



**INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**  
**IDE**  
Rajiv Gandhi University



MAENG-506

# Indian English Literature–II

MA ENGLISH

4th Semester

**Rajiv Gandhi University**

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# Indian English Literature II

MAENG506  
IV SEMESTER



**RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY**

Arunachal Pradesh, INDIA - 791 112

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## About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives as envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.

## About IDE

The formal system of higher education in our country is facing the problems of access, limitation of seats, lack of facilities and infrastructure. Academicians from various disciplines opine that it is learning which is more important and not the channel of education. The education through distance mode is an alternative mode of imparting instruction to overcome the problems of access, infrastructure and socio-economic barriers. This will meet the demand for qualitative higher education of millions of people who cannot get admission in the regular system and wish to pursue their education. It also helps interested employed and unemployed men and women to continue with their higher education. Distance education is a distinct approach to impart education to learners who remained away in the space and/or time from the teachers and teaching institutions on account of economic, social and other considerations. Our main aim is to provide higher education opportunities to those who are unable to join regular academic and vocational education programmes in the affiliated colleges of the University and make higher education reach to the doorsteps in rural and geographically remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and North-eastern part of India in general. In 2008, the Centre for Distance Education has been renamed as "Institute of Distance Education (IDE)."

Continuing the endeavor to expand the learning opportunities for distant learners, IDE has introduced Post Graduate Courses in 5 subjects (Education, English, Hindi, History and Political Science) from the Academic Session 2013-14.

The Institute of Distance Education is housed in the Physical Sciences Faculty Building (first floor) next to the University Library. The University campus is 6 kms from NERIST point on National Highway 52A. The University buses ply to NERIST point regularly.

### **Outstanding Features of Institute of Distance Education:**

(i) At Par with Regular Mode

Eligibility requirements, curricular content, mode of examination and the award of degrees are on par with the colleges affiliated to the Rajiv Gandhi University and the Department(s) of the University.

(ii) Self-Instructional Study Material (SISM)

The students are provided SISM prepared by the Institute and approved by Distance Education Council (DEC), New Delhi. This will be provided at the time of admission at the IDE or its Study Centres. SISM is provided only in English except Hindi subject.

(iii) Contact and Counselling Programme (CCP)

The course curriculum of every programme involves counselling in the form of personal contact programme of duration of approximately 7-15 days. The CCP shall not be compulsory for BA. However for professional courses and MA the attendance in CCP will be mandatory.

(iv) Field Training and Project

For professional course(s) there shall be provision of field training and project writing in the concerned subject.

(v) Medium of Instruction and Examination

The medium of instruction and examination will be English for all the subjects except for those subjects where the learners will need to write in the respective languages.

(vi) Subject/Counselling Coordinators

For developing study material, the IDE appoints subject coordinators from within and outside the University. In order to run the PCCP effectively Counselling Coordinators are engaged from the Departments of the University, The Counselling-Coordinators do necessary coordination for involving resource persons in contact and counselling programme and assignment evaluation. The learners can also contact them for clarifying their difficulties in then respective subjects.

## SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

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### Syllabi

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**UNIT I: History of Indian English Literature II**

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**UNIT II: R. K. Narayan**

*The Guide*

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**UNIT III: Mulk Raj Anand**

*Coilie*

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**UNIT IV: Anita Desai**

*Voices in the City*

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**UNIT V: Amitava Ghosh**

*The Shadow Lines*

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# UNIT I: History of Indian English Literature II.

## 1.0 INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS

Up till this juncture, the Indo-Anglian literature grew and made itself available at the world level. But it must be mentioned that though prose and poetry written in Indian English flourished remarkably in India, novels and novelists were yet to make their way into the global literary scenario. The Indian literary history is inked with creativity that covers genres such as epics, fables, poetry, drama and short stories. But the novel established itself much later. As many critics and researchers would like to point out, the first known English novel written by an Indian was *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), unlike in Europe where novel as an independent genre evolved in the eighteenth century. During the initial days, the theme of novels revolved around the harsh realities of life that one came across in India. The second half of the nineteenth century India saw production of random novels and many of these novels had an overtly social and historical tone and seemed to be inspired by contemporary as well as leading British fiction writers, such as, Defoe, Fielding and Scott to name a few. Given these facts, one notable aspect is the unexpected appearance of a number of great women novelists.

Novels in India found a new voice after the First World War. Some novelists were attracted to the ideas and thoughts that questioned the very existence of capitalism and colonialism, like the ideas expressed by Marx. Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) is a prominent Indian English novelist whose works such as, *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud* and *Black Waters* looks at the lives of social sufferers who have been relegated to the margins of Indian society. Anand's plots revolve around the harsher realities of life and analyses the repercussions of social evils such as caste, class and religion that legitimizes economic exploitation.

After Anand, the other novelist that demands attention is Raja Rao (1908-2006) who played a commendable role in experimenting with narrative techniques. He combined the narrative elements of Indian epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata and a Western style reflected in Eliot and Joyce. His *Kanthapura* still remains one of the most coveted texts ever composed. Raja Rao, unlike his predecessor Anand, was keen on exploring the spiritual legacy that India treasures, but he never dealt with social issues that crippled the nation at the time. His style was to mix elements of the past with contemporary issues. In this way he was able to create a unique syntax of writing through which he bridged the gap between the past and the future. Myths and legends were recurring motifs in his writings. Titles of his novels reflected his choice of mixing myths and legends with present time. *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare: A Tale of India* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) are some of the examples. Rao's contribution to the literary sphere not only earn him literary recognition (he was honoured with the Sahitya Akademi award in 1964) but also fetched him many other prestigious awards at various national and international levels (PadmaBhushan, 1969; Neustadt International Prize for Literature, 1988; Padma Vibhushan, 2007).

The next novelist of great prominence who elevated the genre of novel in Indian English to a different milieu was R. K. Narayan (1906-2001). In sharp contrast to Mulk Raj Anand's fascination for social reality laced with humanism, Narayan presents us a world immersed in humor and irony, sympathy and fantasy yet, not undetached from realism. Narayan's writings display his inclinations towards philosophy as they reflected in his novels, such as, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The Dark Room* and many more. Most critics unanimously agree that Narayan's Malgudi is similar to Thomas Hardy's Wessex. Malgudi, like Wessex, is an imaginary town where Narayan's novels are set. Malgudi is a self-engrossed town that is detached from the outside world, yet external disturbances find a way to encroach upon the simulated harmony that exists there. For instance, the changing political scenario had an immense impact on the ostensibly detached world of Malgudi. Narayan's endearing appeal also lies in his simplicity. The way the child protagonist Swaminathan, from rural India, sees the world around him makes the stories of *Swami and Friends* an engaging read.

Novels written in Indian English that were published within the period 1935-1960, more often than not, recount the experiences under the colonial regime along with the problems and disillusionment post-Independence, its harsh yet irrefutable reality. The writers, whose creativity flourished during the decades of thirties and forties such as K. Nagarjan, R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and K.S. Venkataramani along with novelists who dominated the fifties such as Humayun Kabir, Ahmed Ali, K.A. Abbas and Kamala Markandiyaa, Nayantara Sahgal and Khushwant Singh have

highlighted the crisis of colonial as well as post-colonial India. While the Indo-Anglican literary scenario was gaining rapid success, globally, India was undergoing a violent political phase, which resulted in the Partition. This division of administrative jurisdiction led to strife and trauma of such intensity that it still remains one of the most traumatic events of Indian history.

Various reasons, ranging from catharsis to the urge to chronicle, have been offered as motives for the Partition as one of the recurring themes in Indian writing and fiction. These accounts and narratives echo the barbarity of Partition and the plight of people. Khushwant Singh, a prominent novelist, wrote *A Train to Pakistan* which narrates the pain of separation and bloodbath that migration and Partition brought for people of India and Pakistan. Singh's next attempt, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* narrates the ironic picture of a Sikh family which has a joint family structure and throws light on various Indian reactions to the freedom struggle that was taking place in the forties. The Partition came as a crisis in India and overpowered the narrative structure of novels written in English. Works of fiction such as these presented a dystopic point of view that anticipated the nuances and predicament of post-colonial theory and criticism.

## 1.5 INDIAN ENGLISH DRAMA

Indian English drama owes its origin to Krishna Mohan Banerji and his play *The Persecuted* written in 1837. Though, the real journey of Indian English Drama was launched by the efforts of Michael Madhamsudan Dutt through his play, *Is This Called Civilization* published in 1871. To this, one may add the contributions of Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. While Bengali remained Tagore's choice of language, his works are also available in English (most of which have been translated by Tagore himself). His corpus of writing is essentially rooted in the Indian tradition.

Sri Aurobindo wrote five blank verse plays that were complete. That apart, he also composed six incomplete plays. Some of his complete plays are *Radoguna*, *Vasavadutta*, *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Eric* and *The Viziers of Bassora*. Each of these complete works adheres to a five act structure. His incomplete plays include: *The Witch of Ilni*, *The Maid and the Mill*; *The House of Brut*, *The Birth of Sin* and *Prince of Edur* and *Achat and Esarhaddon*. Being incomplete, these plays range from one scene to three acts.

One of the most notable features of Sri Aurobindo's plays is that they narrate lives of people from various parts of the globe that echo a multitude of experience, moods and emotions. *Perseus the Deliverer* is based on the myth of Persues (from the ancient Greek source); *Vasavadutta* has been influenced from the romantic tale of ancient India. The romance, *Rodoguna*, owes its origin to Syria; *The Viziers of Bassora*, which is a romantic comedy, is set during the times when the great Haroun al Rashid lived. The romance of *Eric* is set within the boundaries of Scandinavia and narrates the tale of love and war that takes place between the offsprings of Odin and Thor. Aurobindo was an artist par excellence who dealt with all the major genres—comedy, tragedy, romance, heroic play and farce. On analyzing the texts we realize that Aurobindo is highly influenced by Elizabethan drama in terms of plot construction and characterization. In his works, Aurobindo employs the English blank verse to perfection.

Playwright Harindranath Chattopadhyay is an important figure in Indian English drama. He made his debut as a dramatist with *Abu Hassan* (1918). He published seven verse plays under the title *Poems and Plays* (1927). Interestingly all the seven plays revolve around the lives of Indian saints. The collection, *Five Plays* (1929) are composed in prose. While *The Window and The Parrot* narrates lives of the deprived, *The Sentry's Lantern* is a symbolic work that talks about the harbinger of a new era for the people who are deprived. And *Siddhartha: Man of Peace* is a dramatization of Buddha's life.

The other name that deserves mention is A.S.P. Ayyar who composed six plays. *The Clutch of The Devil*, published in 1926, was his first play while *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* was his last. The literary world remembers him for his unusual verse in the play *The Flute of Krishna*.

The other notable playwright is T.P. Kailasam. He composed both in English and Kannada languages. Kailasam is called the father of modern Kannada drama. His plays in English include *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfillment* (1933), *The Purpose* (1944), *Keechaka* (1949) and *Kama* (1964).



During the colonial era, many women writers emerged as significant playwrights. A prominent name is Bharati Sarabhai. She had written two plays titled *The Well of the People* (a symbolic and poetic text echoing Gandhian social ideology) and *Two Women* (a realistic play prying into the private world of individuals).

Another pre-Independence Indian English dramatist who deserves mention is J.M. Lobo Prabhu. He had composed more than a dozen plays of which two plays have become iconic. These are, *Mother of New India*, a play of Indian village in three acts (1944) and *Death Abdicates* (1945). These were published before Independence. Lobo Prabhu's *Collected Play* came out in 1956. Prabhu's strength was in his dialogues and situation. His characters, however, were devoid of lifelike conviction.

In post-Independence era, as far as drama composition in Indian English language was concerned, there was a silence of sorts. Though pre-Independence Indian English drama was rich in creativity, it failed to establish subsequent stage productions.

In post-Independence era, Indian English drama witnessed growing interest among people outside India. A decent number of plays composed by Indian playwrights such as Pratap Sharma, Asif Currimbhoy and Gurucharan Das were staged in England and the USA with unexpected success. But unfortunately India was unable to set up a regular platform to stage Indian English drama. One chief reason for this was that the Indian theatre was monopolized by regional language theatre productions, which had more popularity and demand. In other words, Indian English drama was yet to become a theatre of the masses.

Though plays in the post-Independence period were mostly written in prose, poetic plays were also plentiful. Writers such as GV. Desani, Lakhan Dev, Manjeri Isvaran, and Pritish Nandy made their contributions to theatre but with own specific style and deliberate deviations. Manjeri Isvaran's *Yama and Yami* (1948) narrates the incestuous love Yami nurtures for her brother. The play is composed in dialogue form, written in poetic prose that contains a prologue and an epilogue. GV.Desani's *Hali* (1950) is immersed in symbolism and imagery that talks about transcending human love; Lakhan Dev's *Tiger Claw* (1976) is a three act historical play centered around the controversial murder of Afzal Khan by Shivaji. His *Vivekananda* (1972) and *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1976) display an effortless use of blank verse. Other authors, who composed verse plays during this period include M.Krishnamurti (*The Cloth of Gold*, 1951), P.A.Krishnaswami (*The Flute of Krishna*, 1950), S. Raman (*Karme*, 1979), Satya Dev Jaggi (*The Point of Light*, 1967), S.D.Rawoot (*Immortal Song; Karm and the Killers*, 1959), Pritish Nandy (*RitesforaPlebian Salute*, 1969), P.S. Vasudev (*The Sunflower*, 1972) and Sree Devi Singh (*The Purple Braided People*, 1970).

The most celebrated playwright of the post colonial era is Asif Currimbhoy. He is credited for having composed and published more than thirty plays. Some of his popular titles include *The Tourist Meeca* (1959), *The Doldrumness* (1960), *The Restaurant* (1960), *The Captives* (1963), *Goa* (1964), *Monsoon* (1965), *An Experiment With Truth* (1969) and *Sonar Bangla* (1972) among many others. Despite being comprehensive, Currimbhoy's plays have been critiqued for lacking in plot coherence, obscure language and imperfect characterization.

Currimbhoy was succeeded by Pratap Sharma. He wrote two prose plays: *A Touch of Brightness* (1968) and *The Professor Has A War Cry* (1970). Sharma's plays were staged successfully in foreign shores though they failed to be staged in India.

