it seems eternal. Further reinforcing the connection between place and identity, Achakka pays close attention to the layout of the village, frequently noting how characters get from one part to another and often using place names as epithets for the story's characters. For example, Front-House Akkamma and Temple Lakskamma. And the villagers are so tied to their land that, even though many of the novel's important events take place far from Kanthapura, Achakka's narration never ventures beyond the Skeffington Estate that borders Kanthapura. The narrative voice itself, like Kanthapura's inhabitants, is confined to its village.

Raja Rao discovered his Kanthapura and inhabitants of this village in India. So far as Kanthapura is concerned, regionalism unfolds a set of characters, who are lowly and they are to be raised from their lowly position to a higher one by volunteer leaders like Moorthy. Raja Rao has put the seal of realism on his *Kanthapura*. The novelist in

*Kanthapura* writes about the future history, particularly of the aspect which relates to the rising of the people against the foreign rule in the country. As such the village in the novel becomes the microcosm of the universal fact of life.

*Kanthapura* thus introduces the readers to the south Indian village characters and celebrates a region rather comprehensively. In *Kanthapura* Raja Rao gives plenty of details, but that only in the beginning and he again brings them in a cluster when he describes the topography of the Skeffington Coffee Plantation. The rest of the novel does not contain much of the regional details. Like the Wessex novels of the famous British novelist Thomas Hardy, the regionalism in *Kanthapura* imparts a unique sense of unity of place in the novel. Inhabitants of *Kanthapura* are roused to a new dignity and it is accomplished mainly through Moorthy. There has been since time immemorial a deep-rooted prejudice and inveterate hatred against the pariahs in India, but they are shown in the novel to have been awakened to a new sense of dignity of life, which they exhibit. We have in *Kanthapura* the Potters and the Weavers who migrate en masse to work in the Coffee-plantation.

The local colour is very strong in *Kanthapura*. The characters in it breathe the soil which has nurtured them. The soil has a peculiar kind of environment and atmosphere. The people in the village come into the vortex of the ferment of the India-wide politics and are re-awakened from their centuries old stupor. The characters, with the heritage of their traditions, conversation, little rivalries of their individual groups or group carry with them the scent or aroma of their living. The background of the novel is consisted of the regionalism of the geographical kind. The places have served their purpose already and are of no use now. We do not get in *Kanthapura* the assiduous regionalism of the broader sort of Thomas Hardy. It is of a thinner variety, much thinner even than that of

Malgudi of the famous Indo-Anglian novelist, R.K. Narayan. But the regional topography has details which enliven the place with picturesque vividness and it seems to us that there is something very intimate about the places. The surroundings of the small populace of the village with all the oddities and the eccentricities of characters weaving the pattern of the story are beautifully recreated in the novel by Raja Rao as it were in Kanthapura. The story starts with the consummate style of a raconteur, but as it proceeds, it takes the shape of the plain tone of descriptive prose. It is not the story but the place occupying the background which imparts solidity to the novel.

Kanthapura is also as much about a people displaced as about a place that loses its people. As the legendary history of the village, the book emphasizes the topography of Kanthapura's region as people actually experience it and suggests an inherent link between the villagers and their land. But this sense of belonging unravels throughout the book as the villagers' national identity surpasses their local one, the coolies (indentured labourers at the Skeffington Coffee Estate) move into Kanthapura, and the British wrest control of the village from its people. Ultimately, the pariah woman Rachi's decision to burn down Kanthapura reflects its people's decision to abandon their local identity after the British have decimated their population, representing the way that colonialism—as well as the anticolonial nationalism necessary to defeat it—forces people to sever their traditional bonds with land.

### **Check your Progress I**

1. The specific period of the Indian history with which *Kanthapura* deals is:  
(a) from 1919 to 1931      (b) from 1930 to 1946
2. What is meant by nationalism?
3. Write two instances of the racial-cultural conflict between the East and West.
4. What does a regional novel consist of?

### 4.3 Let us Sum Up

Thus in this unit you have learnt about some of the major themes of the novel *Kanthapura*. We have begun by discussing the theme of Nationalism and Resistance in *Kanthapura*. It was followed by the East-West theme in the novel and finally a discussion on the theme of Regionalism in *Kanthapura*. It is expected that all the inputs provided to you in this unit, and in the entire block at large, will have you to understand the novel better.

### ANSWER KEYS

#### Check your Progress I

1. (a)
2. See first para of section 4.2.1
3. See third para of section 4.2.2
4. See first line of section 4.2.3

#### Possible Questions

1. Examine *Kanthapura* as a novel that attempts “to probe the depths to which the nationalistic urge penetrated,” thus leading to a rediscovery of Indian soul.
2. Write a note on the East-West theme in *Kanthapura*
3. Explain the theme of regionalism in *Kanthapura*

#### References/ Suggested Readings

- Bhattacharya, P.C. *Indo-Anglian Literature and the works of Raja Rao*. Delhi: Atma Ram and Sons, 1983.
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- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Twice Born Fiction*. Delhi: Heinemann, 1971.

- Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1999.
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**Glossary:**

**Assiduous:** showing great care and perseverance.

**Endogamy:** the custom of marrying only within the limits of a local community, clan, or tribe.

**En masse:** in a group; all together.

**Exemplum:** an example or model, especially a story told to illustrate a moral point.

**Forestall:** prevent or obstruct an anticipated event or action by taking advance action.

**Innuendo:** an allusive or oblique remark or hint, typically a suggestive or disparaging one.

**Inveterate:** having a particular habit, activity, or interest that is long-established and unlikely to change.

**Motif:** an idea that is used many times in a piece of writing or music.

**Raconteur:** one who tells stories and anecdotes with skill and wit.

**Ring-leader:** a leader of a ring of individuals engaged especially in improper or unlawful activities.

**Rout:** defeat and cause to retreat in disorder.

**Tangential:** slightly or indirectly related to something.

**Topography:** the art or practice of graphic delineation in detail usually on maps or charts of natural and man-made features of a place or region especially in a way to show their relative positions and elevations.



## **BLOCK - II : NON-FICTION**

**BLOCK – II : NON-FICTION**  
**UNIT - I**  
**NEHRU’S *An AUTOBIOGRAPHY***  
**(Chapter – 1, 3, 4, 19, 51, 53)**

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introducing the Author
- 2.2 The Context
- 2.3 The form of Autobiography
- 2.4 Nehru’s *Autobiography*
  - 2.4.1 Reading Chapter I: “Descent from Kashmir”
  - 2.4.2 Reading Chapter III: “Theosophy”
  - 2.4.3 Reading Chapter IV: “Harrow and Cambridge”
  - 2.4.4 Reading Chapter XIX: “Communalism Rampant”
  - 2.4.5 Reading Chapter LI: “The Liberal Outlook”
  - 2.4.6 Reading Chapter LIII: “India Old and New”
- 2.5 Critical Reception
- 2.6 Glossary
- 2.7 Suggested Readings
- 2.8 Terminal Questions

## 2.0 Objectives:

- Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography* also known as *Toward Freedom* is regarded as one of the best crafted autobiography in the history of Life writing. After going through this unit you should be able to *define* autobiography
- enable yourself to differentiate autobiography from biography
- read Nehru's autobiography in the context of India's struggle for freedom
- know how Nehru's life was intertwined with the Indian nation

## 2.1 The Author:

Jawaharlal Nehru was born on 14 November 1889, in a wealthy Kashmiri Brahmin family in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh. His father, Motilal Nehru was a renowned advocate and also an influential political activist. Nehru family was elitist in most of their practices and English was spoken and encouraged. His father, Motilal Nehru appointed English and Scottish teachers to supervise his children's education at home.

For higher education, young Nehru was sent to Harrow school, then later to Cambridge University in England to obtain a degree in natural sciences. After spending two years at the Inner Temple, London, he qualified as a barrister. During his stay in London, Nehru studied subjects like literature, politics, economics, and history. He got attracted to the ideas of liberalism, socialism and nationalism. In 1912, he returned to India and joined the Allahabad High Court Bar.

Nehru got married to Kamala Kaul on 8 February, 1916. Brought up in a traditional Hindu Brahmin family, Kamala felt an outsider amongst the progressive Nehru family but tried her best to adapt to the family ethos and values. During the Non-Cooperation movement of 1921, Kamala played a vital role by organizing groups of women and

picketing shops selling foreign cloth and liquor in Allahabad. On 19 November, 1917 she gave birth to a daughter, who came to be known as Indira Priyadarshini. Kamala died from tuberculosis in Switzerland on February 28, 1936, while Jawaharlal Nehru was in prison.

### **2.1.1 His Role in Freedom Struggle**

Although he dabbled in political affairs since his return to India, by participating in Indian National Congress' sessions and in Besant's Home Rule Movement, Nehru whole heartedly embraced a political career only in 1919 in the wake of the Jallianwallah Bagh Massacre. He followed Gandhi's directives and was imprisoned for participating in the first civil disobedience campaign as general secretary of the United Provinces Congress Committee in 1921. His time in jail helped him achieve a deeper understanding of the Gandhian philosophy and the nuances of the non-cooperation movement. He was moved by Gandhi's approach of dealing with caste and "untouchability". With time, Nehru emerged as a popular and influential nationalist leader, particularly in Northern India. He was elected as the president of the Allahabad municipal corporation in 1920.

His loyalty to Congress remained unwavering in the face of the rift created in the party due to Gandhi's decision to adjourn the Non-cooperation movement post Chauri Chaura incident. He refused to move to the Swaraj Party established by his father and Chittaranjan Das in 1922.

Jawaharlal Nehru travelled to European nations like Germany, France and the Soviet Union in 1926 with his family and sought meetings with several Communists, Socialists, and radical leaders from Asia and Africa. Nehru was also impressed with the economic system of the communist Soviet Union and wished to apply the same in his own country. In 1927, he became a member of the League against Imperialism created in Brussels, the capital city of Belgium.

In 1930 Mahatma Gandhi supported the name of Nehru as the next president of the Congress. The decision was also an attempt to abate the intensity of “communism” in the Congress. The same year, Nehru was arrested for the violation of the Salt Law.

In 1936, Nehru was re-elected as the president of the Indian National Congress. Sources suggest that a heated argument between the old and young leaders took place in the Luck now Session of the party. The young and “new-gen” leaders of the party had advocated for an ideology, based on the concepts of Socialism.