Discussing about Indian drama, Nissim Ezekiel deserves a special mention. He was a prolific poet and playwright. Ezekiel's *Three Plays* (1969) (*NalinUA Comedy*, *Marriage Poem: A Tragi Comedy* and *The Sleep Walkers: An Indo-American farce*) were creative excellence in Indian English drama. *Songs of Deprivation* (1969), composed by Ezekiel is a short play. Ezekiel is known for his coherent settings, irony,

minute observation of human life and behavior and yet somewhere the poet always took over the dramatist.

## 1.6 CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

In the present times, Indian drama, shedding its classical and European inspiration, is experimental and innovative from the thematic and technical point of view. It is not derived from any specific tradition and has emerged as a distinctive tradition within the history of world drama by reintroducing and recreating myth, religion, history, legend and folklore that are based on contemporary socio-political issues. A theatrical tradition that was given shape by names such as Badal Sirkar, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulkar paved the way for contemporary Indian English theatre.

Girish Karnad, in his versatile role as writer, director and actor, enthusiastically contributed to the world of Indian English theatre. Karnad's dramatic sensibilities, were shaped by the influential touring undertaken by *'natak'* companies and, especially Yakshagana, that was not considered as classical art till recently. Karnad's famous plays include *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1962), *Hayavadana* (1970) and *Nagmandala* (1972). His plots came from mythology, history and old legends laced with symbolism. Credit goes to Karnad for trying to reintroduce their relevance in the contemporary socio-political milieu. The play *Yayati* retells an ancient story from the Mahabharata with a modern sensibility. The narrative of the play *Hayavadana* comes from *Katha Saritsagar* (ancient collection of stories composed in Sanskrit). *Tughlaq* is a historical play where he blurs facts with fiction through the presentation of the complex personality of Sultan Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq. Through his play *Tale Dande*, he unravels the significant relationship between the contemporary world and literature. His play *Nagmandala* deals with the conflict existing in the patriarchal and matriarchal order of society. Though critics suggest that Karnad's dramatic works are devoid of stability his success unfolds through the technical innovation sowed within traditional dramatic form.

Another notable name that Indian English theatre can boast of is Vijay Tendulkar. Tendulkar began his professional career as a journalist but he was always interested in theatre. His very first play was *Grihasth* (1955) and last one was *Safar* (1992). His plays provided Indian theatre with a fresh perspective on arts. He was one of the leading figures of the Vanguard (the avant-garde Marathi Theatre). Tendulkar's plays represented new awareness as they voiced the sufferings, pains and agonies of middle class society. His plays, more often than not, highlighted the theme of isolation of the individual and the individual's effort to combat hostile forces of nature. Tendulkar did not consider recurring violence within humans as something to be ashamed of because it was part of human nature. The representation of violence on stage never translated into anything grand, they were always natural. His plays *Chimanicha Ghor Hote Menache* (1960), *Kalajanchi Shalai* (1968) and *Ek Holti Mugli* (1967) display his concern with the idea of exploitation and authoritarian powers. The theme of oppression takes over the plays such as *Silence The Court Is In Session* (1968) and *Ghasiram Kotwal* (1972). *Sakharam Binder* (1972) narrates the gory tale of human violence. *Kamala* (1982) and *Kanyadaan* (1982) look into the complexity of the domestic space to understand the predicaments of marriage and exploitation. Tendulkar was associated with the New Theatrical Movement (Maharashtra) for a long time.

Badal Sircar is another name that vibrates throughout contemporary theatre. He was associated with the New Theatrical Movement in India. He created 'people's theatre' (a theatre that was run with the support of the people and was created by the people). His initial plays, *Evan Inderjit* (1962), *That Other History* (1964) and *There \ \u I'rid* (1971) showcase his concern with social, psychological, political and existential problems. *Evan Inderjit* depicts the tale of a playwright who tries hard to script a play. His play *Procession* tries to decipher the meaning of a 'real home' within the context of new society based on equality. *Bhoma* is again a fictional indianization of oppressed peasants who survived in India. Sircar's association with Grotowski's Poor Theatre worked as an impetus for him to create his Third Theatre.

Indian English drama would be incomplete without the mention of Mohan Rakesh. He originally wrote in Hindi but his plays were translated into English and other regional languages for their exceptional qualities. His first prominent play *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* was published in 1958. After that *Leharon Ke Rajhansa* appeared in 1963. His famous play *Adhe Adhure* was first staged in 1969 and the play *Pair Tale KvZamin* was completed by Kamleshwar and published posthumously in 1974. In his plays, Mohan Rakesh highlighted the crisis of contemporary society. He considered drama as

a complex system of production involving actors, light, special effects, sound and stage direction. He was well known for his extensive experiments in his plays.

Apart from male play writers, women dramatists also contributed a great deal to Indian English drama. They brought to Indian theater the inner feminine psyche which was missing in earlier productions. Women's theatre movement started off with Street Theatre movement. It was a kind of Theatre Of Protest where women writers voiced their disagreement over politics of exploitation that was based on gender discrimination. They also reworked on myths of *Sita* and *Savitri* and interpreted stories from the woman's point of view. The plays of Usha Ganguli and Mahasweta Devi fall under this category. Mahasweta Devi's feminist and social protest texts include *Mother of 1084*, *Aqjer Urvashi* *O'Johnny*, *Byen* and *Water*.

Mahesh Dattani indeed is one of the best playwrights of the contemporary times. Born on 7 August 1958 Bangalore, Dattani expressed himself in the English language to voice the ideas and dilemmas of the Indian sentiment and sensibility in the context of globalization. Some of his plays are *Where There is a Will*, *Final Solutions*, *Dance like a Man* and *Tara*.

Indian novelists of contemporary times who are writing in English include names, such as, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Deshpande, K. Nagrajan, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Raj Kamal Jha, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee, Bharti Kirchner, Atnit Chaudhuri, Vikas Swarup, Rohinton Mistry, C R. Krishnan, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamla Markandya, Vikaram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee and Arundhati Roy to name a few. Among these most of the writers are settled in the West. Through their plays these writes are trying to portray a hybrid identity. Their novels echo a post-colonial world which is haunted by neo-colonial troubles such as social evils, economic catastrophes, governmental corruption and other forms of oppression. Their experience relating to cultural migration provides new perspectives as well as creative avenues that form the aesthetic impulse of new Indian writing in English. Mostly set in the urbanized West these authors show a tendency to stage contemporary social issues and cultural troubles in their own geography and put an effort to redefine it through the postcolonial context. In their fiction they add the past, the present and the future along with the imperial and colonial experiences, thereby, blurring the distinction of time and introducing a new scope and purpose.

As far as the poetical scenario is concerned, today Indian English poetry holds a place of its own in the milieu of world poetry. Though years ago when poets, such as, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Arun Kolatkar, Gieve Patel, Adil Jussawalla, Jayanta Mahapatra and Dilip Chitre, who ruled the writing world during fifties, sixties and seventies, found themselves struggling to get published. To combat this, they domain jointly started a small press and produced magazines. Subsequent poets include names such as Sarang, R Parathsarathy, Pritish Nandy, K Ayyappa Paniker, Kamala Das and others who experimented with theme and structure and provided a new lease of life to Indian poetry in English.

### **Activity**

Read R.R. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* and comment on the ways in which language has been used.

### **Did You Know**

Representation of women writers, pre-Independence, has given rise to many arguments regarding the possibility of accurately re-presenting the marginalized. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay, *Can the Subalterns Speak?* is one of the most influential essays that discusses the visibility of the marginalized (and the silenced).

## 1.7 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Indian English literature is an umbrella term used to identify literature composed by Indian writers residing in India who chose to write in English instead of their native or co-native language.
- Indian English literature also extends to those compositions that are penned by the members belonging to the community addressed as the Indian diaspora.
- This gamut of literature, many a times, is referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. This category of literature many a times is associated with post-colonial literature.
- The formal link between India and the English language can be traced back to the introduction of the English language as a means of communication in India and the casual treatment of English literature as a subject of study in various Indian universities.
- The year 1794 is the real benchmark year for Indian literature in English. Dean Mahomet (1759-1851) acquired the distinction of being the first Indian author who published and composed his work in English.
- Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) are two prolific writers of the time for their contribution to Indian English writings. Dutt composed epic verses in English and Chatterjee wrote the novel, *Rajmohan's Wife*.
  - A young lady who was writing in English around this time was Toru Dutt (1856-1877). She penned poems and novels in both French and English.
  - Manmohan Ghose (1869-1924) is another author whose mention is important. His first poetry collection was *Primavera* (1890).
  - Though Indian literature in English had acquired a distinct identity of its own, it was not until the time of Rabindranath Tagore that took the whole experience to a different level and won the Noble Prize for literature.
  - It might seem that the Indo-Anglian literature in its initial days was exclusive to male authors only. Not many women writers were writing in English at that time, though one can trace the presence of a number of female writers in the regional languages.
  - London and Cambridge educated Sarojini Naidu had made immense contribution towards literature in the pre-colonial period. Her poetry *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 followed by *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917).
  - Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth* (1925), remains as one of the best autobiographies to have been ever composed.
  - Novels in India found a new voice after the end of the First World War. Some novelists were attracted by ideas and thoughts that questioned the very existence of capitalism and colonialism, like the ideas expressed by Marx.
  - A novelist of great prominence who elevated the genre of the novel in Indian English to a different milieu was R. K. Narayan (1906-2001).
  - Indian English drama owes its origin to Krishna Mohan Banerji and his play *The Persecuted* written in 1837.
  - Playwright, Harindranath Chattopadhyay is an important figure in Indian English drama. He made his debut as a dramatist with *Abu Hassan* (1918).
  - During the colonial era, many women writers emerged as significant playwrights. Prominent among them is Bharati Sarabhai who wrote two plays titled *The Well of the People* (a symbolic and poetic text echoing Gandhian social ideology) and *Two Women* (a realistic play prying into the private world of individuals).
  - A theatrical tradition that was given shape by names such as Badal Sircar, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh and Vijay Tendulkar paved the way for contemporary Indian English theatre.
  - Badal Sircar is another name that vibrates throughout contemporary theatre. He was associated with the New Theatrical Movement in India.
  - As far as the poetical scenario is concerned, today Indian English poetry holds a place of its own in the milieu

of world poetry.

## 1.8 KEY TERMS

- **Babu English:** It was a term coined during the colonial era to mark the encounter between the language of the colonizers (English) and the natives.
- **Blank verse:** It is poetry written in regular metrical but unrhymed lines, almost always iambic pentameters.
- **Indian English:** It refers to works written by Indians in English language.

## 1.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The year 1800 has been considered the 'starting point' for 'the literature written largely by Indians in English' by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. This year is not relevant for any specific literary contribution, but holds more substance as a historically important juncture. By this period, the British had managed to annihilate every kind of political opposition that could have posed a challenge to their authority in the Indian continent.
2. Initially there were three categories of writing that were being published widely. These were: newspapers, atlas as well as maps of different regions.
3. The formal link between India and the English language can be traced back to the introduction of the English language as a means of communication in India and the casual treatment of English literature as a subject of study in various Indian universities. Macaulay's Minute presented in 1833 made way for the inclusion of English language as a medium of teaching with the proclamation that 'the English tongue would be the most useful for our native subjects.'
4. The basic idea behind the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj was to remove old and redundant rituals and give way to new ideas. It also worked to improve the position of women in the society.
5. Toru Dutt was a poet and novelist who wrote in both French and English.
6. Sarojini Naidu contributed immensely towards the cause of Indo-English literature. Her first anthology of poetry *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 followed by *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917).
7. *Raj Mohan's Wife*, written in 1864 by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay is regarded as the first known English novel written by an Indian.
8. After the First World War, some of the novelists were attracted by ideas and thoughts that questioned the existence of capitalism and colonialism, like the ideas expressed by Marx. One of the prominent writers of this period was Mulk Raj Anand.
9. A notable feature of Aurobindo's plays was that they narrated lives of people from various parts of the globe that echoed a multitude of experience, moods and emotions.
10. A prominent name among women playwrights that emerged in the colonial era was that of Bharati Sarabhai's.
11. Narayan presented a world immersed in humor and irony, sympathy and fantasy yet not undetached from realism. Narayan's writings displayed his inclinations towards philosophy. Narayan's endearing appeal also lay in his simplicity.
12. Some of the eminent Indian English playwrights of post-Independence era were Pratap Sharma, Asif Currimbhoy and Gurucharan Das. People like GV. Desani,

Lakhan Dev, Manjeri Isvaran, and Pritish Nandy also contributed to theater but with own specific style and deliberate deviations.

13. Girish Karnad and Badal Sirkar was among the famous playwrights of contemporary India.
14. Indian novelists of contemporary times who are writing in English include names, such as, Shashi Deshpande, K. Nagrajan, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Raj Kamal Jha, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee, Bharti Kirchner, Amit Chaudhuri, Vikas Swarup, Rohinton Mistry, C R.Krishnan, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghose, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamla Markandya, Vikaram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee and Arundhati Roy to name a few.

## 1.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. How did the printing press in the late seventeenth century affect the Indian literary scenario?
2. Write a short note on *Babu English* as the midpoint between the language of the colonizers and the natives.
3. Write a brief note on the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore to Indian English.
4. Write a short note on Indian English novel with special emphasis on any one writer.
5. In theatre, what were the thematic preoccupations of the post-Independence era?
6. How was the British East India Company instrumental in bringing the English language to India?
7. What was Gandhi's contribution towards Indian English literature?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Trace the growth of Indian English prose and poetry?
2. Who were the pioneers of Indian English novels? You may refer to Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* for its unique style in theme and writing.
3. Indian English drama registered a marked change in its aesthetics post-Independence. Explain.
4. Give a critical overview of the theatre of the contemporary period.
5. The casual treatment of English was instrumental in the rise of Indian writing in English. Discuss.
6. In its initial days, Indo-Anglian literature was dominated by male authority only. Comment.
7. What are the reasons to consider Gandhi's South African period (1893-1915) as intellectually productive?

## 1.11 FURTHER READING

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# UNIT 4 A. K. RAMANUJAN AND NISSIM EZEKIEL

## Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 A. K. Ramanujan: A Brief Sketch
- 2.3 Ramanujan's *A River*: Text and Summary
  - 2.3.1 Important Passages for Explanation
  - 2.3.2 Irony in *A River*
  - 2.3.3 Theme of *A River* 2.3.4 Structure of *A River*
- 2.4 Ramanujan's *Obituary*: Text and Summary
  - 2.4.1 Historical Context of the Poem
  - 2.4.2 Important Passages for Explanation
  - 2.4.3 Irony in *Obituary*
  - 2.4.4 Theme of *Obituary*
  - 2.4.5 Structure of *Obituary*
- 2.5 Nissim Ezekiel: A Brief Sketch
  - 2.5.1 Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion*: Text and Summary
- 2.6 *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*: Text and Summary
  - 2.6.1 Elements of Thdianness' in *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*
  - 2.6.2 The Use of Language in *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*
  - 2.6.3 The Speaker in Poem
  - 2.6.4 Poetic Devices Used in a *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T. S.*
  - 2.6.5 Modern Life in Ezekiel's Poems
  - 2.6.6 Pursuit of the Self in Nissim Ezekiel's Poems
- 2.7 Summary
- 2.8 Key Terms
- 2.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 2.10 Questions and Exercises
- 2.11 Further Reading

# UNIT 4 R.K. NARAYAN AND MULK RAJ ANAND

## Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Unit Objectives
- 4.2 R. K. Narayan: A Brief Sketch
- 4.3 *The Guide*: A Summary
- 4.4 Major Themes in the Novel
  - 4.4.1 Family Relationships
  - 4.4.2 Rejection of Traditional Norms and Its Consequences
  - 4.4.3 From Selfishness to Selflessness
  - 4.4.4 Emancipation of Women
  - 4.4.5 Transition from Illusion to Reality
  - 4.4.6 Class Difference
- 4.5 Characters
  - 4.5.1 Raju
  - 4.5.2 Rosie
  - 4.5.3 Marco
- 4.6 R. K. Narayan's Technique of Writing
- 4.7 Mulk Raj Anand: A Brief Sketch
- 4.8 *Coolie*: A Critical Appreciation
- 4.9 Summary
- 4.10 Key Terms
- 4.11 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 4.12 Questions and Exercises
- 4.13 Further Reading

## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to two famous novelist and short story writers who were the founders of the English-language Indian novels.

— R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand

Narayan is one of the most famous and widely read Indian authors of the twentieth century. He is credited with introducing Indian culture to the rest of the world. Though Narayan's work has been often criticized for being too simple in prose and diction, he has managed to gain international visibility based on his highly-localized novels that are usually set in the fictional Mysorean village of

**Malgudi—the single most endearing 'character' created by Narayan.**

In 1935, Narayan began his writing career with *Swami and Friends*. Not only has the Indian culture been described intricately in Narayan's writings, it also possesses a uniqueness of its own. He was a gifted author who immaculately described the simplicity of old days and how people tried to cope with the changing world.



Some of Narayan's famous works include *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Park Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *Malgudi Days* (1982), and *The Grandmother's Tale* (1993).

On the other hand, Mulk Raj Anand is known for his realistic and sympathetic portrayal of the poor. Born in Peshawar (now in Pakistan) on 12 December 1905, he went to University College, London, and Cambridge University after graduating from Khalsa College in Amritsar in 1924. He actively participated in India's independence while in Europe. At the same time, he wrote a series of books on South Asian Culture. These were *Persian Painting* (1930), *Curries and Other Indian Dishes* (1932), *The Hindu View of Art* (1933), *The Indian Theatre* (1950), and *Seven Little-Known Birds of the Inner Eye* (1978). As a novel writer he gained wide recognition with *Untouchables* in 1935 and *Coolie* the following year. Anand also wrote short-stories and edited numerous magazines and journals, including *Marg*, an art quarterly that he founded in 1946. He also intermittently worked on a projected seven-volume autobiographical novel entitled *Seven Ages of Man*, completing four volumes: *Seven Summers* (1951), *Morning Face* (1968), *Confession of a Lover* (1976), and *The Bubble* (1954).

## 4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Recall important various aspects of R. K. Narayan's career
- Summarize the novel *The Guide* by Narayan
- Describe the major themes of *The Guide*
- Recall important aspects of Mulk Raj Anand's life
- Summarize the text of *Coolie*

## 4.2 R. K. NARAYAN: A BRIEF SKETCH

Among the Indian writers in English, R. K. Narayan has a special place in history. As a novelist, he maintained India's essence in all his works rather than adopting traditional Western style.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan was born on 10 October 1906 at Puraswalkam, Madras. It was a congested, noisy and dusty downtown locality. The large family of Iyers included many uncles, brothers, sisters and cousins. Narayan was the third of eighteen children of his parents. The household included grandmothers and grandfathers on both mother's and father's side besides grand uncles and aunts. This was because of the practice of intermarriage between the sister's and brother's children.

Narayan was looked after more by his maternal grandmother addressed as Ammani, rather than by his own mother. His grandmother had a great influence on his life. She affectionately called him Kunjappa, a name that he was called by among his family. She took on the responsibility of educating him, teaching him arithmetic, mythology, classical Indian music and Sanskrit. English was the language spoken in their house.

According to R. K. Laxman, Narayan's youngest brother, grammatical errors the siblings made were not looked upon too kindly. During his stay with his grandmother, Narayan attended many schools including the Lutheran Mission School in Purasawalkam, the C.R.C. High School, and the Christian College High School.

Reading was a passion for Narayan and as a young boy he read the works of Dickens, Wodehouse, Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Hardy. At the age of twelve, Narayan took part in a pro-independence march. His act was frowned upon by his uncle. The family was not inclined towards politics as they regarded all governments as wicked.

### **Narayan's Education**

Narayan studied at his father's school and disappointed his family's emerging middleclass aspirations as he failed his first attempt to qualify for the graduate course in Arts. When his father was transferred to the Maharajah's Collegiate High School, Mysore, Narayan shifted there to be with his family. Delighted by the well-stocked library at school as well as his father's collection, Narayan's reading habit intensified.

It was at this time that he started writing as well. After a failed attempt at the university entrance exam, he spent a year at home just reading and writing. He cleared the exam in 1926 and joined the Maharaja College of Mysore. A formal education did not seem to suit him as he took four years to complete his graduation, a year more than normal. He would have pursued an MA degree but was dissuaded by a friend who was convinced this would kill his interest in literature. Instead, he took to teaching in a school but walked out when he was asked by the headmaster to act as a stand-in for the physical training instructor.

With this experience came the realization that, for him, writing was the only career. He then made up his mind to stay at home and concentrate on writing novels. His first published work was a book review of *Development of Maritime Laws of 17th-Century England*. In the meantime, he never faltered in his resolve to write for a living; he also tried to make ends meet by freelance journalism and keeping odd jobs. He kept on writing and submitting stories for newspapers and magazines.

### **Narayan's Career**

As Narayan was struggling with a writing career, he couldn't contribute financially to household expenses. The lot fell on his elder brother who literally had to burn the midnight oil to keep the family going. Narayan stayed at home, typing the script of a play on a noisy typewriter, while his father, along with others, were certain that he was wasting his time trying to make a living as a writer.

The completion of his first novel did not bear immediate fruition as, for Narayan, it was not easy to find either a publisher or a reading audience. In 1933, while on vacation at his sister's house, Narayan fell in love with a fifteen-year-old girl Raj am. Astrologically and financially they were mismatched but with great difficulty Narayan managed to obtain parental approval and married her. Subsequent to this, Narayan joined a paper called *The Justice* as a reporter. His strict rebellion against the caste-difference in India, especially that between a Brahmin and a non-Brahmin, was displayed in this newspaper which was dedicated to the rights of non-Brahmins. As part of his job, he was exposed to a variety of people and various causes.

Earlier, Narayan had sent the manuscript of a novel to a friend at Oxford, who showed it to Graham Greene. It was this first novel, *'Swami and Friends'*, which brought him in contact with Greene. The first novel of Narayan was published again in 1935 under Greene's care in England. Greene also advised Narayan to shorten his name to enable it to be easier for the English-speaking readers. In his first novel, he attempted to be a realist and used his own experiences in the form of a story.

Though it elicited favourable reviews, sales figures did not go up. The Indian publishing industry in the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s was not very well organized. There were not many readers of Indian fiction in English. This meant small or nonexistent means to support oneself as a writer.

In 1931, after trying to interest all available publishers in his short stories and after trying to find a job in the newspaper *The Hindu* as a trainee reporter, he had a book review and short story published in *The Indian Review*. In 1933, *Punch* published his short satirical article, 'How to Write an Indian Novel.' In 1934 and 1935, he worked as the Mysore reporter for *The Justice*, the official organ of the non-brahmin movement.

Towards the end of the 1930s, Narayan started to contribute regularly with short stories and other pieces to *The Hindu*. This paper published many of his short stories and essays. During the latter half of the 1930s, Narayan's work was published in the magazine, *Frontline*. These included some essays, short stories, and three novels in a serial form. During the middle of his literary graph, Narayan had a fruitful association with *The Illustrated Weekly* and *The Times of India*.

R. K. Laxman, India's greatest cartoonist and the writer's youngest brother, was also deeply associated with these periodicals.

His next novel was *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), which is a picture of his own college life and experiences. In this book, Narayan described how marriages in India are finalized based on horoscopes and how a wife bears all animosities of her husband in the social contract of marriage. A different publisher on Greene's recommendation published it. Soon, '*The Dark Room*' (1938) was published, which dealt with the theme of domestic disharmony. In his third book, he wrote about a dominating husband whose wife was a victim of his oppression. Narayan's first three books dealt with socially accepted practices. In 1937 after his father's death, he accepted a commission from the Government of Mysore, which was a proposal to write a book to promote tourism in the state.

*Malgudi Days*, his first collection of short stories, was published in November 1942. The fictional town of Malgudi is the setting for most of Narayan's stories. The people there are simple and humble, and represent the middle class. *The English Teacher* was published in 1945. In the interim period, due to the war, Narayan was cut off from England. During this time, he started his own publishing company and named it Indian Thought Publications.

### **R. K. Narayan: A Comparative Analysis**

Narayan was one of the first Indians to have his work published outside India with the exception of Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie. Before we analyse and compare Narayan's work, it would be apt to describe the unique features of his writing style. His writings were considered to be simple and unpretentious with a dash of humour. Narayan mainly focussed on ordinary people and his writings usually reminded the reader of people who are a part of their daily life, such as the next-door neighbour, cousins, friends and postman. It was this focus on ordinary people that the readers are able to relate to the story as it unfolds. Narayan had a very different approach from his contemporaries and was able to give a detailed version of the Indian society without making changes in his characteristics or the simplicity of his subject. His writings seem to be devoid of the current trends in fiction writing and, therefore, are unique in their own sense. Narayan's work is said to have gentle Tamil overtones and he also

employed the use of nuanced dialogic prose. Critics who have evaluated Narayan's work consider it to be descriptive and less analytical. They point out that his objective style is rooted in a detached spirit which provides a more authentic and realistic narration. His experience of life coupled with his attitude provided a unique blend of characters and actions, creating a connection with the readers.

### **4.3 THE GUIDE: A SUMMARY**

*The Guide* is the story of a selfish middle class hero named Railway Raju, who does not complete his schooling, but spends his life cheating himself and all those who surrounded him for reasons best known to him. In the end turns a demi-God. Ironically, the life of the protagonist ends in sacrificing himself for an illusory cause. Narayan traces the career of this man from obscurity and ordinariness to prosperity and eminence, and finally his downfall.

Through the life of Raju, Narayan beautifully brings out the lives of Rosie, Marco, Gaffur and Raju's mother.

*The Guide* is thoroughly Indian, not only in its characters but also in its theme, ideas, imagery and sensibility. It depicts the ironies of life and is a blend of comedy and seriousness. While there is a certain amount of social satire, there is no didactic aim or intention in this story of adultery.

*The Guide* possesses perfect artistic unity. Characters, setting, story, symbol, and style, all of them are functionally related to each other to create an artistic unity. The characters grow according to their own laws, and not according to the novelist. He is only suggesting the nature of his characters and the meaning of their acts and perhaps his own attitude towards them in relation to his vision of life. Raju's death, viewed symbolically, means that, if the individual who loses his life for the sake of his fellowmen, his 'death by water' is no death but a means of purification and self-realization.

It is the triumph of the traditional mode of living through natural and manmade catastrophes.

The whole story in the novel goes in flashbacks. The author moves on two planes — the past and present.

#### **The Story**

Raju is the son of a vendor at the Malgudi railway station. His father had built the house long before the railways had arrived. The railways brought prosperity as it opened up Malgudi for tourists. Scores of people come to see the ancient caves in the Mempi forests which had antique paintings of great cultural importance.

Soon, Raju got involved in entertaining tourists and taking them around the place. He knew Tamil and had studied at the Board High School for some time. Gradually Raju became Railway Raju, a famous guide whom visitors asked for. His friend Gaffur, who operated a taxi, was his biggest help.

A scholar of ancient culture, Marco, comes to visit Malgudi to study the paintings in the caves. Raju lodges him at the Anand Bhavan Hotel and takes him to show the caves in Gaffur's taxi. Soon, thereafter, Marco's wife Rosie comes too. She is a postgraduate, 'not very glamorous, but she did have a figure, slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion, not white but dusky'. She

belongs to a family of temple dancers. Marco married her after advertising for a bride with education and good looks. She is, however, not interested in Marco's passion for paintings and objects of art. Rising with good temperament but sleeping after a quarrel is their routine. In such a situation, betraying his relationship with his wife, Marco affords an opportunity to Raju to be closer to Rosie.

As a tourist guide, praising and flattering has become Raju's second nature and he succeeds marvelously with Rosie. Dancing is her weakness, which is detested by Marco as 'street acrobatics'. But Raju tries his trick by praising her talent for dance to the extent that he succeeds in establishing sexual relationship with her after whetting her dissatisfaction for Marco. All this comes to the notice of Marco very soon and he abandons Rosie at the Malgudi station before leaving for Madras. She comes to stay with Raju in his house and starts practising dance.