In the 1942 Quit India Movement, Nehru vehemently rallied for ‘Purna Swaraj ‘or complete political independence for India. He was arrested on August 8 of the same year and was imprisoned till June 15, 1945. Post his release, he threw himself into a series of rigorous discussions and negotiations with the British Government that ultimately led to attainment of freedom in 1947. Nehru fought hard against the proposed partitioning of the country by the last Viceroy Lord Mountbatten. He failed to obtain enough support from Mohammed Jinnah, the leader of Muslim League and reluctantly gave in to it.

### **2.1.2 Nehru as Prime Minister of India**

On August 15, 1947, a free India was born. Nehru was elected as the first Prime Minister of independent India. He was the first PM to hoist the national flag and make his iconic speech “Tryst with Destiny” from the ramparts of the Lal Quila (Red Fort). The time had come to implement his ideas and build a healthy nation. Nehru’s stint as PM of India is characterized by is secular and liberalist approach. He carried out his vision to carry the young India towards the road of technological and scientific excellence with great zeal. He implemented a number of socio-economic reforms and paved the way for rapid industrialization. In the year 1949, Jawaharlal Nehru made his first visit to the United States, seeking a solution to India’s urgent food shortage. In 1951,

Jawaharlal Nehru launched the country's "First Five-Year Plan" emphasizing on the increase in the agricultural output.

### **2.1.3 Nehru's literary works**

His writings include his *Autobiography: Toward Freedom*; *The Discovery of India*; *Glimpses of World History*; *Letters from a Father to his Daughter*, and also *Tryst with Destiny*, the historic speech made by Jawaharlal Nehru, considered in Modern India as a landmark oration that captures the essence of the triumphant culmination of the hundred-year Indian freedom struggle against the British Empire in India.

## **2.2 The Context**

Jawaharlal Nehru's autobiography was written between June 1934 and Early February 1935 when he was in prison in Almora. It is more than a personal story of an individual. It is also an account of the political awakening of a nation, its struggle for freedom from British rule. Nehru's autobiography was written in the charged atmosphere of the nationalist struggle.

Nehru truthfully confesses in his autobiography that his autobiography was intended to convey his countrymen about his thoughts and feelings that he had harbored about his own self and his country for which he was actively engaged in active politics. He feels that the incidents and events mentioned in the autobiography might be uninteresting for a foreign reader because they are unfamiliar with them; but an Indian audience can easily understand and apprehend his stance on certain issues which he thinks might be of greater importance for them. Nehru is of the view that his views expressed in the work are manifestations of the historical facts and events of the time. He could not have written in a vacuum and it is argued that Nehru's life crisscrossed with the happenings and he could not resist himself in mentioning them in the work.

## **2.3 The form of Autobiography**

In Greek, *autos* signifies “self,” *bios* “life,” and *graphe* “writing.” Taken together in this order, the words denote “self life writing,” a brief definition of “autobiography.” The British poet-critic Stephen Spender cites the dictionary definition of *autobiography* as “the story of one’s life ritten by himself” but notes its inadequacy to the “world that each is to himself” (115). More recently, French theorist Philippe Lejeune has expanded that definition: “We call autobiography the retrospective narrative in prose that someone makes of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality.”

The term *autobiography* was first coined in the preface to a collection of poems by the eighteenth-century English working-class writer Ann Yearsley, although most critics still cite Robert Southey’s anglicizing of the three Greek words in 1809 as the first use of the term in English.

### **2.3.1 Autobiography and Biography**

Although autobiography and biography are both modes of narrating lives, they are not interchangeable, no matter how often people subsume both under biography and think of autobiography as the biography someone writes about him- or herself. In fact, although both forms narrate a life, they do so quite differently. In biography, scholars of other people’s lives document and interpret those lives from a point of view external to the subject. In life narrative people write about their own lives (even when they write about themselves in the second or third person, or as a matter of time and timing also differentiate biography and life narrative. For a biographer the death of the subject is not definitive. A biography can be written either during the life or after the death of the person being written about. In fact, biographies offering different interpretations of particular historical figures may appear

periodically over many centuries, as have biographies of Byron, Caesar, Galileo, and Michelangelo. For the life narrator, on the other hand, death is the end of the matter. While a life narrative can be, and often is, written over along span of time, as is the case with the multiple narratives of Edward Gibbon and Maya Angelou, it must be written during the writer's life span—or be published posthumously “as is.”

### **2.3.1 Types of Autobiography**

#### **2.3.1.1 Spiritual autobiography**

Spiritual autobiography is an account of an author's struggle or journey towards God, followed by conversion a religious conversion, often interrupted by moments of regression. The author re-frames his or her life as a demonstration of divine intention through encounters with the Divine. The earliest example of a spiritual autobiography is Augustine's “Confessions” though the tradition has expanded to include other religious traditions in works such as Mohandas Gandhi's “An Autobiography” and “Black Elk Speaks”. The spiritual autobiography works as an endorsement of his or her religion.

#### **2.3.1.2 Memoirs**

A memoir is slightly different in character from an autobiography. While an autobiography typically focuses on the “life and times” of the writer, a memoir has a narrower, more intimate focus on his or her own memories, feelings and emotions. Memoirs have often been written by politicians or military leaders as a way to record and publish an account of their public exploits. One early example is that of Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, also known as *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars*. In the work, Caesar describes the battles that took place during the nine years that he spent fighting local armies in the Gallic Wars. His second memoir, *Commentarii de Bello Civili* (or *Commentary on the Civil War*) is an account of the events



that took place between 49 and 48 BC in the civil war against Gnaeus Pompeius and the Senate.

Leonor López de Córdoba (1362–1420) wrote what is supposed to be the first autobiography in Spanish. The English Civil War (1642–1651) provoked a number of examples of this genre, including works by Sir Edmund Ludlow and Sir John Reresby. French examples from the same period include the memoirs of Cardinal de Retz (1614–1679) and the Duc de Saint-Simon.

### 2.3.1.3 Fictional autobiography

The term “fictional autobiography” signifies novels about a fictional character written as though the character were writing their own autobiography, meaning that the character is the first-person narrator and that the novel addresses both internal and external experiences of the character. Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* is an early example. Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* is another such classic, and J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* is a well-known modern example of fictional autobiography. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is yet another example of fictional autobiography, as noted on the front page of the original version. The term may also apply to works of fiction purporting to be autobiographies of real characters, e.g., Robert Nye’s *Memoirs of Lord Byron*.

#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS—I**

1. Name two famous works of Nehru other than his autobiography?

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2. In which subject did Nehru obtain his degree at Cambridge University?

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3. Name the famous iconic speech that Nehru made from Lal Quila?

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4. Why did Mahatma Gandhi support Nehru as the President of Indian National Congress in 1930?

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5. What is the basic difference between a biography and an autobiography?

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**2.4.1 Reading Chapter I: “Descent from Kashmir”**

In this chapter Nehru, describes his descent from Kashmiri Brahmin family. He tells the history of his Kashmiri ancestors and explains how the title Nehru came to be attached to their name.

Over two hundred years ago, early in the eighteenth century, Nehru’s ancestor came down from that mountain valley to seek fame

and fortune in the rich plains below. Those were the days of the decline of the Mughal Empire. Raj Kaul was the name of that ancestor. He had gained eminence as a Sanskrit and Persian scholar. He attracted the notice of the Emperor and, probably at his instance, the family migrated to Delhi, the imperial capital, about the year 1716. A jagir with a house situated on the banks of a canal had been granted to Raj Kaul, and, from the fact of this residence, "Nehru" (from nahar, a canal) came to be attached to his name. Kaul had been the family name; in later years, this dropped out and became simply Nehrus.

The family experienced many vicissitudes of fortune during the unsettled times that followed, and the jagir dwindled and vanished away. His great-grandfather became the first vakil of the "Sarkar Company" at the shadow court of the Emperor of Delhi. His grandfather was Kotwal of Delhi for some time before the great Revolt of 1857. He died at the early age of thirty-four in 1861. The Revolt of 1857 put an end to their family's connection with Delhi, and all their old family papers and documents were destroyed in the course of it. The family, having lost nearly all it possessed, joined the numerous fugitives who were leaving the old imperial city and went to Agra.

For some years the family lived in Agra, and it was in Agra on the sixth of May, 1861, that Jawaharlal's father was born. But he was a posthumous child as his grandfather had died three months earlier. The burden of the family then fell on his two uncles, who were very much older than his father. The elder uncle entered the judicial department of the British Government and, being appointed to various places, was partly cut off from the rest of the family. The younger uncle entered the service of an Indian State. Later he settled down as a practicing lawyer in Agra. Motilal lived with him and grew up under his sheltering care.

Nehru's uncle attached himself to the newly established High Court, and, when this court moved to Allahabad from Agra, the family

moved with it. Since then Allahabad has been their home, and it was there, many years later, that Jawaharlal was born. His uncle gradually developed an extensive practice and became one of the leaders of the High Court Bar. Meanwhile his father was going through school and college in Cawnpore and Allahabad. His early education was confined entirely to Persian and Arabic, and he only began learning English in his early teens. But at that age he was considered to be a good Persian scholar, and knew some Arabic also, and because of this knowledge was treated with respect by much older people. But in spite of this early precocity his school and college career was chiefly notable for his numerous pranks and escapades. He was very far from being a model pupil and took more interest in games and novel adventures than in study. He was looked upon as one of the leaders of the rowdy element in the college. He was attracted to Western dress and other Western ways at a time when it was uncommon for Indians to take to them.

Though he was a little wild in his behavior, his English professors were fond of him and often got him out of a scrape. They liked his spirit, and he was intelligent, and with an occasional spurt he managed to do fairly well even in class. He got through his various university examinations without any special distinction, and then he appeared for his final, the B A.

He was keen on getting on in life and establishing himself in a profession. Naturally he looked to the law as that was the only profession then, in India, which offered any opening for talent and prizes for the successful. He also had his brother's example before him. He appeared for the High Court vakils' examination and not only passed it but topped the list and got a gold medal for it. He had found the subject after his own heart, or, rather, he was intent on success in the profession of his choice.

He plunged into his work, bent on success, and for many months cut himself off from everything else. Nearly all of my uncle's briefs

came to him, and, as he happened to do well in them, the professional success that he so ardently desired soon came his way and brought him both additional work and money. At an early age he had established himself as a successful lawyer, and he paid the price for this by becoming more and more a slave to his jealous mistress—the law. He had no time for any other activity, public or private, and even his vacations and holidays were devoted to his legal practice.

Motilal was, of course, a nationalist in a vague sense of the word, but he admired Englishmen and their ways. He had a feeling that his own countrymen had fallen low and almost deserved what they had got. And there was just a trace of contempt in his mind for the politicians who talked and talked without doing anything, though he had no idea at all as to what else they could do. Also there was the thought, born in the pride of his own success, that many—certainly not all—of those who took to politics had been failures in life.