These developments become intolerable to his mother and she leaves with her brother for her village. Raju's shop at the platform is swindled by his assistant and he is indebted to Sait for eight thousand rupees. The shop is allotted to another contractor. The creditor, Sait, files a criminal case against Raju for assaulting him. But he does not abandon Rosie. After she has had enough practice, he secures a chance for her dance performance at the Albert Mission College students' function. It proves a breakeven incident and Rosie becomes a star dancer. Her name is changed to Nalini and invitations for her performance come from all the corners of south India. Huge amounts are paid in advance and she is always booked.

Raju, too, becomes a respectable person with judges, ministers, officers and mill-owners seeking his company. His household has several servants, a driver and a Gurkha guard. One day, Raju receives a book, *The Cultural History of South India*, sent by Marco's publishers. He does not show or talk about it with Rosie. After some time he finds an insured envelop addressed to Rosie from Marco's lawyers. It contains a document for the release of a jewellery box to be signed by Rosie. Fearing revival of feelings for Marco in Rosie's heart, Raju forges her signatures on the document and sends it back. Soon he is arrested on Marco's complaint. In spite of Rosie's best efforts, he is sentenced to two years' imprisonment. While in jail, he is a model prisoner and is referred to as a teacher. But, after his release, he comes to the village of Mangal and camps at an old desolated temple on the banks of river Sarayu.

The poor, ignorant but innocent villagers gather faith in him and start flocking round him for solutions to their personal problems. They come to believe that his mere look transforms a person. They bring him offerings of fruit, rice and milk and clothes on festivals. They start calling him the 'swami'. Many years pass by thus. Then there is a drought. Drought results in famine. Food brawls and murders start taking place. In his humility, Raju sends a message to a man named Velan and other villagers to stop quarrelling, otherwise he would not eat. The message is sent through an idiot who reports that the Swami informs that he would not eat until it rains. Villagers from far and near start thronging the place to have a glimpse of the holy man who is fasting for rains. Newspapers flash this news and several governmental agencies come to exploit the potential of the congregation there.

Raju tries his utmost to explain to Velan that he never intended to fast for rains and does not want to do it. He tells Velan of his past life of crime and lust. But the reverence for his holy appearance with long beard and hair is so stupefying that Velan does not react except with renewed submission. Raju has no option but to rise to the demands of the situation. He undertakes to fast and pray in the knee-deep waters for

the arrival of rains. On the eleventh day, he collapses while praying in the river bed with the prophecy that it has started raining in the hills. *The Guide* is, thus, a very powerful story. It has a strong mythological base.

### **Opening of the Novel**

As the novel opens, we find Raju sitting alone and bored in a crossed-legged position on a granite slab on the banks of river Sarayu, waiting for someone's company. A gullible villager, Velan, comes and sits two steps below where Raju is sitting. When asked, the stranger tells Raju that he is from Mangala, 'not very far from here'. He is returning from a visit to his sister who lives nearby. Raju likes his 'rambling talk' and remembers how he met the loquacious barber just outside the prison gate soon after his release. Raju was not ready to talk about his conviction and sentence but the barber guessed that Raju had not committed any serious crime. After he had finished, he told Raju that he looked 'like a maharaja'.

The narrative then goes into the flashback. The incident of the villager who has come to consult with him happened long ago. The narrative then gets somewhat confusing as Narayan moves forward to tell the villager, named Velan, his life story. It is at this time that Rosie is introduced to the reader. There is another swing to the past where the narrator recounts his childhood before returning to Velan and his problems. The blank lines he has inserted in the narrative mark the points at which the settings change.

### **Raju mistaken for a *Sadhu***

Velan mistakes Raju for a holy man and entreats him to solve his domestic problem. His half-sister has run away from the house on the day of her marriage and was traced in a fair in a distant village three days later. The girl sulked in a room the whole day and Velan wondered whether she was possessed by an evil spirit. As is his wont, Raju makes light of the whole thing saying that such things are a part of life.

Then he remembers how his troubles started when Rosie came into his life. It was a strange name for a typical South Indian woman. She was not a foreigner and she could have had any other Indian name like Devi, Meena or Lalita. It was a memorable day when he saw the ill-matched couple at the Malgudi station. Raju knew that Marco was 'a lifelong customer' for him.

Raju was fated to become a tourist guide. He muses; 'I was a guide for the same reason that someone else is a signaller, porter or guard. It is fated thus'. He was influenced by the railways since very early in life. He felt at home on the railway platform and 'considered the railway master and porter the best company for man and their talk the most enlightened. I grew up in their midst.'

### **Raju's Childhood**

Raju's father had built their house outside Malgudi town with papaya trees all around. Initially, he sold the papaya and later he built a small shop of 'planks and gunny sack' outside the house. Here, he sold peppermint fruit, tobacco, betel-leaf, parched gram and whatever else the wayfarers on the Trunk Road demanded. As a child, Raju was asked to help his father when he went home for his mid-day meals. They were woken up early in the morning with the crowing of the neighbourhood cock. They began their day with the ritual pooja before the pictures of gods. After his father had milked the cow, he tried to teach Raju the Tamil alphabet on the *pyol* of the house. But Raju

was not interested in studies. He was relieved when his father went to attend his shop. He would rush off to the shade of a tamarind tree across the road and play there all day. Sometimes his father took him to the town in a bullock cart for shopping. Raju liked these excursions: 'Men and vehicles, hogs and boys— the panorama of life enchanted me.'

As Raju is musing over his childhood and how he came to be a tourist guide, the stranger interrupts his trail of thoughts with his problem. He then suggests to the worried Velan to bring his sister to him. Raju ruminates: 'I wish I had asked him what the age of the girl was. Hope she is uninteresting. I have had enough trouble in life.' Raju starts feeling that he is 'attaining the stature of a saint'.

### **Velan and his Sister**

The next morning, Velan brings his sister there. He also brings some food and other offerings for Raju. The girl has braided her hair and decorated herself with jewellery. Raju sits up rubbing his eyes: 'He was as yet unprepared to take charge of the world's affairs. His immediate need was privacy for his morning ablutions.' He asks them to go a certain distance away and wait for him. Raju starts telling them the story of Devaka which he cannot complete. Velan and his sister keep following him as he strides across the temple majestically; they also keep listening to him mutely. Velan is of the stuff disciples are made of: an unfinished story or an incomplete moral never bothers him; it is all 'in the scheme of life'.

As Raju fumbles with the story his mother had told him, he starts thinking of his childhood again. His father would keep chatting with the wayfarers outside his 'Hut-Shop' till late at night without bothering to have his meals despite several reminders from Raju's mother. While waiting for his father to come home after closing the shop, Raju would insist that his mother tell him a story. Raju tells Velan that he is not going to think of his problems right now; he will consider them and render his advice when 'the time is ripe for it'. Velan accepts this answer 'with resignation' and rises to leave. Raju then points to his sister and tells Velan: 'I know what your problem is, but I wish to give the matter some thought. We cannot force vital solutions. Every question must bide its time.... And to arrive at a proper understanding time is needed.' Raju is himself surprised at what he is saying.

Velan is relieved to hear that 'his master' is seized of the problem faced by him. He looks 'significantly' at his 'difficult sister' who bows her head in shame. Raju gazes at her and tells her 'What must happen must happen; no power on earth or in heaven can change its course just as no one can change the course of this river.' Satisfied with these platitudes, Velan and his sister leave. As we shall see, Raju's words leave a great impact on Velan's sister; she goes from there a 'changed girl'.

Narayan starts the narrative in the middle of the story and he plunges straight into the story a couple of days, after Raju's release from prison. His chance meeting with an illiterate and gullible villager, Velan, gradually elevates the former tourist guide and jailbird to sainthood. By uttering a few platitudes, Raju is able to win Velan's confidence and Velan, as Narayan points out, is 'of the stuff that disciples are made of. In course of time, he becomes Raju's follower, constant companion and confidant. Besides, he provides him with faith.

Narayan's narrative technique in *The Guide* is unusual. There is a constant shifting between the present and the past. For instance, as Velan relates his immediate

problem to Raju, the latter dashes back to his past and the time when all his problems started. There are also dexterous touches, the typical Narayan tongue-in-cheek humour as in the description of Rosie's husband, Marco, the eternal tourist.

### **Raju's Schooling**

Raju thinks of the time when the railway line was being laid a little distance away from his house. It would take six to eight months for the tracks to be laid before trains could come to Malgudi. Work continued at a brisk pace, Raju lost part of his freedom under the tamarind tree because lorries were parked there now. He would climb onto them and play; nobody minded him but his clothes became dirty. He would often stand on top of red mud and view the distant Mempi hills. Gradually, he befriended the men working on the track listening to their talk and sharing their jokes. Raju's father was worried and he decided to admit him to school, which he loathed'. A great fuss was made every morning when Raju was sent to school. He was dressed in clean shirt and shorts, his hair was combed and a tiffin was packed for him. But it soon became a drudgery for Raju: 'I preferred to be neglected and stay at home than to be fussed over and sent to a school.' But he was helpless as his father was a stern disciplinarian who would take no nonsense from him.

The teacher, an old man, believed in 'getting the maximum noise out of his pupils'. Raju would have preferred to be sent to the fashionable Albert Mission School which was close by. 'I'd have felt proud to call myself an Albert Mission boy,' But his father didn't want him to have anything to do with a Christian school. The place where Raju was sent to study was hardly a school. The teacher was an abusive man, who habitually used to address his pupils as donkeys. Whenever the teacher went inside the house, which was very often, the students would peep in to see what was going on there. Once they saw the teacher cooking while his wife stood closely. From that day the teacher decreed that his students were not to cross the threshold of his house. From that day they never peeped in again but confined their attention to the drain that flowed beneath the *pyol*. The teacher's fee was one rupee a month per student and whatever else his students brought him. That was his only interest in his students who felt honoured to serve him. Despite the teacher's obvious disinterest in him and Raju's own indifference to studies, he proved 'good enough.'

### **Velan's Problem Solved**

When Velan comes to see Raju the next day, the girl listens to Raju's advice and apologizes to her brother for the inconvenience and embarrassment caused. She also agrees to get married to the person chosen by Velan. This establishes Raju's claim as a holy man in Velan's village. He, however, does not attend the girl's marriage. He does not want to be seen in a crowd and he does not want to gather a crowd around him as a man who has worked a change in an obstinate girl. Velan brings the girl to him along with her husband and a crowd of villagers and relatives. The incident attracts more followers. Raju is now looked upon as a holy man and people gather around him every evening. Raju cannot question them or ask them to go away as the river bank is a public place, where he himself is an intruder. People come and sit on the steps lower, to where Raju sits and keep looking at him. He doesn't have to say a word to anyone; he just keeps sitting there at the same place, and tries hard to think 'where he should go from there next and what to do.' People do not so much 'whisper a word for fear that it might disturb him'. Raju is 'beginning to feel uncomfortable on



these occasions' and wonders 'if he could devise some means of escape from their company'. Throughout the day he is practically left alone, but late in the evening after finishing their work, the villagers would come there; they felt blessed in his company.

### **Raju's Indecisiveness about being a Holy Man**

One evening before the people arrive, Raju moves to the backyard of the temple and hides himself behind a huge hibiscus bush full of red flowers. He hears their voices on the steps of the river. Talking in low whispers, they go round the shrine and pass by the hibiscus bush where Raju is hiding. He holds his breath and waits. He thinks of an excuse of hiding there in case, he is discovered. He would tell them that he has found this an ideal place for meditation. But fortunately they do not look for him there and wonder where the swami could have gone. 'What a pity he is not here today!' They exchange views on how the swami has changed their lives ever since his arrival. They all miss him. They leave the food they have brought him in the temple and go home since it was getting dark. As Raju cautiously peeps out of his hiding place, he hears their voices trailing off in the distance. Since he is hungry, he goes inside the shrine and devours the food they have brought wrapped in a banana leaf for him. He prays that Velan never discovers who he is in reality; he is grateful for the food Velan and his friends regularly bring for him. At the same time, he is amused at the qualities they attribute to him.

The next morning, Raju gets up early, washes his clothes at the river, makes himself coffee and feels 'completely at ease with the world'. He must decide on his future now. The choice is clear: he can either go back to the town of his birth (Malgudi) and face the taunts and barbs of the people or go somewhere else. Where else can he possibly go? He is not used to work hard. He is now getting food without asking for it\* Anywhere else, no one is going to bother about providing him food, clothing and shelter without his working for these basic necessities of life:

Where could he go now? Nowhere. He realizes that he had no alternative: he must play the role Velan had given him.

With his mind made up, Raju prepares to receive Velan and his friends in the evening. He sits as usual on the stone slab waiting for them with a blessed and calm look on his face. He prepares to act the part of the holy man assigned to him by Velan and the other villagers. The thing that really bothered him was that he might sound so brilliant in everything he says.

Raju shifts his seat to the inner hall of the temple and awaits Velan's arrival with some excitement. When no one turns up at the appointed time, he gets panicky. He is restless at night, wondering whether his followers have deserted him and whether they would return at all. He thinks of walking to the village and letting Velan and his friends know that he is back. However, he dismisses such a move as undignified and cheap. Suddenly, he sees a boy grazing his sheep on the opposite bank of the river. He calls the boy and offers him a banana. During his conversation with the boy, Raju discovers that he has been sent there by his uncle to ascertain whether the swami has returned to the temple. Raju sends him back with the message that he is back and that people should visit him in the evening.

### **Indianness in the novel**

The novel is an essentially Western art form but Narayan has successfully used it to express Indian sensibilities. Narayan's works are a curious blend of Western method

and Eastern material. Narayan's Indianness is seen in various ways. It is seen in his simple and traditional mode of narration, which is straightforward and chronological, even in *The Guide*, where part of the story is narrated by Raju and a part by the novelist. It is also seen in his exploitation of such Indian motifs as cobras, *devdasis*, Bharata natyam, gurjus, sadhus and swamis. It is also seen in the setting of the novel. Malgudi is a typical Indian town gradually and steadily transforming from a semi-agricultural town to a big city. This transformation is a symbolic one; representing the change that was taking place in India as a whole. Malgudi has its own distinct individuality. It is but a small representative of the Indian social system, the Indian way of life and also of the Indian values cherished and followed through the ages. The residents of Malgudi, despite their local trappings - are essentially human. Therefore, they are related to humanity. In this sense, Malgudi is everywhere.