As Nehru recollects, His father was a cheerful extrovert, full of confidence and had an inner balance that came from self made success. He was too busy making money, and enjoy what money could buy. He set about living the life of an English Gentleman. It is evident from the chapter that Nehru was under tremendous influence by the life of his father. In his later life, Nehru is seen living a life of an English gentleman.

#### **2.4.2 Reading Chapter III: “Theosophy”**

A pampered child surrounded by Luxury, with a private swimming pool and tennis court, Jawaharlal ran the risk of being smothered by devotion and affluence. The mother’s influenced ensured an Indian environment. The atmosphere of Hindu custom and folklore was not lacking in the Nehru home, and Jawaharlal picked up a great deal of legend from the women.

But the Nehru family never integrated into the high caste Hindu society of Allahabad, for not only was Motilal a relative newcomer but he had been excommunicated in 1899 for his refusal to make atonement for having travelled overseas. This insulated Nehru from revivalism then rampant in Hindu orthodox circles in Allahabad, and even cut them off from the more orthodox sections among the Kashmiri Pundits. Since the Pundits were very conscious of their status, there was absence of caste antagonism in them. Also, among the Hindus of Kashmir there was no caste below the Brahmins, and this facilitated the lack of caste oppression. There was also affinity with the Muslims, as there was little feeling of separateness with them. For generations the Nehrus were patronized by the Muslim rulers.

Motilal always wanted his son to get the best that British education could offer. Initially he engaged two English Governess, and then sent his son for a few months to a local convent and finally decided on private instruction at home. Nehru was also given lessons in Sanskrit by a prominent Sanskrit scholar Gangadhar Jha.

But apart from this, a private tutor was engaged to teach Nehru about English education. He was F.T Brooks. He was in charge of Nehru's education from 1901 to 1904. Brooks was a keen theosophist who had been recommended to Motilal by Mrs. Annie Besant. Nehru agrees that F.T Brooks wielded tremendous influence on him. He developed in Nehru a taste for reading and subsequently he read great many English books.

Brooks developed in Jawaharlal two interests which endured – a taste for reading and a curiosity in science and its mysteries. Apart from his religious bent, he appeared to have been a man of much sensitivity, imagination and understanding. Between them, tutor and pupil, rigged up a little laboratory, and there Jawaharlal felt, for the first time, the quick stir of wonder which still seizes him when confronted scientists

and scientific matters. Here he learned his early lessons in elementary lessons in Physics and Chemistry.

Brooks also developed in his young charge a love for English poetry, and though his other preoccupations left Jawaharlal little time to indulge this taste, his love for the arresting phrase and evocative thoughts persisted. The strong streak of melancholy in his character was probably also enhanced by this association.

Apart from this, F.T Brooks brought a new influence to bear upon him and that was Theosophy. He used to have weekly meetings of theosophists in his rooms, and Nehru attended them and gradually imbibed theosophical phraseology and ideas. There were metaphysical arguments, and discussions about reincarnation and the astral and other supernatural bodies, and auras, and the doctrine of karma, and references not only to big books by Madame Blavatsky and other theosophists but to the Hindu scriptures, the Buddhist Dhammapada, Pythagoras, Apollonius Tyanaeus, and various philosophers and mystics. He felt that there was the key to the secrets of the universe. For the first time he began to think, consciously and deliberately, of religion and other worlds. The Hindu religion especially went up in his estimation; not the ritual or ceremonial part, but its great books, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita.

Mrs. Annie Besant visited Allahabad in those days and delivered several addresses on theosophical subjects. Nehru was deeply moved by her oratory and returned from her speeches dazed and as in a dream. He decided to join the Theosophical Society, although he was only thirteen then. When he went to ask father's permission, he laughingly gave it; he did not seem to attach importance to the subject either way.

Soon after F. T. Brooks left, Nehru lost touch with theosophy, and in a remarkably short time theosophy left his life completely. But he had no doubt that those years with F. T. Brooks left a deep impress upon him, and he felt that he owed a debt to him and to theosophy.

The next important event that Nehru recollects affecting him was the Russo-Japanese War. Japanese victories stirred up his enthusiasm, and he waited eagerly for the papers for fresh news daily. He invested in a large number of books on Japan and tried to read some of them. He felt rather lost in Japanese history, but I liked the knightly tales of old Japan and the pleasant prose of Lafcadio Hearn.

Nationalistic ideas filled his mind. He mused of Indian freedom and Asiatic freedom from the thralldom of Europe. He dreamt of brave deeds, of how, sword in hand, he would fight for India and help in freeing her.

Motilal, with his wide circle of English friends, had always been impressed by the products of British public schools. He decided to send his son to one, and was fortunate to find a vacancy at Harrow. Jawaharlal was then sixteen, slightly above the normal age for entering a British public school.

#### **2.4.3 Reading Chapter IV: “Harrow and Cambridge”**

In this chapter, Nehru describes his experiences at Harrow and Cambridge, the two famous institutions of learning at that time in England. In India, Motilal was not satisfied by Brooks’ tutorship and he admitted Nehru in one of the most prestigious British Public School Harrow in May 1905. Nehru was a promising child at Harrow and his teachers were fairly impressed by his school works. In the beginning, he found himself as a stranger at Harrow but soon he adjusted himself to the new environment.

At Harrow, Nehru developed his interest in politics and aviation. He kept himself informed about the English election results of 1905; in addition to this, Nehru was well aware of the developments in the aviation sector especially about the Wright brothers.

His admission at Harrow coincided with startling events in India, one of them being the Partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905.



Nehru was interested in the developments that came as the result of the partition. He read the Journals and Newspapers sent to him by his Father from India. The partition in Congress as Moderates and Extremists interested Nehru very much. And he found himself in sympathy with the Extremists. Bal Gangadhar Tilak seemed to him as an embodiment of Indian Nationalism struggling for freedom.

A book which intensified this feeling was one of G. M. Trevelyan's three volumes on Garibaldi and his struggle for Italian freedom, which Jawaharlal won as a prize for good work in school. So absorbed was he by its story that he obtained the other two volumes and studied the Garibaldi epic carefully. In his mind, already politically conscious as far as his own country was concerned, he equated Italy with India.

Two authors who at this period molded much of his political and economic thinking were Lowes Dickinson and Meredith Townsend. Townsend's *Asia and Europe* particularly impressed him and influenced the pattern of his political thought. Already his Asian consciousness was seeking an intellectual basis and foundation.

Bored with the life at Harrow, Nehru decided to join Trinity College at Cambridge in the October of 1907. In the meantime before his entry into Cambridge, he made a trip to Ireland. There he saw the growing nationalism among the Irish people and was impressed by Sin Fein movement. Nehru saw parallels between the Irish movement and the Indian nationalist agitation which strengthened his Extremist outlook.

From 1907 onward for several years India was seething with unrest and trouble. For the first time since the Revolt of 1857, India was showing fight and not submitting tamely to foreign rule. News of Tilak's activities and his conviction, of Aravindo Ghose and the way the masses of Bengal were taking the Swadeshi and boycott pledge.

The extremism, however, was confined to his letters to his father. Jawaharlal did not plunge into the student politics of Cambridge. His extremist opinions, it should be added, were still not deep seated or transforming his outlook.

At Cambridge, Nehru describes how he became the part of a society called 'Majlis' where they discussed political problems which was usually unreal debates. Nehru could not get over his shyness and diffidence. At Cambridge, Nehru came in contact with some of the noted Indian politicians like Bipin Chandra Pal, Lajpat Rai and G.K Gokhale. They fired his nationalistic feelings and acquainted him with the events at home.

In this chapter, Nehru also informs us about the politics activities of his father at home. He tells that his father had actively involved himself in the Indian politics His active participation in freedom movement made Nehru proud. But at the same time, He criticizes his moderate outlook and tries to reason out why he was bent so. Nehru was critical of moderate nationalism and their policies towards the British.

At Cambridge his nationalism, which was stirred as a boy by the Russo-Japanese War, found an emotional vent in the happenings in India. But quite clearly his political convictions, such as they were, had as yet no firm foundations and the later axiom of non-cooperation with British rule had then no place in his thinking. In consultation with his father Jawaharlal toyed for a while with the idea of joining the Indian Civil Service, but this proposition was soon abandoned in favour of the paternal profession. Motilal could not brook the prospect of his only son serving for long years in remote districts away from home, and had a growing feeling that the examiners were biased against Indian candidates.

Even before completing his final examinations at Cambridge, Jawaharlal joined the Inner Temple, which pleased his father very much.

He was following his father's footsteps although he had dislike for law. Infact he was forced to take law and this resulted in leading a life of idleness.

Nehru describes an incident which occurred in Norway on a holiday. Jawaharlal nearly killed himself in the adventure. While tracking somewhere north of Bergen, he plunged into an ice-cold fjord for a bath and became numb. His foot slipped and he was swept away by the current. His companion pulled him out on the brink of a waterfall. But Jawaharlal, a man of physical courage, and proximity to death pleased rather than sobered him.

Nehru traces the beginnings of his interest in socialism to his Cambridge days when the Fabianism of Shaw and the Webbs attracted him, but he confesses that his interest was academic.

Jawaharlal returned to India with a nurtured mind and imagination. He also brought back with him attachments to Britain and the values he considered British. Those values remained with him forever. He had gone to England in a mood of adventure and discovery. But he returned to his homeland to discover India. It is not without significance that many years later a book of his was to bear the title Discovery of India.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS—II**

1. How did the surname 'Nehru' came to be attached the Kaul family?

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2. Motilal Nehru was a self-made man. Explain?

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3. Name the two authors who influenced the pattern of Nehru's political thought?

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4. "F.T Brooks brought a new influence to bear upon him". What was it?

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5. Nehru traces the beginnings of his interest in socialism to his Cambridge days. How?

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6. What were the two interests that F.T Brooks developed in Nehru?

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#### **2.4.4 Reading Chapter XIX: "Communalism Rampant"**

In this chapter, Nehru describes about his illness in 1923, after his return from Nabha Prison. At Nabha, Nehru was reeling under typhoid fever left him physically weak and he was bed ridden for several days.

During his illness, Nehru tries to envisage the happenings around him in a much a detached manner. One of the events that left a lasting impression on his thinking was the deteriorating Hindu Muslim relations. Nehru admits that the tension was much worse in the big cities where riots took place and it was brutal and callous in nature. Nehru recollects how discords developed between Hindus and Muslims on the question of Cow sacrifice and on the matters of festivals clashing simultaneously.

Again Nehru talks about the fresh friction between the two sections on the question of music before the mosques. The Muslims objected to Hindu's use of music in the temples during the evening prayers in the Mosques. The sounding gongs and the ringing of temple bells were regarded as interference in their worship. These Aarti-Namaz disputes assumed major proportions. Nehru is concerned about the role of newspapers in spreading and exaggerating these petty communal disturbances. He is of the view that disturbances of such kind could have been settled peacefully through mutual considerations, but opines that religious passions have little to do with reason or consideration or adjustments.

Nehru is also seriously concerned about the role of communal leaders in fanning the burning situations to their interests. The Muslim reactionaries who did not participate in the non-cooperation movement now took the advantage of situation. They with the help of British Government came up with new and more far-reaching communal demands. The Hindu reactionaries too became a puppet in the hands of British in the name of guarding Hindu interests.

Congress party's stance on this matter was very significant. Congress leadership stood firm and, on the whole, refused to side with either communal party, or rather with any communal group, for now the Sikhs and other smaller minorities were also loudly voicing their particular demands. Inevitably this led to denunciation from both the extremes.

Nehru supports Gandhi's idea of solving the communal tension and he opines that Gandhi had his own formula to solve it. According to him, it could only be solved by good will and the generosity of the majority group, and so he was prepared to agree to everything that the Muslims might demand. He wanted to win them over, not to bargain with them. With foresight and a true sense of values he grasped at the reality that was worthwhile; but others, who thought they knew the market price of everything and were ignorant of the true value of anything, stuck to the methods of the market place. They saw the cost of purchase with painful clearness, but they had no appreciation of the worth of the article they might have bought.

Nehru expresses his concern about the role of the British Government in dealing with the communal problem. They believed in the principle of divide and rule and they were successful to a large extent. Nehru puts forward a solution in tackling the problem. He believed that the goal of political freedom can only be achieved through joint action of Hindus and Muslims. He advocated that people should be made to realize that they were struggling for an entirely different political structure and not just an Indianized edition. Political independence meant, of course, political freedom only, and did not include any social change or economic freedom for the masses. But it did signify the removal of the financial and economic chains which bind them to the City of London, and this would have made it easier for them to change the social structure.

Nehru is critical of the stance taken by the reformist in solving the communal problem and he is of the view that until and unless they take revolutionary outlook, the problem will always remain unsolved. Nehru opines that the time had gone by when any political or economic or communal problem in India could be satisfactorily solved by reformist methods. Revolutionary outlook and planning and revolutionary

solutions were demanded by the situation. But there was no one among the leaders to offer these.

Nehru views that the want of clear ideals and objectives in struggle for freedom undoubtedly helped the spread of communalism. The masses saw no clear connection between their day-to-day sufferings and the fight for Swaraj. They fought well enough at times by instinct, but that was a feeble weapon which could be easily blunted or even turned aside for other purposes. There was no reason behind it, and in periods of reaction it was not difficult for the communalists to play upon this feeling and exploit it in the name of religion. It is nevertheless extraordinary how the bourgeois classes, both among the Hindus and the Moslems, succeeded, in the sacred name of religion, in getting a measure of mass sympathy and support for programs and demands which had absolutely nothing to do with the masses, or even the lower middle class. These narrow political demands, benefiting at the most a small number of the upper middle classes, and often creating barriers in the way of national unity and progress, were cleverly made to appear the demands of the masses of that particular religious group. Religious passion was hitched on to them in order to hide their barrenness.

Nehru feels that the political reactionaries advanced their personal interest under the cover of communal feelings. They rather obstructed the social and economic advances of the society by creating rift between two sections. They never cared for the national goal and the government played with their positions. This created a rift in the advances towards political freedom.

#### **2.4.5 Reading Chapter LI: “The Liberal Outlook”**

In this chapter, Nehru criticizes the role of liberalist in Indian politics. He is very critical of their stance in their public life. Nehru being an extremist in outlook, feels that the present political situation in

India demanded aggressive and antagonistic stand. But his expectations met with dismal failure. He had a strong feeling as if he had entered a monastery, the inhabitants of which had long been cut off from effective contact with the outside world. They formed, with a few others, the real backbone of the Liberal party.

It was surprising to find how far these people had alienated themselves, not only in their day-to-day lives, but morally and mentally, from the Indian masses. Reality for these distinguished statesmen consisted of one thing—British imperial power, which could not be successfully challenged and therefore should be accepted with good or bad grace. It did not seem to strike them that it was quite impossible for them to solve India's problem or draw up a real live constitution without the good will of the masses.

The questions that a country puts are a measure of that country's political development. Often the failure of that country is due to the fact that it has not put the right question to itself. He feels that the Indians waste their energy and tempers over the communal distribution of seats, or forming parties on the communal award and carrying on a sterile controversy about it to the exclusion of vital problems. This Nehru regards as a political backwardness. Nehru tells that they seemed to have no political or economic principles, no wide outlook, and their politics seemed to be of the parlor or court variety—what high officials would do or would not do.

He mockingly proclaims that the Indian Liberals are not liberal at all in any sense of the word, or at most they are liberal only in spots and patches. What they exactly are it is difficult to say, for they have no firm positive basis of ideas and, though small in numbers, differ from one another. They are strong only in negation. They see error everywhere and attempt to avoid it, and hope that in doing so they will find the truth. Truth for them, indeed, always lies between two extremes. By



criticizing everything they consider extreme, they experience the feeling of being virtuous and moderate and good. This method helps them in avoiding painful and difficult processes of thought and in having to put forward constructive ideas.

Nehru is hopeful of changing the lethargy in the common people. He feels that even this old country is now convulsed by the forces of change, and the moderate outlook is bewildered. The old world is passing, and all the sweet reasonableness of which the Liberals are capable does not make any difference; they might as well argue with the hurricane or the flood or the earth quake.

Nehru tells that we are all moderates or extremists in varying degrees, and for various objects. If we care enough for anything, we are likely to feel strongly about it, to be extremist about it. Otherwise we can afford a gracious tolerance, a philosophical moderation, which really hides to some extent our indifference. They can afford to wait for Swaraj and need not excite themselves about it. But any proposal for radical social change disturbs them greatly, and they are no longer moderate or sweetly reasonable about it. Thus their moderation is really confined to their attitude toward the British Government, and they nurse the hope that if they are sufficiently respectful and compromising perhaps, as a reward for this behavior, they might be listened to. Inevitably they have to accept the British viewpoint.

Speaking about the Liberals, Nehru opines, they neither dream nor do they act. They have no understanding of human convulsions like the great French Revolution or the Russian Revolution. The complex, swift, and cruel eruptions of human desires, long suppressed, frighten them. For them the Bastille has not yet fallen.

Nehru remarks that nor is moderation enough by itself. Restraint is good and is the measure of our culture, but behind that restraint there must be something to restrain and hold back. It has been, and is, man's

destiny to control the elements, to ride the thunderbolt, to bring the raging fire and the rushing and tumbling waters to his use, but most difficult of all for him has been to restrain and hold in check the passions that consume him. So long as he will not master them, he cannot enter fully into his human heritage.

#### **2.4.6 Reading Chapter LIII: “India Old and New”**

In this chapter Nehru dwells on the rich cultural heritage of India and praises the unity in diversity principle in India. He is of the view that Indian culture is far superior to the newly evolved cultures of the world. He finally visualizes a nation where both old and new ideas co-exist with each other.

Nehru is critical of the role played by the intelligentsia, to the end of the nineteenth century who accepted, consciously or unconsciously, the British ideology of empire. They criticized only the outer manifestations of the empire while failed to recognize the damage that they were doing to the fruitful Indian culture. Nehru says that history and economics and other subjects that were taught in the schools and colleges were written entirely from the British imperial viewpoint, and laid stress on numerous failings in the past and present of India, and they highlighted the virtues and high destiny of the British culture.

Nehru tries to outline how Indians sought refuge in the religious nationalism as the British government presented them with the distorted version of Indian culture. It was a kind of escape for them. They came to believe in the thought that at least in the sphere of religion and philosophy they were second to no other people. They comforted themselves in their misfortune and degradation with the notion that though they did not possess the outward show and glitter of the West but had the real inner article, which was far more valuable and worth having. He cites the example of Vivekananda who roused up the dormant pride in the Indian past.

Gradually, as Nehru recalls, Indians began to suspect and examine critically British statements about their past and present conditions, but still they thought and worked within the framework of British ideology. If a thing was bad, it would be called “un-British”; if a Britisher in India misbehaved, the fault was his, not that of the system. But the collection of this critical material of British rule in India, in spite of the moderate outlook of the authors, served a revolutionary purpose and gave a political and economic foundation to Indian nationalism. Nehru cites a few literature which served in the development of Indian nationalist thought. The books of Dadabhai Naoroji (*Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*), Romesh Dutt and William Digby and others, thus played a revolutionary role in the development.

Further researches in ancient Indian history revealed brilliant and highly civilized periods in the remote past. It was also discovered that the British record in India was very different from what Indians had been led to believe from their history books. Indian challenge to the British version of history, economics, and administration grew, but continued to function within the orbit of their ideology. That was the position of Indian nationalism as a whole at the turn of the century. Nehru states that the Indian politics was still dominated by the Liberal group and other small groups as well as a number of moderate Congressmen.

It is not surprising that the Indian intelligentsia in the nineteenth century should have succumbed to British ideology; what is surprising is that some people should continue to suffer that delusion even after the stirring events and changes of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century the British ruling classes were the aristocrats of the world, with a long record of wealth and success and power behind them. This long record and training gave them some of the virtues as well as failings of aristocracy. The English began to think themselves—as so many races

and nations have done—the chosen of God, and their Empire an earthly Kingdom of Heaven. If their special position was acknowledged and their superiority not challenged, they were gracious and obliging, provided that this did them no harm. But opposition to them became opposition to the divine order, and as such was a deadly sin which must be suppressed.

The progress of India became synonymous with the adaptation of the country to the imperial scheme and the fashioning of chosen Indians after the British mold. The more Indians accepted British ideals and objectives, the fitter they were for “self-government.” It was thought that Indians will be free if they demonstrated and guaranteed that they would use it only in accordance with British wishes.