Malgudi is a territory Narayan was fond of. Nobody has succeeded in identifying or locating it yet. More than one critic has regarded Malgudi as one of the characters in Narayan's novels. It is essentially a lower middle-class town with its schools, temples, hotels, printing shops and the neighbouring Mempi Hills, with its usual beggars, conmen, confident tricksters, bogus sadhus and others. It is indeed, a microcosm of India, and not a regional town. English poet and critic William Walsh calls it, 'an image of India and a metaphor for everywhere else'.

In the words of author A. Hariprasanna: 'Narayan creates his fictional world of Malgudi as an essentially Indian society or town. The Indianness and Indian sensibility pervaded the whole place. Narayan's Malgudi is also a microcosm of India. It grows and develops and expands and changes, and is full of humanity, drawing its sustenance from the human drama and is enacted in it.'

Indianness is seen in Narayan's stress on the family which is assigned a place of central importance in each of the novels. As William Walsh points out, 'The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for able subtlety and conviction with which family-relationships are treated—that of son and parents and brother and brother in *The Bachelor of Arts*, of husband and wife and father and daughter in *The English Teacher*, of father and son in *The Financial Expert*, and of grandmother and grandson in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. The closeness of relationship between the adults and children, and the absence of watertight compartments between the worlds of the two, constitute the basis of these novels. But the action is developed through the conflict between the egocentricity of an individual member and the family's claim on him.

Indianness is seen in the way Rosie, despite being in an unhappy marriage, tries to make up for her momentary infidelity by owning up to her mistakes and asking for pardon. The importance given to marriage in India is brought out in Rosie's relationship with Marco. The Indianness is seen in the way Raju's mother depends on her brother to put some sense into Raju. She does not mind her brother coming and scolding her son because in the absence of her husband, she gives him the respect due to an elder male. The Indianness is seen in the way Velan is eager to take advice from an unknown Swami because learned men or Swamis are respected in society. He laps up everything that Raju tells him ignoring the fact that he has served a sentence in prison. Indianness is seen in the fact that Marco is educated and progressive enough to marry Rosie who belongs to a family of Devadasis. However, he is still the true Indian male who cannot tolerate his wife pursuing dance or being unfaithful to him. He does not pardon his wife even though she confesses her mistake.

## 4.4 MAJOR THEMES IN THE NOVEL

When *The Guide* was published in 1958 by Methuen in London and by Viking Press in New York, Narayan was already a fairly well known writer in India, England and the United States. His previous novels, *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952) and *The Printer of Malgudi* (1957) had already gained him a faithful reading audience.

*The Guide* brings out the simplicity of rural folk, their superstitions stemming from illiteracy, the position they give to women in their society, the husband-wife relationship, the disdain with which infidelity is looked upon, the helplessness of widows and the manner in which money can corrupt. In this section, we will explore the major themes of *The Guide* including the repercussions of deviating from acceptable norms or conventions, marital disharmony, emancipation of women and class difference.

### 4.4.1 Family Relationships

Narayan's novels are studies in human relationships, particularly family relationships. Of relationships within the family, the father-son relationship is most frequently studied. In *The Guide*, Narayan has studied the relationship between Raju and his father. When Raju gets into bad company at the construction site, his father is concerned and enrolls him in a school. On this issue, there is a clash of ideologies. Raju wants to study at the Albert Mission School. His father feels that in this school, Christianity is imposed on the students and they are forced to convert. So, against Raju's wishes, he decides to send Raju to the pyol School. The headmaster of that school is an abusive man and his language is no better than the labourers at the construction site. Soon Raju discontinues school and helps his father in running the stall at the Malgudi railway station. After his father's death, Raju is left to manage the stall alone. He now also has to look after his widowed mother.

All goes well until Raju's involvement with Rosie. When Rosie comes to live in his house, Raju's mother is against keeping a woman who has left her husband. Raju disregards his mother's feelings and ultimately she has to leave the house and goes to live with her brother. Here, it can be seen that Raju gives more importance to Rosie than his old, widowed mother.

He is even ready to go against his uncle to whom his mother turns for advice and help in the absence of a senior male member in the family. In traditional Indian households, the children never go against the word of the father or anybody old enough to take the place of the father. Raju decides to stand up against anyone who opposed his relationship with Rosie.

As his art matured, Narayan's study of human relationships became more complex and intricate. Such complex relationships which he explores, are those which centre around sex or money. These relationships are of particular importance in *The Financial Expert*, *The Guide*, *Man-Eater of Malgudi* and *The Sweet-Vendor*. In these novels money and sex appear in different guises, and are explored and studied from different angles. Excessive preoccupation with either money or sex is an aberration which results in discord and disharmony—in the disruption of normal family life, for instance—but peace and harmony ultimately return and normalcy is restored. This is

so much so the case that the disruption of the accepted order and the ultimate restoration of normalcy may be said to be the central theme of the novels. In fact, Narayan is a penetrating analyst of human passions and human motives—the springs of human action—and this makes him a great critic of human conduct. Human relationships—relationships within the family circle, and relationships centering round sex and money—are his ever-recurring themes, and we can learn from them how to establish right-relationships. Life must be accepted and lived, despite its many shortcomings, follies and foibles. This may be said to be the Narayan message, but it has to be gleaned by each reader according to the light that is inside him.

Narayan's fictional characters have their mooring in Malgudi. This town of Malgudi is a traditional one visited by Lord Rama, Laxmana, Sita, Hanuman and Goddess Parvati -the mythical gods and goddesses to Buddha, Sankara and Gandhi - from the mythical to the real. According to P.S. Ramana, Narayan has studied a character first on the test of social order, i.e., in the context of his community, set up and social environment; secondly, he studies a character in relation to himself. An analysis of their life reiterates the claims of their foregrounding in Indian moral and social value system. Narayan's vision illuminates numerous significant themes, which are discussed in this unit as follows:

- The place of woman in a traditional society
- The moral limitations of a materialistic way of life
- The consequences of flouting accepted codes
- The psychological and ethical implications of some Hindu concepts as ascetic purification, *Yoga*, renunciation, non-attachment, *Maya* and the cyclic progressions of life and death
- The great Indian theory of *Karma* and the various paths of achieving *Moksha* or self-realization

#### **4.4.2 Rejection of Traditional Norms and Its Consequences**

In *The Guide*, Narayan develops a theme touched in *The Bachelor of Arts*, that of a bogus *sanyasi*. Raju, a restless, attractive youngster, acts as a guide to the tourists who come to visit the Malgudi ruins. The corruption-by-outsiders theme is this time initiated by the tourists, Marco and his glamorous wife, the dancer Rosie. Raju's love for Rosie is delineated as a consuming obsessive passion, fundamentally destructive and terrible. We find that Raju comes into conflict with traditional morality as he seeks to realize his aspirations. The result is that the accepted order is disturbed, and there is chaos and disorder. He seduces Rosie and thus is guilty of immorality and corruption. When she comes to live with him, conventional morality is violated, and there is displeasure all around. The neighbours are annoyed, and his widowed mother is obliged to leave the home and stay with her brother. Raju does not attend to work, has to give up the railway stall and soon is in financial trouble. He is unable to pay his debts and has to face prosecution in the law courts. He is an egotist, an individualist, a self-seeker who exploits Rosie sexually and commercially. They earn fabulous amounts, but he wastes it all in drinking, gambling and extravagant living. He is too possessive and centred and forges Rosie's signatures to get a box of jewellery. It is a criminal act, and it soon lands him in jail. It is a violation of ordinary norms of conduct, and his example shows that crime does not pay. We must not act as Raju acts, we must not be over-possessive, self-centred, extravagant or jealous. Thus, the violation

of conventional norms creates chaos and disorder in his own life and in the life of his social environment.

In R. K. Narayan's novels, there is a rebellion in the characters who violate the social norms but this rebellion is followed by a return, a renewal and a conformity to the social set-up. Violation of traditional norms leads to disruption, misery and unhappiness. In *The Guide*, Marco snaps his conjugal tie with Rosie when he comes to know of her intimacy with Raju. It is nothing short of infidelity. He says to her:

But you are not my wife. You are a woman who will go to bed with anyone that flatters your antics.

The traditional world of Malgudi has its own custom of arranged marriage which is settled by parents after negotiations and matching of horoscopes. In Indian society, marriage is looked upon as a sacrament and a spiritual union. It has been sanctified by society and sanctioned by tradition. Men and women living together as husband and wife outside wedlock are regarded as sinners and hence do not enjoy or receive any social acceptance or recognition. It is therefore sacrilegious to violate the sanctity of sex. Illicit relationship is considered to be a stigma on those who are engaged in this kind of relationship. In *The Guide*, Rosie, after separation from her husband, lives with Raju as his wife under the assumed name Nalini, without marrying him. Raju's mother who is an orthodox woman is dead against her son's way of life with Rosie. She says to Raju:

Why can't she go to her husband and fall at his feet? You know, living with a husband is no joke, as these modern girls imagine.

She doesn't want the tainted woman to stay in her house. It is a moral as well as social sin. But Raju has no regards for his mother's sentiments. So she leaves the house forever. In course of time, Raju's love for Rosie is replaced by love for money which leads him to forge her signature resulting in his arrest. Their relationship is finally severed. Thus, their romantic love not only causes miseries and sufferings to them but also to their families.

#### 4.4.3 From Selfishness to Selflessness

Raju's evolution from a tour guide to a spiritual guide forms the central theme of the novel. The title of the novel, *The Guide*, has two implications. It brings out the two roles played by Raju. One, as a tourist guide, where he is impulsive, undisciplined and given to self indulgence; and the other, after serving a sentence and converting to a holy man who thinks over life philosophically, is careful and self-disciplined. There are two stories in the novel. One is Raju's relationship with Rosie and the other is his relationship with the villagers. In the opening scene, Raju is sitting by the temple talking to Velan, one of the villagers who mistakes him to be a holy man. The novel then moves back and forth with accounts of Raju's life as a holy man told in third person, and Raju's account to Velan of his previous career as a tour guide and lover, which is told in the first-person. Raju plays a dual role, that of a saint and a sinner. But it should be noted that he is at no point in the story a complete sinner, nor a complete saint. Raju's character strikes a chord of sympathy in us. The title leads us to the question of who is the guide and how does he guide people. Raju is first a tour guide as he shows the interesting sights of Malgudi to people who come to visit the town. He also plays guide to Rosie as he is instrumental in helping her find a way to fulfill her dreams. We should not, however, mistake Raju as a political or moral guide who leads a community. All his actions are self-centred and while guiding people he keeps his interest in mind all the time.

It is now that spiritual regeneration takes place. Raju rises above his self. He recognizes the claims of humanity and learns to live and die for others. He may die, but his very death is his spiritual re-birth, Raju has matured, has achieved self-realization and self-fulfillment and has taken a new birth. His example shows that salvation and regeneration, the realization of one's highest aspirations, comes not through self-seeking but through self-negation and self-effacement. One must learn to live and die for others, before really noble and worthwhile achievement becomes possible.

The major theme of transmigration of the human soul from the clutches of 'maya' or ordinary desires to attain 'nirvana' or self-realization is amply demonstrated by the author in the novel. Raju embarks on life's journey as a man who is self centred and attracted only to material things. He is fascinated by the world of 'maya' and would do anything to achieve it. In the end, self-realization dawns upon him and he sacrifices his life.

#### **4.4.4 Emancipation of Women**

Rosie is a complex character and Narayan uses her to talk about women liberation.

Rosie feels suffocated in her marriage and tries her utmost to emerge in her own right as a woman who is talented and artistically inclined. She is married to Marco, an archeologist, whose only interest is the academic research he is pursuing. He has come to Malgudi to study some caves. He is busy in stone statues but does not value human relations. Rosie is not at all interested in the 'Cold, old stone walls' that excite her husband. Rosie meets Raju, a local tourist guide and it is in his company that she finds happiness and enjoys life. Rosie and Marco are incompatible. Marco has no interest in Rosie's love for classical dance. It is Raju, who later encourages her to emerge from her shell and bring forth her talent.

According to C. D. Narasimaiah, she is the only character in the novel who changes and grows and recovers from folly, as the novel progresses. To quote his own words, 'It is strange that Rosie is completely free from Narayan's ironic handling. Considering she was a highly educated woman—a Master of Arts—and a married woman at that, and in the Hindu society too, and considering, above all, that Narayan is operating within the framework of traditional Hindu society whose code of conduct he largely endorses, it is curious that Rosie's departure from that code invites no adverse comment. In all fairness to Rosie though, Narayan tries to show how the instincts of a faithful wife were not dead in her. Quickly realizing her mistake, a repentant Rosie tries to mend fences with Marco. 'I realized I had committed an

enormous sin.....My mind was greatly troubled. I didn't want anything more in

life than to make my peace with him. I did not want to dance. I felt lost...'

After studying Rosie's character, we can conclude that women have a fixed place in society. They have to be economically dependent on their husbands and tolerate the treatment meted out to them. This situation prevails in all levels of society in India. Such is the practice of gender inequality. As long as Rosie allowed herself to be confined within the walls of her husband's existence, she suffered silently. But when she emerged from its confines, she was able to prove her worth as a classical dancer. Though R. K. Narayan had to face controversy for dealing with an issue like extra marital relations, his attempt to portray emancipation and empowerment of women, through the character of Rosie, was indeed a brave effort.

Rosie is the one character in the novel who seems to offer a singular example of recovering from folly as the novel progresses. In fact, she has always been dignified, noble and the very picture of ideal womanhood in spite of her loss of chastity—there is enough atonement for it and that is what matters. And significantly, this has been achieved by as serious a treatment of the character as any novelist in the tragic mode may have done. This seems to be true of almost all the women characters created by Narayan. But especially in the way he takes care to preserve Rosie from inner taint, Narayan seems to be affirming what has been hailed in the Indian tradition as the feminine principle—the primary process of a woman's life, as it incorporates the rules and values of natural law.

#### 4.4.5 Transition from Illusion to Reality

Does Raju finally manage to transform himself into a true 'swami'? Perhaps this

passage suggests an answer:

The sky was clear. Having nothing else to do, he started counting the stars. He said to himself, 'I shall be rewarded for this profound service to humanity. People will say, "There is the man who knows the exact number of stars in the sky. If you have any trouble on that account consult him. He will be your night guide for the skies."' He told himself, 'the thing to do is to start from a corner and go on patch by patch. Never work from the top to the horizon, but always the other way.' He was evolving a theory. He started the count from above a fringe of the Palmyra trees on his left-hand side up the course of the river, over to the other side. 'One.... two.... fifty-five....' He suddenly realized that if he looked deeper a new cluster of stars came into view; by the time he assimilated it into his reckoning, he realized he had lost sight of his starting point and found himself entangled in hopeless figures. He felt exhausted.

This passage is very important as we see how Raju progresses from a regular guide to someone who guides the progress of souls. The title of the story now assumes a far deeper meaning. The novel moves on from being the story of an ordinary guide known as 'Railway Raju', to the story of someone who has more significance. The above paragraph also shows Raju's transition from fantasy to actuality. In the act of counting the stars, or trying to assess what is intangible, Raju is trying to work out the vastness of life. For once in his life, Raju is thinking about something so deeply knowing that there will be no material gain from this. His life now goes beyond its personal limitations and encompasses a wider sphere.

#### 4.4.6 Class Difference

Narayan presents social norms and class distinctions in *The Guide* mainly through the symbolism of Rosie's name. The non-traditional name is the marker of Rosie's social hybridity, through which the novelist gives a realistic and truthful representation of social norms and prejudices in India. In this respect, Rosie's failure to give the name of her father locates her social identity as belonging to a family of devadasis— T belonged to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers., .we are viewed as public women.. .we are not considered respectable, we are not considered civilized.' It may seem ironic that both Raju's mother and uncle seek to view Rosie in terms of social class:

Are you of our caste? No. Our class? No... .After all, you are a dancing girl. We do not admit them in our families.

They judge her according to their social norms, instead of her individual merits. It is shocking that in their prejudice they completely ignore Rosie's other identity as

an educated woman with an M.A in economics. Rosie's westernised name and her association with the symbol of snake, mark her social exclusion; Marco's satiric name and appearances also symbolizes his detachment from reality; and various other personality traits also symbolize a move from the time-honoured orthodox Hindu belief to a modern urbanized society. The use of symbolism, when combined with realism of the novel, unfolds a wide spectrum of walks of life in a modern society of India through Narayan's meticulous attentions to details of characterization.

## 4.5 CHARACTERS

Narayan is the creator of a whole picture-gallery of some of the most memorable characters in literature. A number of life-like figures move in and out of his novels and once we have been acquainted with them, we can never forget them. In his novels, he focusses on the instincts of people from all classes and all walks of life. His characters indulge in various professions and lead their lives in simple and old-fashioned ways.

In this section, we will discuss the three remarkable characters of *The Guide*, Raju, Rosie and Marco. A host of other minor characters contribute to the tapestry of middle class life in Malgudi—Velan, Raju's parents, the driver Gaffur and Joseph. Only Marco and Rosie are educated in the literal sense. The rest are simple rural folk busy trying to earn their living.

### 4.5.1 Raju

In *The Guide*, Raju is the central figure—a rogue and fraud who plays different roles, till, finally, he comes to be regarded as a Mahatma, and falls a martyr to his own ingenuity. Raju's career from a railway guide to a Mahatma brings out the truth of the statement that, 'Raju never did anything; things always happened to him. His entire career illustrates the drill of a passive character from one role to another'.

Raju has apparently nothing heroic about him. In fact, he is an anti-hero, a common man with just a tinge of the uncommon in him. He is a simple, very ordinary and not extraordinarily smart character. A transformed, shapeless character who easily picks up the suggestions of others; his personality is, in fact, a product of other people's convictions. He is extremely susceptible to the suggestions of others, and this plasticity of response determines his career and ultimate destiny. Raju's character is a mixture of many traits, some of which are even contradictory.

From a stall-keeper, Raju turns into a tourist guide. He is shrewd, intelligent and observant, and he soon acquires little bit of knowledge by reading the old magazines and books which he stocks, and by talking to the passengers who come to his stall. He is a fraud who does not know much about Malgudi and its environs, but he pretends to know everything. He never says 'no' to any customer. He freely changes and distorts facts to please the tourists. The result is that his fame spreads and he comes to be known as 'Railway Raju'. His confidence and nonchalance pay him rich dividends, and he never worries about the many distortions in which he has indulged and the untruths he has told. He deceives, lies and adopts crooked ways to fleece the unknowing tourists.

Raju would have remained a successful tourist guide all his life, but for the arrival of Marco and Rosie in Malgudi. Raju is fascinated by 'the divine creature' that he perceives Rosie to be and wins her heart by his sympathy and consideration, as



well as showing keen interest in her art. Both of them are born romancers and the novel celebrates the coming together of two similar temperaments.

Raju is a typical confident man of Indian tales; he betrays those who confide in him. Like Marco who has great faith in him, is kind and generous to him, and leaves him to look after his wife as he pursues his archeological studies but Raju takes advantage and seduces Rosie. He does not hesitate to ruin the domestic life and happiness of a man who has confided in him, paid him handsomely and has treated him as a family member. It is his confidence, his nonchalance which enables him to win Rosie very easily.

Raju is so despicable that he appears almost to be the antagonist of the novel until its concluding pages. Raju is arbitrarily cruel, hypocritical, and manipulative from his earliest recounted youth. He manipulates his father into taking him into town; he abuses a local cattle-boy for entering his private play-area; he lies to and takes advantage of tourists; he steals Rosie from Marco; he makes Rosie miserable, chasing away her friends, and becoming pretentious (even forging her signature on a legal document, rather than let her have any contact with Marco); finally, he takes advantage of the villagers in order to get food. These are hardly traits one would ascribe to a 'hero'. He displays greed and materialism matched only by narcissism and hypocrisy, so that he loses even his closest friends; only money saves him, and he soon loses that as well.

Raju is thoroughly unprincipled and immoral. He is a self-seeker who tries to achieve his goal by hook or by crook. When Rosie comes to live with him in his house, he takes her in without caring for his mother's sentiments. He wastes his time and money on Rosie. The stall is neglected, and soon he has to give it up. His debts continue to mount, and ultimately the Salt comes to him to demand his money. Some Satan is within him and he treats the Salt insolently. He goes away in great anger and as a consequence, gets Raju involved in endless litigations. By his insolent arrogance, he even drives his mother out of the house.

In the third stage of his career, he becomes a convict, and even this role he performs with enthusiasm, becoming an ideal prisoner. This was an act that Raju did voluntarily and deliberately, it did not happen to him. But Raju was bewildered that such a trivial action should bring down such frightful consequences on his head. When out of jail, we find him playing the role of a Swami or Mahatma. He plays this role to perfection, for basically there is not much difference between the role of a railway guide and that of a spiritual guide. The same eloquence, the same ability to make grand, mystifying statements, the air of knowingness, enables him to play his new role with such success. Although he is a fraud and a rogue in reality, he appears to be a mahatma. He sits on slab of stone as if it was a throne. Raju felt he was attaining the stature of a saint and later he felt he was growing wings.

Not once does he deliberately try to pass himself off for a holy man, but when he finds that people want to believe in his spiritual power, he cannot disappoint them. It is the public reposition of faith that compels him to act and die as a holy man even though he had no inclination towards either option. Raju is both an Indian enigma and a key to the mystery and myth. Here a man has lesser claim to his privacy. He lives for others and is guided by external considerations and compulsions and is defined in spite of his disinclination and indifference.

It is not clear to the reader, whether it rains due to Raju's penance. Also, the change of heart that Raju undergoes has not been given much importance by Narayan.

He makes it seem as if that is the least he could do to atone for his sins. He doesn't give more than a few lines to mention this. It is a moment of great disturbing beauty, in which we know something larger and more affecting than the working out of an individual destiny in an inhospitable world.

Why, then, does Raju almost fail to be the hero of *The Guide*? It seems impossible for any character such as Raju to redeem himself and earn our respect. In order to do so, he must display a fundamental change of heart regarding the villagers, and must take dramatic steps to prove his devotion to this new philosophy. We finally see these changes only eight pages before the end of the book. It is not, in fact, until the last page of the book that Raju displays the characteristic that confirms his heroism and courage.

*The Guide* has an element of the picaresque, but it is not a picaresque novel in which there is no such transformation and spiritual rebirth. Raju is redeemed by becoming a martyr for the sake of others; there is no such redemption in the ease of the picaro in a picaresque novel. The most interesting character in the novel, Raju is a hero who is not heroic, except at the very end. He is a mixture of good and bad qualities, but he is not a villain except, perhaps, in one instance when he forges Rosie's signature on a legal document sent to her by Marco. Raju is potentially a tragic figure and, given his character, there is perfect inevitability in what happens to him.

#### 4.5.2 Rosie

Rosie, in the novel, overshadows Raju whereas Raju remains the pivot for the whole part of the novel. Hers is a very complex character. As they say, women are the most difficult creatures to understand on this earth, it is very difficult to understand her. She is moody, impulsive and ambitious. These frail aspects of her character have been glossed over in the novel. It was because the character of Rosie was ahead of its times. To imagine a woman leave her uncaring and impotent husband and live with her lover in his house, was impossible in the sixties. Though she has been represented as a rebel, her rebellion has been justified in such a way that it finds consonance with the novel. To humanize her and get the sympathy of the viewers with her, Marco has been demonized. This is the reason why it is difficult to understand her in the novel but still easy to comprehend.

Rosie is one of those butterfly-type of woman who frequently appear in the novels of Narayan. She is the heroine of the novel. She has a charming and fascinating personality. Raju falls in love with her at first sight and says, 'she was not very glamorous, if that is what you expect, but she did have a figure, a slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion not white, but dusky, which made her only half visible as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice' Her arrival at Malgudi, with her husband Marco, plays havoc with the life and career of Raju, the popular Railway guide.

Born in a family of dancing girls, she knew who her mother was but not her father. She is given a college education and is an M. A. in Economics. She is flattered that a man like Marco wished to marry her, and is devoted to him in spite of his impotence and priggishness. But her inherited feelings for dance cannot be suppressed, and when she gets a chance to perfect the art, she seizes it. Her giving way to Raju is understandable. She might have resisted her physical urge if her husband had been at least kind and considerate: but his inhuman coldness, Raju's evident admiration and the opportunity so conveniently provided by her husband, result in what seems a

foregone conclusion. When that husband throws her out and she has no other place to go to, she comes to Raju. More than the attraction of sex is the desire to perfect her and realize herself fully in her god-given gift. She does not take long to achieve eminence. When Raju wants her to give performances she is not unwilling. But with fame come unceasing demands on her time and energy. She has to fall into a routine and go round and round like a bull yoked to an oil-crusher. Her weariness of it all is like that of any film star: She is being exploited but sticks it out.

It is through the character of Rosie in *The Guide*, that Narayan truly takes up and treats the concept of women emancipation. Rosie attempts to break free of the restrictions that her husband has imposed on her. Her husband, an archaeologist, is busy with his research and exploration and has no value for living beings. Rosie's encounter with the enthusiastic tourist guide Raju, at Malgudi railway station proves to be the turning point of her life. Rosie and her husband, Marco are two very different individuals and function on different planes. In the initial stage, he aggressively defies the wishes of his wife who desires to see a king-cobra. He snubs her. 'Don't expect me to go with you. I can't stand the sight of a snake-your interests are morbid.' On the other hand Rosie has a distaste for 'Cold, old stone walls'. Marco was not interested at all in Rosie's talent of classical dance which was encouraged by Raju.

In all fairness to Rosie though, R.K.Narayan tries to show how the instincts of a faithful wife were not dead in her. When she finds that her husband has produced a masterpiece, she cuts out his picture from the *Illustrated Weekly* and puts it on her dressing mirror.

She is surprised by Raju's behaviour in the matter of the book, and later by the forgery. But she does not walk out on him. To get him out of the mess into which he has got, she dances day and night and is willing to go round like a parrot in a cage, or a performing monkey.

Raju exploits Rosie for his own advantage and narrow, selfish ends. He says:

'I had monopoly of her and nobody had anything to do with her..... She was my

property.' And a little later... 'I did not like to see her enjoy other people's company. I liked to keep her in a citadel.' Raju takes all the credit for her success, and is of the view that she would not be able to do without him. But he is soon disillusioned. She rises to new heights of popularity and stardom without him. He is amazed at her extraordinary vitality. He realizes that neither he nor her husband matter at all to her.

The rift is cemented when Raju is arrested for forging Rosie's signature on a legal document sent by Marco's solicitors over the custody of a jewellery box. Rosie is hurt. She promises to pawn the last of her possessions to defend Raju in court, but tells him categorically that she won't have to do anything with him after that. Rosie proves to be true to her word. She engages the best lawyer from Madras to defend Raju and has to undertake numerous dance engagements to pay the star lawyer. When Raju is sentenced to two years' imprisonment, she closes down the establishment at Malgudi and moves over to Madras, where Marco lives. But she will have nothing to do with him also. Her career is on the upswing, as Raju learns from newspaper reports that he reads in jail. He wonders how she can manage without him. But Rosie is managing her career on her own admirably because she has found her metier at last.

Rosie's behaviour is always dignified and noble despite her nightlong bickerings behind the closed bedroom doors with Marco or altercations with Raju later when she cautions him not to discuss anything in the presence of servants. She does not react when Raju's boorish uncle shouts at her, calls her names and orders her to get out of

the house where she has come, and is staying, uninvited. There is enough atonement for her adulterous liaison with Raju, which is there primarily because he helps her realize her ambition of displaying her art in public. Rosie's delineation is in keeping with Narayan's delineation of female characters in general. Rosie may have succumbed to circumstances but she remains free from inward taint. That is why she makes such a complete and miraculous recovery, though the novelist, quite wisely, does not restore her to her earlier dubious marital status. Rosie is a strong-minded woman who is unwilling to sacrifice her happiness or ambition for the sake of keeping up appearances and staying with an appalling husband.

According to Narasimaiah, 'she is the only character in the novel who changes and grows and recovers from folly as the novel progresses.' To quote his own words, 'It is strange that Rosie is completely free from Narayan's ironic handling. Considering she was a highly educated woman—a Master of Arts and a married Hindu woman at that, it is surprising that Rosie's departure from that code invites no adverse comment from the novelist. In fact, she has always been dignified, noble and a true picture of ideal womanhood. Despite losing her chastity, she confesses to her husband and tries to seek pardon. This is highlighted as her biggest virtue. And significantly, this has been achieved by as serious a treatment of the character as any novelist in the tragic mode may have done. He takes special care to protect the character of Rosie from being tainted internally. Narayan seems to be affirming what has been hailed in the tradition as the Feminine Principle in life.'