Nehru brings out the positive thoughts and tries to recollect her glorious past in the following words. He states that India with all her poverty and degradation had enough of nobility and greatness about her; and, though she was overburdened with ancient tradition and misery and her eyelids were a little weary. Through long ages she had traveled and gathered much wisdom on the way, and trafficked with strangers and added them to her own big family, and witnessed days of glory and of decay, and suffered humiliation and terrible sorrow, and seen many a strange sight; but throughout her long journey she had clung to her immemorial culture, drawn strength and vitality from it, and shared it with other lands. Like a pendulum she had swung up and down; she had ventured with the daring of her thought to reach up to the heavens and unravel their mystery, and she had also had bitter experience of the pit of hell. Despite the woeful accumulations of superstition and degrading custom that had clung to her and borne her down, she had never wholly forgotten the inspiration that some of the wisest of her children, at the dawn of history, had given her in the Upanishads.

Further, he dwells upon the unity in diversity of Indian culture. He states, though often broken up politically, her spirit always guarded a common heritage, and in her diversity there was ever an amazing unity. Like all ancient lands she was a curious mixture of the good and bad, but the good was hidden and had to be sought after, while the odor of decay was evident, and her hot, pitiless sun gave full publicity to the bad.

Nehru tries to bring home the point of similarity between India and Italy. He says both are ancient countries with long traditions of culture behind them, though Italy is a newcomer compared to India, and India is a much vaster country. Both were split up politically and yet the conception of Italia, like that of India, never died, and in all their diversity the unity was predominant. In Italy the unity was largely a Roman unity, for that great city had dominated the country and been the fount and symbol of unity. In India there was no such single center or dominant city, although Benares might well be called the Eternal City of the East, not only for India but also for Eastern Asia. But, unlike Rome, Benares never dabbled in empire or thought of temporal power. Indian culture was so widespread all over India that no part of the country could be called the heart of that culture. From Cape Comorin to Amaranth and Badrinath in the Himalayas, from Dwarka to Puri, the same ideas coursed; and, if there was a clash of ideas in one place, the noise of it soon reached distant parts of the country.

Nehru tries to analyze the factors that have enabled the Indian tradition to preserved unity in diversity. According to Nehru, there was an active sustaining principle that resisted successfully powerful outside influences and absorbed internal forces that rose to combat it. And yet with all its strength it could not preserve political freedom or endeavor to bring about political unity. These latter do not appear to have been considered worth much trouble; their importance was very foolishly

ignored, and Indians have suffered for this neglect. Right through history the old Indian ideal did not glorify political and military triumph, and it looked down upon money and the professional money-making class. Honor and wealth did not go together, and honor was meant to go, at least in theory, to the men who served the community with little in the shape of financial reward.

Further Nehru adds that the old culture managed to live through many a fierce storm and tempest, but, though it kept its outer form, it lost its real content. Today it is fighting silently and desperately against a new and all powerful opponent—the bania civilization of the capitalist West. It will succumb to this newcomer, for the West brings science, and science brings food for the hungry millions. But the West also brings an anti dote to the evils of this cut-throat civilization—the principles of socialism, of co-operation, and service to the community for the common good. This is not so unlike the old Brahman ideal of service, but it means the brahmanization (not in the religious sense, of course) of all classes and groups and the abolition of class distinctions. It may be that when India puts on her new garment, as she must, for the old is torn and tattered, she will have it cut in this fashion, so as to make it conform both to present conditions and her old thought. The ideas she adopts must become racy to her soil.

Nehru envisages of an Indian nation which is replete with both old and new ideas. This new nation will be able to face the challenges of modernity where old and new will go hand in hand.

### **2.5 Critical Reception of Nehru's *Autobiography***

Nehru's *Autobiography*, is a literary masterpiece by any standard that could be reasonably applied to the handiwork of one who was not a professional man of letters. No translation could do justice to the original in adequate measure. Nehru could really be described as a writer

by temperament, who was a politician by force of national circumstances. He was an intellectual in his make-up, never quite at ease in the rough and tumble of everyday politics, though, in course of time, he proves a master of the political situation as well, by conscious effort, as it were..

In one or two material respects, Nehru's work has an edge over that of Gandhi. It is an integral whole in which the different strands of his own eventful life are skillfully interwoven with those of the nation in torment and a world in turmoil. This is made possible as much by the au-thor's artistic vision and historical perspective as by his active involvement in the country's destinies and his lively awareness of world affairs.

In many ways, Nehru is as intro-spective as Mahatma Gandhi himself. For he reflects levels of consciousness in the flowing narrative, not to be found in the simple, direct account of Gandhi, who shows few traces of philosophic doubt or even ordinary human conflicts of the subtler kind. Nehru's account has a greater human, not to say artistic, appeal. It is the human personality that breathes through the pages with its joys and sorrows, its minor diversions and major excitements.

The didactic element is almost wholly absent in the autobiography. Nehru is ever in the agonizing and exhilarating process of depicting his own struggle and tracing the evolution of his personal-ity. The lofty and unalterable moral imperative is either absent or care-fully kept out of the reader's way. Poetry and Pathos are two of the pervasive qualities that lift Nehru's account far above the common run of Indian autobiographies. The author has an inimitable flair for vivid de-scription of scenes, and sensitive evo-cation of moods, his own, as well as those of nature.

Commenting on Nehru's autobiography, Sarvapalli Gopal, an eminent biographer of Nehru comments:

The publication of Jawaharlal's *Autobiography* in the spring of 1936, only a few weeks after the death of Kamala, gave the world an inkling of his nature and enabled it to share his sorrow. .. It was an essential document of the period, a key to the ideas and politics of a whole new world. Here was a man who spoke and thought in the language of modernity and reason, whom, unlike Gandhi, the West could understand, a man like themselves who happened to find himself on the other side. His individual vision was of general interest and universal value. In this, the first, important first-hand account of the modern phase of Asian nationalism, Jawaharlal showed that in India it was a civilized, responsible movement that owed as much to the principles of European revolution and the liberalism and non conformity of Britain as to the Indian context. (Gopal, 105)

The autobiography is honest and introspective. It frankly comments on the society and age in which he lived, on the people he had known and on his own mental development. The book is not a wooden narrative of events; nor is it, like Gandhi's autobiography, a part of confessional literature (Gopal, 106). Nehru was too undemonstrative, too repelled by any trace of exhibitionism, to interest the world primarily in himself. Jawaharlal sets out to tell the Indian condition and British rule, which hurt both his feelings and his intelligence by forcing the large majority of his countrymen to live in sordid and brutal circumstances. The reader found himself in the presence of great moral and historical issues as seen through the eyes of a refined and humane man.

Moreover Nehru wrote his autobiography with detachment. There was self scrutiny and self criticism but no self-pity. The hardships he had opted for were taken for granted. The attempt was not at self-justification but at justification to himself. Estranged from his own people by being soaked in the exploiter's culture, he was a mixed up being,



yearning for roots and struggling to work out his own destiny. Tortured by doubt, impressive in his indecision, agonizing over all sides of every question, always asking to what end was the long, wearing struggle, he provided a picture of warm and vulnerable humanity.

A heterogeneous character with great inner resources and of infinite mood, aware of natural beauty and in love with mountains, capable of responding to every side of life, yet he had preferred to spend years in prison. He had taken to politics and become indifferent to all else because he cared about the human scene and was disturbed by the ugliness and stupidity in the world.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS—III**

1. What was Congress party's stance on communalism?
2. What was Nehru's on the spread of communalism in India?
3. What was Nehru's opinion of the Liberals?
4. Why is Nehru critical of the role played by the intelligentsia, to the end of the nineteenth century?
5. What are Nehru's views on Unity in Diversity in India?
6. Who wrote *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*?

## **2.6 Glossary**

- Vakil: A [representative](#), especially of a political figure; an official or [ambassador](#).
- Sin Fein: a [left-wing Irish republican](#) political party active in the [Republic of Ireland](#) as well as in [Northern Ireland](#).
- Bania: an occupational community of merchants, bankers, money-lenders, dealers in grains or in spices, and in modern times numerous commercial enterprises.

- Aarti: a [Hindu](#) religious ritual of worship, a part of *puja*, in which [light](#) from wicks soaked in [ghee](#) (purified butter) or [camphor](#) is offered to one or more [deities](#).
- Namaz: the Urdu word for Prayer.
- Buddhist Dhammapada: a collection of sayings of the *Buddha* in verse form and one of the most widely read and best known *Buddhist* scriptures.
- Lafcadio Hearn.: an international writer, known best for his books about Japan, especially his collections of Japanese [legends](#) and [ghost stories](#),

## 2.7 Suggested Readings

Anderson, Linda R. *Autobiography*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Arnold, David and Stuart Blackburn, eds. *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography and Life History*. Bloomington: Indiana University P, 2004.

De Souza, L. *Autobiography in Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Cyber- Tech, 2009.

Gopal, Sarvepalli *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*. New Delhi: OUP, 2004.

Gokhale, Balkrishna Govind. "Nehru and History". *History and Theory* 17.3(1978): 311-322. *JSTOR*. Web. 27 March 2010.

Moraes, Frank. *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*. New York: Macmillan, 2007.

Nadel, Ira Bruce. *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form*. New York: St. Martins, 1986.

Singh, Rosy. *Autobiography: Fact and Fiction*. New Delhi: Aryan Books, 2009.

Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010.

### **2.8 Terminal Questions**

1. Describe in brief Nehru's role in the Indian Freedom struggle?
2. Bring out the basic difference between an autobiography and a biography?
3. "F.T Brooks wielded tremendous influence on Nehru". Elaborate the statement.
4. Describe the Arti-Namaz dispute that Nehru describes in his autobiography?
5. Comment briefly on Nehru's attitude towards the Liberals?
6. Nehru tries to equate the history of Italy with that of India. Elaborate?

## **BLOCK- II : NON-FICTION**

### **UNIT-II**

#### **NIRAD C. CHAUDHURY: *A PASSAGE TO ENGLAND***

**(Part I, Chapter-7; Part II, Chapter-2; Part III, Chapter- 1&3)**

#### **STRUCTURE**

- 1.0 Learning Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 About the author
- 1.4 His major works
- 1.5 Social views and writing style
- 1.6 *A Passage to England*
  - 1.6.1 Part-I (Chapter-7)
  - 1.6.2 Part-II (Chapter-2)
  - 1.6.3 Part-III (Chapter 1 & 3)
- 1.7 Themes of the Chapters
- 1.8 Let us sum up
- 1.9 Keywords
- 1.10 Terminal Questions
- 1.11 Suggested Readings

## 1.0 Learning Objectives

After going through the unit you should be able to-

- List the biographical facts from the prescribed author's life.
- Identify the author's main works
- Point out clearly the themes, concerns, and techniques in the prescribed essays.
- Sum up the main ideas of the essays prescribed for the study.