#### 4.5.3 Marco

Marco is a complex and enigmatic character, who frequently appears in Narayan's novels and plays minor roles. They are odd, eccentric characters, like knots in wood, who keep away from the mainstream of human life. Marco comes to Malgudi with his wife Rosie, and with 'water diviner's' instinct, Raju at once realizes that he is his permanent customer: He is dressed like a spaceman. We don't know his real name. Raju calls him Marco, for he looks like an 'eternal tourist'. Marco and Rosie are not able to pull on together, for in his zeal for, and devotion to, his archeological studies, he takes no interest in his young fascinating wife. Raju thinks of Marco in relation to Rosie as 'a monkey's picking up a rose garland'. He is unable to understand Marco's obsessive interest in ancient relics, and says, 'Dead and decaying things seemed to unloosen his tongue and fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs.'

He is bored with Marco's ruin collecting activities. Rosie, too doesn't like to see the 'cold, old stone walls'. She finds that her wealthy husband is more interested in books, papers, painting. When Marco decides to stay on to explore the cave painting more fully, Raju takes charge of Rosie and soon becomes her ardent lover. Analysing the causes of Marco's failure with Rosie, Raju says: 'Marco was just unpractical, an absolutely helpless man. All that he could do was to copy ancient things and write about them .... Perhaps he married out of a desire to have someone to care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong—this girl herself was a dreamer if ever there was one.'

Marco has nothing in common with an average tourist as he doesn't wish to visit the traditional tourist spots in and around Malgudi. He has come there with a purpose to study and decipher carvings in temples and to visit the ancient caves near Mampi Hills. And he is single minded in the pursuit of his goal. In the same manner

as his wife, Rosie is devoted to dance. They are a mismatch as they fiercely hate each other's hobby and this leads to frequent arguments and quarrels between the two. There are a few ugly scenes in the hotel at Malgudi and the guesthouse on Mempi Hills.

Marco's satirical name and the descriptions of his appearance are also symbolic in *The Guide*. 'Marco' is a name that Raju invents because of the man's weird attire somehow, reminds him of Marco Polo. Certainly, the name resembles the potential strangeness in him, and his appearance reinforces this: 'He dressed like a man about to undertake an expedition, with his thick coloured glasses, thick jacket, and a thick helmet, over which was perpetually stretched a green, shiny, water proof cover, giving him the appearance of a space-traveller.' This idiosyncratic outfit, so inappropriate for the hot climate of Malgudi, symbolizes his lack of connection with the reality and the emotions of this world, which ultimately explains his failure to understand Rosie. The presentation of Marco's desire to control every aspect of his environment seems to stem from his distaste for the unpredictable vitality and willfulness of living things: 'dead and decaying things seemed to.. fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs.' This obviously creates a symbolical contrast between him and Rosie—while Rosie is projected as a symbol of life, Marco is anti-life.

What takes Rosie away from Marco is his aversion to dance; he hates the very word, While Raju says, 'I could almost hear the ripple of water around it' when Rosie indicates the lotus with her fingers. Marco calls dance a monkey trick or street acrobatics. What interests Rosie irritates Marco and she confesses to Raju 'I could have preferred any kind of mother in law, if it has meant one real, live husband.'

According to CD. Narasimaiah, 'Raju-Rosie relationship becomes credible and acceptable only because of the neglect Rosie suffers at the hands of her husband.'

Marco strikes us as uncommonly eccentric. For example, 'He would not part with an anna without a voucher, whereas if you gave him a slip of paper could probably get him to write off his entire fortune,'. Stern, self-centred and self-righteous, Marco thinks he has acquired his wife's body and soul, and he thinks that his rights over his 'property' are unlimited. Dancing to him, is another form of prostitution, especially when Rosie belongs to a Devadasi family of temple girls, who have no respect in society and are considered public property. One of the conditions of his marriage to Rosie was she would give up dancing, and now that she mentions it, he is furious; he accuses her of breaking the covenant of marriage. Her confession of infidelity stuns him and he stops talking to her. He fails to understand that a wife can be unfaithful to her husband even once and can still be in love with him. To Rosie's passionate appeal, 'I want to be with you. I want you to forget every thing, I want you to forgive me.' He replies, 'Yes, I'm trying to forget even the earlier fact that I ever took a wife. I want to go out from here too—but I want to complete my work; and I am here for that. You are free to go and do what you please.' When he leaves for Madras he buys only one railway ticket, leaving Rosie behind in Malgudi to fend for herself.

Marco leaves for Madras, but even though he is physically not there in Malgudi, he seems to be an ominous, overhanging presence. Rosie never forgets him, 'for after all he is my husband', she tells Raju. She sees his picture in the *Illustrated Weekly* cuts it and places it on her dressing table. She wants to see his book but Raju has hidden it in his liquor cabinet. Rosie is grateful to him for letting her go, any other man in his place would have throttled her when he learnt of her adulterous liaison

with Raju. This induces a feeling of insecurity in Raju. Yet Marco is full of honesty and integrity in his own way. In spite of the fact that Raju has insulted him and seduced his wife, he acknowledges Raju's help in his book; 'This author is obliged to acknowledge his debt to Sri Raju of Malgudi Railway Station for his help.'

He is scrupulous towards Rosie also, as he tries to restore a box of jewellery to her. We have no reason to believe Raju (who forges Rosie's signature in the legal document and lands in jail on a forgery charge) that it is a plot to entrap Rosie and force her to return to him. Nor must we blame him for pressing his charge of forgery against Raju. It is not an instance of vindictiveness but a desire to let the man who has wronged him have his just deserts. Marco wishes to restore the box of jewellery to his wife and when he finds that her paramour is trying to grab it through fraud, he is perfectly justified in taking the measure that he takes. In this way, he has revenge on the man who has seduced his wife.

## 4.6 R. K. NARAYAN'S TECHNIQUE OF WRITING

R. K. Narayan is a storyteller in the Indian tradition of storytelling. The narration moves forward chronologically, each succeeding event being linked causally with the previous one. As Paul Verghese points out, 'Narayan's is the most simple form of prose fiction—the story which records a succession of events. There is no *hiatus* between character and plot; both are knit together. The qualities the novelist attributes to these characters determine the action, and the action in turn progressively changes the characters and thus the story is carried forward to the end. In other words, as a good story-teller, Narayan sees to it that his story has a beginning, middle and an end. The end of his novel is a solution of the problem which sets the events moving; the end achieves that completeness towards which the action has been moving and beyond which the action cannot progress. This end very often consists either, in a balance of forces and counter-forces or in death or both.' However, *The Guide* is an exception in this respect. The narrative technique Narayan has followed in this novel is different from that of the other novels.

In the story *The Guide*, we see the narration moving back and forth, from the present to the past and again to the present. The story is told by two people; the narrator tells the story in its present context, and in the third person. Raju, the main character, tells his story in the first person. His narration takes the reader to the past. Cinematic elements like flashbacks and jump cuts have been extensively used.

Narayan deviates from the traditional mode of narration; part of the story is told by the author and part in the first person by the hero himself. This is certainly an improvement in Narayan's narrative technique; here however, it is necessitated by the nature of the story. The novel begins with the release of Raju from prison. Whatever happens to Raju after his release is told by the narrator—the novelist; whereas whatever had happened to Raju before he was imprisoned is told in a series of flashbacks in Raju's own words, in the form of a confession to Velan who has come to think of him as a saint. Then Raju takes over the narrative chores and relates his progress from sweetmeat seller to jailbird to Velan. In between, the omniscient narrator punctuates Raju's narrative by showing him dealing with the villagers as a holy man.

*The Guide* divided into two parts, narrates Raju's childhood, love affair, imprisonment (first part) and growth into a swami (second part). Though the streams move simultaneously, the first part is set in Malgudi, Raju's past and the second part

is set in Mangla, Raju's present. While Raju's past in Malgudi is narrated by Raju himself, his presence in Mangla is narrated by the author. R. K. Narayan is a novelist of common people and common situations. His plot of *The Guide* is built of material and incidents that are neither extraordinary nor heroic. *The Guide* is a story of Raju's romance, his greed for money, his sin and repentance. It is also the story of everyman's growth from the ordinary to the extraordinary, from the railway guide to the spiritual guide.

## 4.7 MULK RAJ ANAND: A BRIEF SKETCH

Mulk Raj Anand was one of the three pioneers of Indian novelists writing in English, the other two being R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie* are regarded as classics of Indian fiction composed in English. Anand wrote during what is called the 'pink decade', depicting not only the anxiety of the age following the Great Depression, but also the novelist's protest against the age of chaos and conundrum in morals.

### His Popular Works

- *The Village*
- *Across the Black Waters*
- *The Sword and the Sickle*
- *The Private Life of an Indian Prince*
- *Untouchable*
- *Two Leaves and a Bud*
- *Coolie*

### A Humanist

His three novels *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937) have gathered much admiration. But his boldness and critique of the age also brought him notoriety and his novels were banned from being printed, sold or marketed. He was called a propagandist and a socialist. However, Anand never propagated the ideology of the Right or the Left. He was a humanist, a historical humanist. He once said,

Just as I desire a total and truly human view of experience, a view of the whole man, in order that a completely new kind of revolutionary human may arise, so that I am inclined to stress the need for a truly humanist commensurate with the need of our time.

However, Anand's humanism is not merely the Hellenic idea of man being the measure of all things, independent of social context, particularly when it comes to measuring the development of the lowest of the low in society, especially Indian society-the outcasts and the downtrodden. They could even be the disregarded and denigrated erstwhile princes whose privileges were taken away after the Independence of India. In *Author to Critic: The Letters of Mulk Raj Anand to Saws Cowasjee*, Anand explained:

My knowledge of Indian life at various levels had always convinced me that I should do a *comedic humaine*. In this, the poor, the lowly and the untouchable were the only kind of outcasts. *Untouchables* also included the middle sections and the nawabs and rajas. Unfortunately, there has not been time to show the poor - rich of our country, who deserve pity more than contempt.

Evidently, Anand's sympathies are not confined to the poor and the outcasts, as it is alleged. He is no political propagandist and resents being called one. Anand never liked to be called a realist, as initially he 'never viewed man as a compound of egoistic influences, but as years went by, his mastery over selfish instincts, which were stronger in the beginning than altruism and which must be held in check in order to make society possible.' According to Anand, the society did not come into being out of nothing; it developed as man grew more altruistic. The measure of development of society is in terms how many, who are not known or recognized as human at all, are admitted within society, such as all kinds of outcasts. And in this regard, Anand said in *Author to Critic*:

I not only tried to reveal things which the middle classes do not accept but the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie - by going below the surface of various hells made by man for man with an occasional glimpse of heaven as a desire-image.

Anand puts great stress on the emotional and the practical-social; thus bringing the ethical ideal into bolder relief. Anand's humanism, thus is the way to humanitarianism. The great problem in the way to this ideal, as he found out, was to subordinate, so far as possible, the personality to sociability; everything must be related to humanity. Anand's central impulse is love of mankind, particularly love for the neglected sections of the human races - to live for others is absolute demand in Anand's fiction. For him, humanity is worthy being worshipped.

Anand deserves better appreciation. Though he was awarded the Sahitya Akademi in 1972, Indian academicians have only grudgingly and very slowly extended their welcome to him. This is because Anand's later novels are found to be weak variations on the same theme of social protest and have failed to win critical acclaim. It might be said that the first two novels—*Untouchable* and *Coolie*—are most dear to his heart and represent his religion of humanity, which he created by replacing the religion of God and that of metaphysics. *Untouchable* (1935) was Anand's first attempt to find this great religion of humanity by exposing the religion of God and metaphysics.

In *Coolie*, Anand exposes the religion of money. Every society passes through two stages - theological and metaphysical—before turning to the positive stage, the definitive stage of the religion of humanity. These three stages are clearly marked though they coexist in *Coolie* and that is the reason it is marked by chaos and confusion.

Anand thus traces the evolutionary stages of Indian society, particularly in respect of the *condition humaine* of the poor Munoo, and through him of the whole low caste people.

## 4.8 COOLIE: A CRITICAL APPRECIATION

*Coolie* is Mulk Raj Anand's first novel, though it was published after *Untouchable*, and is wider and more varied in scope than the latter. *Coolie* is not the story of a single day in the life of Munoo, the protagonist; nor is it simply the journey of the child. It is a picaresque novel, an epic of thousands of *Coolies* in India. Munoo, is thus an archetype of the downtrodden. Cowasjee writes:

It (*Coolie*) is a study in destitution, or to use Peter Quennell's words: India seen third-class — a continent whose bleakness, vestiges and poverty are unshaded by a touch of the glamour, more or less fiction that so many English storytellers, from Kipling to Major Yeats-Brown, have preferred to draw across the scene.



Simply told, Munoo, a hill boy, leaves his none too idyllic surrounding in the Kangra hills, forced, of course, by his uncle Daya Ram and aunt Gujri, to earn, orphan as he was, with no inheritance left after the death of his parents. Arriving in the house of a bank clerk, he falls foul of a shrewish and vindictive housewife and flees from the household of Baboo Nathoo Ram. Munoo next arrives at a primitive pickle factory in Doulatpur, where a quarrel over money between the partners of the factory uproots him and sends him to Bombay to work as a *Coolie* in a cotton mill. But an impending strike in the mill followed by communal riots make him run for life and he is rescued by an Anglo-Indian woman, Mrs Mainwaring, and taken to Shimla to work for her as a servant. He dies of tuberculosis (which is aggravated by his having to pull the rickshaw for the mistress).

## Chapter-1

This chapter traces Munoo's journey from the hills of Kangra to Shimla. Munoo was only fifteen when his uncle thought that Munoo was grown up and must fend for himself. So, his uncle got him a job in the house of a Babu of the bank, where Daya Ram worked as a peon in Sham Nagar. Munoo did not like the idea, for he still wanted to enjoy the company of his friends. Munoo wished to delay his journey to the wider world for no specific reason. He was confused. The village has taken away everything from him and the town has nothing to offer him. Munoo loved to luxuriate in the lavish beauty of nature, but he is equally attracted by the industrial world.