## 1.2 Introduction

In this section we will discuss the above given selections of essays from Chaudhuri's *A Passage to England*. It is an account of the impressions gathered during his visit to England and some neighboring European countries. In 1955 Indian writer Nirad Chaudhuri was invited by the BBC to visit England to write some Overseas Service broadcasts for them. Although an erudite scholar Chaudhuri had never visited abroad before. A convinced homebody, he set out at the age of fifty-seven to spend eight weeks in Europe, five of these in London. The collection of essays is mostly about the various contrasting aspects of culture and civilization of the East and the West. The author is constantly surprised, first because he was admonished not to expect England to live up to its literature, for he was apt to see life through literature, and then found that England indeed confirmed rather than destroyed the dream. He was surprised at the absence of people en masse, at the absence indeed of women he could consider beautiful, at the appearance of Churchill in the House of Commons, at the effect of a climate that revealed to him for the first time the third dimension and of the weather that he found quite predictable, though his hosts seemed never to accustom themselves to it. He is alert to national dangers to the leveling effect of the Welfare State, a state of British conscience rather than economics, he thinks, and to a present interest in culture that actually balks civilization.

### **1.3 About the author**

Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri (23 November 1897 – 1 August 1999) was an Indian Bengali+English writer and man of letters. He was born in a Hindu family in 1897 in Kishoreganj, then part of Bengal in British India, now in Bangladesh.

Chaudhuri was educated in Kishoreganj and Kolkata . For his FA (school-leaving) course he attended Ripon College in Calcutta along with the famous Bengali writer Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay. Following this, he attended Scottish Church College, Calcutta, where he studied history as his undergraduate major. He graduated with honors in history and topped the University of Calcutta merit list. At Scottish Church College, Calcutta, he attended the seminars of the noted historian, Professor Kalidas Nag. After graduation, he enrolled for the M.A. at the University of Calcutta. However, he did not attend all of his final exams, and consequently was not able to complete his M.A.

After his studies, he took a position as a clerk in the Accounting Department of the Indian Army. At the same time, he started contributing articles to popular magazines. His first article on Bharat Chandra (a famous Bengali poet of the 18th century) appeared in the most prestigious English magazine of the time, Modern Review.

Chaudhuri left his position in the Accounting Department shortly after, and started a new career as a journalist and editor. During this period he was a boarder in Mirzapur Street near College Square, Kolkata, living together with the writers Bibhuti Bhushan Banerjee and Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder. He was involved in the editing of the then well-known English and Bengali magazines Modern Review, Prabasi and Sonibar Chithi. In addition, he also founded two short-lived but highly esteemed Bengali magazines, Samasamayik and Notun Patrika.

In 1932, he married Amiya Dhar, a well-known writer herself; the couple had three sons. In 1938, Chaudhuri obtained a job as secretary to [Sarat Chandra Bose](#), a political leader in the freedom movement in India. As a result, he was able to interact with political leaders of India: [Mahatma Gandhi](#), [Jawaharlal Nehru](#), and the brother of Sarat Chandra Bose, [Subhas Chandra Bose](#) (also known as Netaji). A growing familiarity with the workings of the inner circle of Indian politics led him to be skeptical about its eventual progress, and he became progressively disillusioned about the ability of Indian political leadership.

Apart from his career as a secretary, Chaudhuri continued to contribute articles in Bengali and English to newspapers and magazines. He was also appointed as a political commentator on the Kolkata branch of the [All India Radio](#). In 1941, he started working for the Delhi Branch of the All India Radio.

Chaudhuri was a prolific writer even in the very last years of his life, publishing his last work at the age of 99. His wife Amiya Chaudhuri died in 1994 in [Oxford](#), England. He too died in Oxford, three months short of his 102nd birthday, in 1999. He lived at 20 Lathbury Road from 1982 until his death and a [blue plaque](#) was installed by the [Oxford shire Blue Plaques Board](#) in 2008.

#### **1.4 His major works**

His masterpiece, *[The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian](#)*, published in 1951, put him on the long list of great Indian writers. He courted controversy in the newly independent India due to the dedication of the book, which ran thus:

The dedication, which was actually a mock-imperial rhetoric, infuriated many Indians, particularly the political and bureaucratic establishment. “The wogs took the bait and having read only dedication sent up howls of protest”, commented Chaudhuri’s friend, editor,

historian and novelist, [Khush want Singh](#). Chaudhuri was hounded out of government service, deprived of his pension, blacklisted as a writer in India and forced to live a life of penury. Furthermore, he had to give up his job as a political commentator in All India Radio as the [Government of India](#) promulgated a law that prohibited employees from publishing memoirs. Chaudhuri argued that his critics were not careful-enough readers; “the dedication was really a condemnation of the British rulers for not treating us as equals”, he wrote in a 1997 special edition of [Granta](#). Typically, to demonstrate what exactly he had been trying to say, he drew on a parallel with [Ancient Rome](#). The book’s dedication, Chaudhuri observed, “was an imitation of what [Cicero](#) said about the conduct of [Verres](#), a Roman proconsul of [Sicily](#) who oppressed Sicilian Roman citizens, who in their desperation cried out: “[Civisromanus sum](#)”.

In 1955, the [British Council](#) and the [BBC](#) jointly made arrangements to take Chaudhuri to England for eight weeks. He was asked to contribute lectures to the BBC, and wrote eight of these. His impressions of England and Europe were later collected in *A Passage to England*. [The Continent of Circe](#), published in 1965, traces Chaudhuri’s doggedly independent-minded ideas on the social, geo-political, and historical aspects of sub-continental India across millennia. An extended sequel to his famous autobiography, titled [Thy Hand, Great Anarch!](#) was published in 1988. His last book [Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse](#), published in 1997, coincided with his hundredth year.

### **1.5 Social views and writing style**

Although he was highly critical of the post-independence Congress party establishment, Chaudhuri was more sympathetic to the right-wing Hindu nationalist movement in India. He refused to criticise the destruction of mosques: “Muslims do not have the slightest right to



complain about the desecration of one mosque in Ayodhya. From 1000 AD every temple from Kathiawar to Bihar, from the Himalayas to the Vindhyas has been sacked and ruined. Not one temple was left standing all over northern India. They escaped destruction only where Muslim power did not gain access to them for reasons such as dense forests. Otherwise, it was a continuous spell of vandalism. No nation with any self-respect will forgive this. What happened in Ayodhya would not have happened had the Muslims acknowledged this historical argument even once.”

Chaudhuri was also deeply distressed by what he saw as the deep hypocrisy in Bengali social life and in particular those that resulted from class and caste distinctions. His historical research revealed to him that the rigid Victorianesque morality of middle class Bengali women was a socially enforced construct, that had less to do with religion, choice and judgment, but more to do with upbringing, social acceptance and intergenerational transference of values.

His prose was highly influenced by Sanskrit and the older version of the Bengali language, the Shadhubhasha. He had little respect for the proletarian language, ‘Choltibhasha’ or ‘Cholitobhasha’, which he regarded as being common in taste and scope. He avoided the use of words and very common expressions originating from Arabic, Urdu and Persian in modern Bengali.

### **1.6 *A Passage to England* : An Introduction**

Nirad C. Chaudhuri wrote only one travelogue, *A Passage to England* based on the impressions gathered from his eight-week visit to Europe of which he spent five weeks in England, two in Paris and one in Rome. Chaudhuri divides *A Passage to England* into four sections, ‘The English Scene’, ‘The English People’, ‘Cultural Life’, and ‘State of the Nation’. The title of the work was taken in imitation of

E.M.Forster's novel *A Passage to India*. Chaudhuri's work turned out to be the first book by an Indian author to appear on the bestseller lists of England. The travelogue's anecdotes and observations throw light on the essential cultural differences between the Indian people and those from Europe.

### **1.6.1 Part-I, Chapter-7: *The Mother City of the Age*** **Critical Summary**

In this chapter, Nirad C Chaudhuri relates his impressions on the city of London on his visit. He states that the impression he gathers is from the standpoint of a foreigner. He declares that he find the reality of places more interesting than the romanticized versions found in written sources.

Chaudhuri's conception of admiring the English landscape was formed on principles that he considers different from an Englishman. While an Englishman is more likely to have a favorite spot of personal choice, to the author, a foreigner, all of England has the same charm. For him difference in landscape in different parts of England did not disturb harmonious impression that he gathers from England in a general way. For him English landscape all around the country appealed to him in a unified manner. This is because he is a foreigner who was well read about the places he is visiting. As such the England he perceives is partly conceptual in nature. Whereas, the English men perceive their land in concrete terms and therefore has to choose a favourite spot within the country to attach their emotions to.

Chaudhuri, however, goes on to point out the industrial landscape of England as an exception to this. And of the industrial landscape, although changed what was already there. He observes that London belongs to the present and the future more than the past. However, he compares London to modern capitalism in that although both have a distinctive personality: they were created in the pre-industrial era.

Amidst the rest of England, London stands apart. However, London has its similarities with other great industrial cities both in the West and the East. These industrial cities are off-springs of London, which the author calls 'the mother city'. Calcutta is also one among those off-springs in the East. The next aspect that Chaudhuri discusses is the vastness of London. Its vastness and variety is such that even the native residents fail to sum it all up. Thus, visitors might be lost in London not only physically but intellectually as well. The author observes that one reason for this vastness is because London was not planned or built, but it grew. Comprehending London as a whole, therefore is near impossible. It is formless.

Because it is so difficult to understand the form or the vastness of London, Chaudhuri tries two methods of sampling it as a means of solving this problem for himself. The first method is by sampling the beauty of London. In this regard, he cites the example of St. James' Park, Whitehall, Trafalgar Square, Westminster, etc. The second method of sampling the city is by looking at the historical monuments and buildings of architectural wonder. The buildings are remarkable for their Norman and Gothic style. One example of this is St. Paul's in London. However, the true structure and function of London was known to the author only when he had been coming and going through the paths that run behind the easily visible townscape. The hidden parts of London, is a totally different world from the outlying areas. ( ) The Greater London does not only consist of cityscape, but encompasses far outreaches of suburban and even the countryside. On journeying to Canterbury from his temporary residence, the author was expecting that at one point the urban view would disappear, but there were more and more blocks of buildings making him confused. He got the same impression when he rode north of the city. The sights that the author saw disillusioned him about his earlier knowledge about the city that he gathered from reading

history. It is in his train journeys through the almost unending suburban settlements. The author also recalls having passed the south of the Pool, which he found strange because what he saw in the beginning was a large number of derricks and cranes. Amidst all this congestion, the wide empty spaces are also located within the city. The Royal Parks, the gay West End, and the City, etc. are located within the city.

The author cites the reason for Indian people journeying mostly by the underground is because they want to avoid the unending sight of red-brick walls in outer London. The continuous sight of the same dreary urban backyards is likely to make people feel disturbed. The author himself declares himself incapable of living his entire life in London. The sight of naked brick wall, the lack of space and above all the apparently poor quality of life lived in select parts of London makes him feel suffocated. Yet, he admits that his personal impressions are enough to understand the city. The author later realizes that as of administration, there also exists a greater London of spirit. The city rings of power and vitality which is more apparent in parts like Hammersmith or Camber well.

Chaudhuri observes that London is the base of a new mode of life and has been so since the last hundred years. Human habitation in London cannot be simply categorized as urban or rural. He implies that the idea of London cannot be pinned down to some distinct definition. The city is multifaceted and multidimensional. It has absorbed all its past, near and distant, in its present. In that way London is timeless. This becomes clearer to the author when he contrasts London with Paris. Paris according to him, is still the same as it was at some point of time in history. It is so more in its spirit than its form which has changed with time. In this context the author observes that the new UNESCO building he saw in Paris, a modern one, seems to be a conscious attempt aiming at change. However, according to the author it only reflects in architecture

the shallow, insincere and sterile internationalism. As opposed to the modernity of London does not have to depend on external manifestations in the form of infrastructure. London's modernity remains intact in the fact that it was the first city of this age. He observes that London's modernity is old-fashioned but still living and growing. It is both historical and young at the same time.

#### **Check Your Progress-1**

1. When did Nirad Chaudhuri first visit England?
2. What was the purpose of Chaudhuri's visit to Europe in the beginning?
3. Give the name two major works of Nirad Chaudhuri.
4. How many sections are there in *A Passage to England*?
5. Why does the author call London as the 'mother city'?

#### **1.6.2 Part-II [The English People], Chapter-2: *The Eternal Silence of These Infinite Crowds***

##### **Critical Summary**

Part-II of the book of the book is entitled "The English People". As such in this part Chaudhuri puts forward his impression of the behavior of the English people as he observed them in the English public life. In the second chapter of this part, the author is astounded by the contrast that the English people displays in the public places in comparison to the Indians. He observes that unlike in India where an individual is reminded of his class instantly after an introduction with another individual of a higher class, in England even important people do not do so.

Chaudhuri observes a second contrast between the Indian and the English people. While the Englishmen prefer to remain speechless mostly in public, Indian people tend to display both kindness and bad

temper accompanied by noise. Noise is essential to express heartiness in India. The silence of English people in public places tends to offend some Indians visiting England who don't know their ways. The author was informed about this aspect of English public life, yet witnessing it firsthand creates a new impression on him. The silence in crowded streets, underground railway stations and even in pubs or restaurants was astounding to the author because he had lived his life amidst the bustling life of the Indian bazaars. While clubs and restaurants are places usually noisy and full of life in India, they are the most silent places in England. Once when the author tried to open up a conversation with a stranger in a club, it was turned down but without any perceptible display of offense.

The Englishmen themselves have heard about the complaints that Frenchmen or people from other European countries make about their oddness of public behavior or habit. Hence they find nothing new in the author's experience. However, because they are unaware of the contrast they puts up in comparison to the Indian people, Chaudhuri finds it worth his while to dwell on this 'contrast' aspect. In this he speaks from his long experience of fifteen years of travelling in Indian public transports. In the buses of Delhi, passengers would lean on one another's body for support and nobody would mind it. Again, if a person without a wrist watch has to know the time, it is natural for him to take up the hand of another person with a watch and check the time himself. And this ought not to offend the other person. Further, passengers have conversations on both public and private topic even with strangers. Random passengers also express their concerns over the health of another passenger. As such, the author recalls his experience of once being asked by a passenger about a visible skin irritation. Although slightly embarrassed the author was expected to give a polite reply. It is also a point of mutual understanding among

the passengers that they help each other get to their destination if the conductor of the bus did not know the places.

Furthermore, reading materials like newspapers and books ought to be shared among the interested passengers present in the bus. Individual choices are limited by public intrusion while on buses in India. The author relates one instance when out of habit, he moves to the door of the bus earlier so that he can get down as quickly as possible. Having seen this, other passengers ask him to have patience and some even grabbed his coat tails in order to stop him from moving. Other such incidents happening in Indian buses that the author had witnessed are the volunteered exchange of a bad coin for a good one, a young woman attempting suicide being saved by her husband, quarrels, fist-fights, etc. At one such incident, the conductor and the driver of the bus were involved in fist-fight. The driver stopped the bus and got off. He went into the Edward Park and lay on the grass in a sullen mood. He refused to come back to his work and did so only when all the passengers entreated him. According to Chaudhuri, all this make Delhi representative of the national life in India.

Even more interesting are the incidents that happen at the bus stops. At one such instance that happened to the author, he was waiting at a bus stop when an elderly person approached him accompanied by his family. The man inquired if it was possible for them to catch a bus to the Red Fort from that bus stop. The man was so gratified by the help that he thanked the author profusely. In order to express his gratitude even more, he behaved more heartily and introduced his family to Chaudhuri. The man further intimated the author about the details of his children and also told him that they were returning from a visit to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, which was made in order to take a 'darshan' of the great leader. Through the course of the following time that was spent in the company of the old man, the author was also informed

about the details of how he had come to Delhi two years back over a law-suit involving a family dispute with his father. The elderly person even asked the author's name and address so that he could send the latter some mangoes from his own orchard. He insisted on until the bus arrived and the author had to cut short the conversation by boarding it. The author observes in the end, "It is...this large-hearted wiping out of the distinction between public and private affairs, this craving for sympathy in widest community spread, that make us recoil from the dreariness of the public behavior of the English people."

Chaudhuri thus reflects on these points of difference between the English and the Indian people. The most important conclusion to be drawn is the tendency of the English people to maintain a sense of decorum and personal space even in public. Whereas Indian people, as the author reflects, do not necessarily recognize the importance of personal space while in public. As such Indian people have a participatory sensibility in public life that sometimes tends to be intrusive. As such, Indian public places tends to be noisy as opposed to the English. Chaudhuri does not necessarily find fault in that directly, but implies the same to be an inherent cultural difference in the sensibility of the people.

### **1.6.3 PART-III ["Cultural Life"],**

#### **Chapter 1: (Shakespeare in Today's England)**

##### **Critical Summary**

In the third part of the book entitled, "Cultural Life", Chaudhuri presents his impressions of English culture as deduced from the contemporary English scene. He does this by taking the relevance of Shakespeare in contemporary England as a parameter. However, the author himself is not happy with the title. He points out the ironical fact that Shakespeare and his works are considered as amusement by the English public, whereas educated Indians consider the same as culture.



The primary perspective that Chaudhuri holds in this section is related to a question of cultural difference between Indian and England. He maintains that in the contemporary times a large aspect of English culture remains Shakespeare and his works; whereas, although India has playwrights like Kalidasa to pride on, the popular mind is engaged more with religion. Commercialization has kept alive both Shakespeare and religion in the respective countries. Anyhow, the question that preoccupies Chaudhuri here is as to why Shakespeare still appeals to modern audience.

Chaudhuri informs us that Shakespeare was almost worshipped in Bengal. And hence, he does not find anything awkward in the way great poet's 391<sup>st</sup> anniversary was celebrated in Stratford-upon-Avon. The proceeding of the program was typical of the celebrations of a national hero, with a few local touches that included elaborate feasting and drinking of wine. However, apart from this function the author found every other thing that has to do with Shakespeare's relation with contemporary England new. He observes that Stratford has become prosperous due to the commercialization of Shakespeare and his plays. Surprisingly, although a classic Shakespeare's popularity stills holds ground in contemporary England. His plays are popular entertainment unlike the classics of India whose have gone out of popular taste despite being very sophisticated and rich.

The author recalls from his experience of visiting the theatre company 'Old Vic', where he saw that people were eagerly buying tickets even if the same play '*As You Like It*' was being played for the seventeen time in the same month. The author was astonished to find a big crowd gathering in Stratford one evening and was even more surprised to see people sleeping on the ground at night to queue for tickets. Chaudhuri observes that people do not do such a thing out of their duty towards their culture, but rather when the return value is worth the money. The

author was further surprised by the choice of the playgoers who could have instead gone for a film. The audience was not only enjoying and appreciating the play but were doing so in a natural manner. Even the coarse and bawdy jokes meant for the Elizabethan audience were accepted with a natural air.

The question that kept arising in the mind of Chaudhuri throughout these experiences was, “Why does Shakespeare appeal to a modern audience?” While immensely seeking the answer for this question, he says that not even the Englishmen with whom the author talked, could give an appropriate answer. Shakespeare’s works were well understood by his contemporaries. And the modern audience might find him profound in the effort they have to put into understanding the sophisticated language. It is said that the best representation of Shakespeare given by the ‘Old Vic Theatre’ company and by Stratford was the main reason behind his present popularity. However, the author says that this does not explain why the best actors and producer concern themselves with him. The author draws an answer for himself that the reason might be because the English people had retained Elizabethan traits in them. However, even this answer seemed incomplete to him as there is more to the answer.

Later on, in France the author is confronted with the same question under similar circumstances. When he entered the theatre Salle Richelieu of the Comedie-Francais to watch a performance of a play named *Athalie*, he was surprised to find even a larger audience than that seen in the Old Vic in Stratford. In the programme notes, Chaudhuri reads about the producer’s experience of extensive reading “the most dazzling psychological and philosophical acrobatics of the grammerians, polemicists, commentators, ecclesiastics, authors, and artists on the fabulous personages of this sumptuous epic...”

However, leaving this all aside the producer finally sought the Bible and Racine as the source for the play; thus connecting the present with the eternal. *Athalie* is a rendering of the Old Testament a seminal religious text around which Christianity and Judaism is centered round for centuries; hence, the preoccupation of the common people. Similarly, Shakespeare has been considered an intrinsic part of English culture and nationality for nearly six centuries. Because Shakespeare has gained an immortal character, no matter in what form and manner, his plays continue to be appreciated and enjoyed even today with great fervor. This seems to be the answer to the question that preoccupies the author. Despite Chaudhuri's disclaimer that the considering Shakespeare within the question of culture may not be liked by many English people for they consider it more of an entertainment, he implies that Shakespeare in England is woven into the fabrics of common people's lives and thus lives on. Shakespeare in England have taken a cultural character.

#### **Check Your Progress-2**

1. Mention two points of contrast between the people of England and those of India as given in the chapter "The Eternal Silence of these Crowds".
2. Chaudhuri discuss the cultural life in England surrounding Shakespeare based on his experiences in which town exactly?
3. What is the name of the theatre to which Chaudhuri go to watch *As You Like It* while in Stratford?
4. What answer did Chaudhuri finds to his question about the popular appeal of Shakespeare to the modern audience?
5. What play did Chaudhuri watch at theatre Salle Richelieu while in France?

### **Chapter 3: "Adventure of a Brown Man in Search of Civilization"**

#### **Critical Summary**

In this chapter, Nirad C. Chaudhuri talks about aspects of Europe that are tangible and easily perceptible, and those that are not. Unlike the earlier influence of European institutions, inventions and theories in politics and economics, the contemporary Europe is not contributing similarly to the world. That Europe is apparently extinct. Although, the author says it is not so. Other than that the Europe of European civilization is thriving in the very veins of ordinary life of the contemporary times and might not be easily perceptible. The author documents his visits to some of the most reputed museums and galleries in England.

The author says that despite everything European civilization will remain timeless even in the future. In the words of Chaudhuri it remains omnipresent. The characteristics that represent Europe are more to do with its culture. He says that it is difficult to separate the Europe of the present from the historical past. He goes on to discuss how it is opposite in the case of India. The India of the modern times has snapped its connections with the ancient civilization that was Indian. The very fact of the universal recognition of the great ancient civilizations of Indian subcontinent has made Indians of the more recent phases of history to cease trying to keep the spirit alive. For most of Indian people, Chaudhuri observes, the historic civilization is a culture that is considered a burden to be continued. The nature of the Indian civilization has turned intangible, something that can only be imagined. Thus, it has become inert and narrowed down to concepts only for the foreigner to study. It has long gone out of practice. Even to the educated Indian people, the sense of the Indian culture and civilization is not gained through self-practice but from the west. As a result they can only preach it to foreigners but never practice it themselves. For Indians, Indian culture and

civilization holds merely the utilitarian values of supporting the cause of nationalism. This is the reason the thriving European civilization amidst daily life of ordinary people strikes the author so much.

Chaudhuri illustrates this point with examples from his experience in Paris and England. He relates that while in Paris he had noticed a large crowd everyday in front of the Orangerie where people gathered to see the works of famous painters ranging from David to Toulouse-Lautrec. The expenses of 200 francs for the entrance fee and another 100 francs for the catalogue did not put off the audience. Added to this was a political conference that was happening at the same time and yet those people gathering in front of the exhibition were not drawn to it. The author expresses his respect for the French people and by large, the Europeans for transmitting the understanding of the distinction between politics and culture. Through the above given example, the author implies that for the European people culture comes first when they are given the options. In contrast to this, he points out that without politics to follow, Indian masses could hardly find a anything to devote themselves to. The only option they could find is involving in is worldly affairs of daily life.

Chaudhuri analyses the question as to how much a nation's economy hurts its culture. He does this keeping in view the possibility that the lack of any proper continuity of what was Indian culture and civilization of the ancient times might be due to India's poor economy. He argues that if any nation could have lost its culture, if culture was so much dependent on its economy, then England must have lost it. But, he finds no such depletion of English culture and civilization even after had lost the greater part of its national wealth in the world war and reconstruction. It could have hurt the cultural life of the country more because the changes in the English economy was drastic: from being the richest nation, later it became significantly poorer (measurable from

the fall from prominence of many families). But, on his visit Chaudhuri finds that cultural life in England remains unharmed by the changes in the economic and political status of the country after war. Chaudhuri considered the highest expression of the English civilization to be Shakespeare and country houses till then. However, to illustrate his point of the continuity of English civilization despite depressions on the economy, he documents his surprise on the wonders that art museums and architecture presents him with.

Having visited the most prominent art galleries and museums, the author realizes the amount of importance and attention that is attached to culture and civilization in Europe. The reality of European arts, painting and architecture was far more magnificent than what was imagined by the author before his visits. He realizes that museums and galleries like the National, Tate and Wallace are themselves achievements in civilization. He states that museums like Fitzwilliam at Cambridge and Ashmolean at Oxford are just as important for a man as any college.

However, in looking at the collections at the museums, the author perceives a problem. Each piece in these museums requires long observation for a good understanding and there are numerous such collections. As such, often the visitors are torn between their desire to spend more time observing a single piece and their fear of missing another masterpiece. The author adopts the easiest and pleasantest method in order to overcome this problem. At first he made a rapid general survey of the collection, and then took his time to observe those pieces that he selected for close study. He had implemented this method of looking at museum pieces when he visited the British Museum and the National Gallery. In the former, he had selected the following pieces: the Elgin Marbles, Assyrian sculptures, the Codex Alexandrinus and the Lindisfarne Gospels. To his pleasure, the author also came upon the statues of Demeter and Marcus Aurelius incidentally. He expresses his

joy at coming upon the statue of Demeter because it was his childhood dream to see that statue. In the National Gallery, besides some paintings, the author was interested in *The Nativity* by Piero della Francesca. The author also had also acquired new taste and appreciation on different aspects on the works of painters like Claude Lorrain, Poussin and Rubens.

The author is thrilled with the idea that these masterpieces, which are some of the best works of art in the whole world are easily found all around England, and not just in London. Towns like Bristol which are otherwise commercial hubs have their share of the masterpieces of classical art works and theatres. However, the author is perplexed as to why the local standards were not something authentic to the place but rested on performances of French plays. He watched a French play named *Intermezzo* by Jean Giraudoux in Bristol. Although many Englishmen didn't understand French as his friend in his company, they did feel the message of the play. Later on in Paris, the author saw the same play in one of the most reputed theatres, the Marigny. And further on at Oxford, he saw another modern French play, Anouilh's *Bal des Voleurs* which is considered one of his masterpieces. Similarly, while visiting Cambridge on an evening, he heard a European classical music piece the *Messiah* by Handel performed by the 'Cambridge Philharmonic Society' - a favorite piece in England. The author is surprised to find what is considered art works of unusual taste readily available in Europe for common people. This explains the fact that European culture and civilization is a thing alive among the common people. On another occasion, the author talks about the publication of a folio edition of *Jane Eyre* somewhere in between 1923-24, with lithographs from by a French artist. He had wished to buy this but had to give up the idea due to shortage of money. On his current visit to England, when he went to the Charlotte Bronte exhibition in the British Museum, he was exhilarated to see the copy of the same folio there.

Finally, the author arrives at the probable question, “What is civilization?” People might deny the idea of civilization altogether because while on the one hand societies are developing better living conditions on the other, vulgarity and barbarity of the mind is on the rise. He suggests that the doubtful English people try the tests that he employed.

- a) The first one is checking the number and prosperity of shops dealing in antiques, old books and second hand furniture.
- b) The second one is finding dedication of an English gardener to his profession which results in expression of great beauty and artistic taste.

This according to the author is equal to buying of old prints, books, furniture, etc. things out of an appreciation of the artistic or antique value of those objects. If either of these is seen, then the doubtful individual can rest assured that civilization is still existent in England, as the author has himself assured.

### **1.7 Themes of the Chapters**

In the chapters that we have discussed so far we can see clearly certain themes around which the chapters are built. Some of them are-

**History and Timelessness:** In the first chapter we can observe how the author reflects on the timeless nature of the city of London. Unlike many other cities and places, London tends to continue carrying many aspects that make it both a city of the present as well as the past. It is a city that had its origin at an early phase of modernity, and as such has retained a timeless character in that it has been the model for many other major cities around the world and yet has continued to be what it was in the past. Other cities have the history of being built, but London according to the author has grown.



**East vs. West:** Almost all the chapters that we are dealing with are built around the theme of contrast between the East and the West. Likewise, the author in his discussions on the city of London has compared it with the cities like Kolkata of the East. Moving on, in the next chapter that we have discussed, we find a comparison between various aspects of life of the English people and Indians. Then in the section “The Cultural Life” there are contrast drawn between what comprises the cultures of the British and the Indian people. Chaudhuri tries to reflect on the reasons as why English people still attach to Shakespeare’s works while Indians are not concerned at all about their great artists.

**Cultural Continuity:** Cultural continuity is a theme that can be traced in the given chapters of Chaudhuri’s works. On his visit to England and other European countries, he observes that while Europeans live their culture, Indian have carried it as a burden. The mere fact that the world has recognized the Indian ancient civilizations seems to have made Indians to give up their cultural continuity. Chaudhuri noted on his visits how art and architecture in Europe still holds great value for the public. Moreover, they continue certain practices that were there back at some early stages of their civilization.

### 1.8 Let’s Sum Up

- Nirad C Chaudhuri was invited by the BBC to visit England in 1955 to write some Overseas Service broadcasts for them.
- *Passage to England* is a collection of essays through which Chaudhuri documents his impressions of different aspects of England on his visits there.
- Chaudhuri gives his observation on the uniqueness of the city of London and describes how it is the mother-city of

many other cities all around the world. Calcutta is one such offspring of London.

- Chaudhuri next contrasts the public life in England and in India.
- English people prefer to stay quiet in public life: in pavements, trains, etc. This is in contrast to Indian people who become more interactive in public.
- Chaudhuri discussed how culture and civilization in India is thought of as something of the past and hence remains unpracticed. While in England the culture and civilization is interwined with ordinary life. It is living.
- The continued popularity of classical works of art and literature, demand for antiquities, easy availability of the best works of art in some of the best museums and galleries in England, etc. testifies that culture and civilization does exist there.

## **1.9 Keywords: English Life, Culture, East vs. West, Civilization.**

### **1.10 Terminal Questions**

1. What impression does Nirad C Chaudhuri gather about the topography of the city of London?
2. Discuss why Nirad C Chaudhuri does not consider London to be a historical city?
3. Elaborate on Nirad C Chaudhuri's view that Europe has a living culture and civilization.
4. How does Nirad C Chaudhuri contrast English public life with Indian public life? Cite examples from the text.

5. Critically examine the author's experiences in the town of Stratford in England.
6. Discuss the two tests that the Nirad C Chaudhuri suggests the English men if they are feel nihilistic about civilization.
7. Discuss Chaudhuri's exploration of the question of Shakespeare's popularity among the modern audience.
8. Explain how art and architectures are markers of a civilization based on Chaudhuri's experience in Europe.

### **1.11 Suggested Readings**

Chaudhuri, Nirad. (1960) *A Passage to England*.

Zama, M. (2004) *Prose of Our Times*.

Dhawan, Rajinder Kumar. (2000) Nirad C. *Chaudhuri: The Scholar Extraordinary*.