## Chapter-2

Chapter 2 begins by showing Munoo being goaded by his uncle to the house where he was to be employed. Obviously, he found the journey tedious. He was bare feet and intermittently sat to nurse his feet, which were sore and weary after ten miles march. However, the sun shone with searing intensity, and he was perspiring under the thick cotton tunic. As his uncle shouted for Munoo to accelerate his pace, the boy cried: there were tears in his eyes as he gazed at his bUstered feet and felt a quiver of self-pity go through him. His uncle only promised to buy him a pair of shoes out of his following month's pay. On nearing the town, he forgot the inconvenience of the journey. He was happy that he reached the end of the journey.

As he advances on his journey, his passion to know, the 'why' of things gets the better of other motives. Everything absorbed his fancy.

When Munoo was asked by his uncle to bow to Babu Nathoo Ram, he, thought the Babu to be a miracle: 'Long live the gods,' he said and wondered at the Babu's black boots. He further wondered whether the language that his would-be master spoke was the 'Angrezi' which the village school master said should be learnt by all those who wanted to be babus. Babu Nathoo Ram's bungalow filled Munoo with wonder, because the house was part of those buildings which lay shrouded, as Munoo sensed (a false scent) in an atmosphere of cool, shady trees among neatly trimmed hedges. He wondered who lived in these houses. Anything - riches, and status, English language and its speakers, bungalows, etc. filled Munoo's heart with wonder. Even the way the babu's wife draped her sari filled him with awe. However, as she resembled his aunt, he was a little apprehensive of his life in the bungalow.

The kitchen was in a chaotic mess. The brother of the babu, called Chote Sahib tried to make it easy for Munoo to work, with his humour. But the babu's wife made life hell for him. She did not let him mingle with the family members. He was made

to work hard and not given enough to eat. He felt good only in the company of Chote Sahib or the babu's daughter Sheila.

Munoo came to believe that people of the town, as for example, the family of Babu Nathoo Ram, were superior to the hill people. He accepts his inferiority and position as a slave. In the presence of an important English guest, he accidentally drops the tea set for which his Bibiji slaps him. His uncle also curses him for not valuing his job.

Munoo gets attacked by another servant boy and is wounded. Chota Babu daily dressed his wound. Sheila also sympathized, though silently, with Munoo's state of health. He was in the limbo of fever and pain. As he became aware he felt, as if he had emerged from centuries of forgetfulness. He faintly remembered that his uncle had come to inquire about his health. He hated his uncle, hated everyone except the Chote Babu and perhaps Sheila.

He slipped out of the house one evening and boarded a train for some unknown destination.

### **Chapter-3**

Munoo slept in the compartment amidst a lot of luggage. He was discovered by a childless Prabha Dyal, who felt the love of a father for him. He and Ganpat take him to Daulatpur. Though, the factory where he had to work was dingy. Munoo was glad to have been rescued by Prabha.

Munoo started reading the signboards of shops. Munoo was happy that his master and mistress were kind. This feeling made his work in the factory tolerable. Ganpat was the only irritant. It was a hard and dark life. He greeted the day at dawn after staying awake till midnight. He would start work at the factory all tired and sleepy. Ganpat kept an eye on all the boys and was a terror for the coolies. Munoo worked in the dark underworld, full of heat of blazing furnaces. He wondered why he hadn't grown taller since he left his village. Ganpat, on returning from one of his journeys, decided to break his ties with Prabha and soon the latter went bankrupt. He took ill and was advised by the doctor to go to the hills. Munoo had to part with his master and mistress.

He took refuge in a shrine to get free food from there. He tried carrying load at the railway station but was shooed away by the policemen because he had no licence. With the help of a mahout from a circus, he boards a train for Mumbai.

He found work at a factory under a foreman called Jimmy Thomas. He rented huts to the labourers he employed and also gave them an advance on interest. The hut they stayed in was suffocating and the working conditions at the factory were appalling. Munoo was convinced that the poor lived in hell, irrespective of whether they were in a village or in the town. But he soon got used to it. He found a friend in the wrestler Ratan.

Ratan was fired by the foreman one day for arriving late. Ratan's case was taken up by a union of Muzaffar and Sauda. They asked the coolies to walk out of the mill and refuse to work till their working hours were shortened, their wages increased, their living conditions improved and their children educated. Anticipating the strike, the mill decided not to work for the fourth week. Munoo who went to negotiate with the owner was hit and the coolies were not left with any other option but to go on strike.

The talks transformed into a communal conflict between the Muslims and the Hindus.

He escaped the riot and was trying to get a stock of the situation when he got knocked down by a car, belonging to Mrs. Mainwaring, who took him to Shimla.

#### **Chapter-4**

Munoo regained his health before reaching Simla, even though he was physically and mentally broken. Mrs. Mainwaring was fond of his dark eyes. She was of a mixed breed, and suffered from an inferiority complex about her origin.

Munoo who had always been charmed by white people, Mr. England at Sham Nagar, to begin with, was thrilled to be in her company. To cap it all, she was a woman too.

She found herself physically attracted to Munoo. When he fell ill on his first day of rickshawpulling, she took good care of him and nursed him back to strength. He continued to serve his memsahib diligently but died of consumption after a little while.

#### **A Critical Look**

The novel is well-rounded - it moves from the hills of Kangra to end up in the hills of Shimla. Nevertheless, the novel is not simple as is the case of its outline. For one thing, it is a series of misadventures in a picaresque manner, offering a critique of money-culture; only the hero is no rogue but himself a victim of the world's rogueries, as Cowasjee says in the Introduction to the novel. Munoo is beaten everywhere he goes. But unlike Bakha in the *Untouchable*, who is abused and beaten for his caste, Munoo questions the cause of his sufferings because he is born in a Rajput family. What is questioned in his case is not the caste system, but as Cowasjee puts it, the 'cash nexus'. Munoo arrives at the hypothesis that all inequalities are because of money, as does the Havildar in *Untouchable*, despite his higher caste. And further, not all belonging to the same class love Munoo. At times, Munoo himself grows apathetic towards his fellow-sufferers.

#### **The Metaphysical and the Practical**

Anand wanted to ignore the metaphysical search for the cause of the ills of the world and stay with the practical. This search leads to barren speculation. The whole of *Coolie* shows the futility of this quest: Why does man ill-treats man? What is that makes one man superior to the other? This makes for the confusion in the novel.

Anand wished readers to abandon their curiosity to know what lies underneath the phenomena and attend to what is observable. Munoo, being a child, is ever curious to know the causes conceived as existing beneath the surface of events and as possessed of superior reality to the appearances grounded upon them. Munoo, therefore, represents not only the infancy of an individual, but also of the entire human race. Even science invokes all sorts of hypothetical entities which are just as "metaphysical" as things philosophers find behind the sensible universe.

#### **The Allegory**

Munoo's journey from the hills to the plains and back to the hills is an allegory to the evolution of individuals, of societies and cultures. At the individual level, it is a pilgrim's progress; in the context of race, it is an evolutionary social process. Munoo as an

innocent child begins this journey from a scratch; his journey from innocence to experience, but it is questionable whether he really attains knowledge of the social process, for he remains inquisitive till the end, as he was in the beginning, because he wants to know the hidden laws. He is, therefore, mystified even by new discoveries. His mind, as he progresses on the path of knowledge, comes to consider all phenomena as mystical and imaginary. Cowasjee has observed:

The magic of the book is in Munoo's innocence, in his naive warm-heartedness, his love for comradeship, his irrepressible curiosity and jest for life. He belongs with some of the most endearing juvenile characters in modern literature with Victor Hugo's Gavroche and Dickens' David Copperfield. And through him the whole misery of India speaks. In effect, *Coolie* is a tale of unheard sufferings of Munoo, mainly confused by his poverty. It is the tale of misery of an orphan who has no choice but to become a *Coolie*. As he moves along from one experience to another, he finds that the social scene moves backward. It seems to be stuck in the pre-scientific state.

### **Deconstructionist Philosophy**

Anand believed in social dynamics. By implication, he rejected all hypothetical constructions. For him, natural laws are sounder than metaphysical laws, because the latter are no more than descriptions of how phenomena function. They are not explanations of why they function as they do. Why human beings behave the way they do is something we cannot know. The causes of these things are unascertainable. This is true not only with respect to why and wherefore of the universe in general, but with respect to each particular phenomenon occurring in sense-experience. In this regard, Anand is closer to de-construction, as Jacques Derrida also denies both theological and metaphysical constructions. This is what deconstruction means. Such preoccupations as natural laws are quasi-human; they only delay social progress. Like Derrida, Anand demolished what he called structural thinking, that is, there is a centre, a fixed origin of things. As Derrida put it in 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences':

The function of this centre was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure .... But above all to make sure that the organizing principle of their structure would limit what we might call the *freeplay* of the structure.

### **Attempt at Social Transformation**

Anand also holds that any search for structure, i.e. the centre or the fixed origin of cause, restricts the play and as a result human sciences do not progress, as the fixed origin such as Munoo discovers beneath human behaviour—money or egoistic impulses—do not allow people to be altruistic. To say that man is selfish by nature or that we are born selfish gets us nowhere. That is why the social sciences—what Derrida characteristically calls human sciences—are backward. Human or social science is still backward in comparison with other sciences. Precisely because while other sciences—physics, chemistry, biology—have abandoned the search for fixed causes consolidated in a single force, called nature, social scientists still search for a fixed centre.

Anand's ambition was to reorganize society in a way that would bring lasting benefit to all classes of people; that would ensure universal peace between nations, prevent economic struggle within each nation, ensure to all an advanced society and culture in every way. In this sense Anand was essentially a social reformer. But as we have seen earlier, he is no ideologue of any set of ideology. He is interested in putting

society on a *positive* basis, i.e. reform society, as Derrida does, neither looking with nostalgia as Rousseau did, at the absent origin, nor offering freeplay, joyous affirmation of Nietzsche. The joyous affirmation, as Derrida put it, without truth and without origin. Anand would like to tread the middle course between social static and social dynamics of Augustus Comte, a French philosopher of the nineteenth century.

Anand's novels, *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, in particular, attempt to steer clear of extremes - the nostalgia of the old theological order, its monotheism and freedom from all order. We are still behaving and doing our work as it was done in the 1930s. What Anand wrote was a replica of the current society. We still believe in caste or class system of the old, and the rest of the time in terms of new and liberated thinking. Anand's creation is entirely about this confusion in human thinking. As Anand viewed, Indian society as depicted in *Coolie* is caught in the vortex of confusion of incompatible thinking. Anand believed that order and progress cannot be attained and reconciled satisfactorily until thinking and life are brought completely to the positive stage which envisages that as society advances, individualistic concerns yield to social concerns, altruism triumphs over selfish impulses and we realize that public functions are more important than private functions. It is in this respect that society is still backward. Modern man, Anand, like Comte noted, has lost the ability to identify himself with the state and society. He pretends to be modern, at least in his dress and demeanor, but he is still an egoist. We are changing our attire daily but not putting our obsoleted view on the pyre.

Although Anand takes care of his family, he is unaware of the miseries of those who fall outside his familial circle. He is still ruled by vague notions. His concern is not with phenomenon but with reality itself. Anand, for this reason, resented being called a realist. His novel describes the phenomenon, what he experienced, and though he had faith in the law of three stage of social evolution, he still seemed to concur with Francis Bacon that the mind must form theories but facts might defeat them. Mrs. Mainwaring is a liberated lady, but her egoism, her selfishness, persisted.

### Activity

1. The common view of Narayan is that of a supreme ironist, who, with his gentle humour, exposes the absurdities of our situation. Do you agree?
2. Conduct a research on the Internet and write a literature review of the criticism that has congealed around the text.

### Did You Know

The novel, *The Guide* was adapted as a film in 1965 starring Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman. It was directed by Vijay Anand, who also contributed to the screenplay. The film is widely considered to be one of the masterpieces of Indian cinema. The film was a box office hit upon release. The movie proved memorable for its award-winning performances by the lead actors and memorable music by S. D. Burman. *Time* magazine listed it at number four on its list of Best Bollywood Classics.

## 4.9 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Among the Indian writers in English, R. K. Narayan has a special place in history.
- Narayan was looked after more by his maternal grandmother addressed as Ammani.
- Reading was a passion for Narayan and as a young boy he read the works of Dickens, Wodehouse, Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Hardy.
- Narayan studied at his father's school and disappointed his family's emerging middleclass aspirations as he failed his first attempt to qualify for the graduate course in Arts.
- A formal education did not seem to suit him as he took four years to complete his graduation, a year more than normal.
- Towards the end of the 1930s, Narayan started to contribute regularly with short stories and other pieces to *The Hindu*.
- His luck changed when his first story based on Malgudi titled *Swami and Friends*, was read by Graham Greene. With Greene's financial help it was published in England.
- *Malgudi Days*, his first collection of short stories, was published in November 1942.
- *The Guide* is the story of a selfish middle class hero named Railway Raju, who does not complete his schooling, but spends his life cheating himself and all those who surrounded him for reasons best known to him. In the end turns a demi-God.
- *The Guide* possesses perfect artistic unity. Characters, setting, story, symbol, and style, all of them are functionally related to each other to create an artistic unity.
- The story of *The Guide* revolves around a couple Marco and his wife Rosie, who had come to the town.
- The whole story in the novel goes in flashbacks. The author moves on two planes — the past and present.
- As a tourist guide, praising and flattering has become Raju's second nature and he succeeds marvelously with Rosie.
- Raju tries his trick by praising her talent for dance to the extent that he succeeds in establishing sexual relationship with her after whetting her dissatisfaction for Marco.
- Raju is mistaken for a holy man by Velan, a gullible villager.
- The novel is an essentially Western art form but Narayan has successfully used it to express Indian sensibilities.
- Indianness is seen in R.K. Narayan's stress on the family which is assigned a place of central importance in each of the novels.
- R.K. Narayan is a storyteller in the Indian tradition of story-telling.

- Narayan deviates from the traditional mode of narration; part of the story is told by the author and part in the first person by the hero himself.
- Mulk Raj Anand was one of the three pioneers of Indian novelists written in English
- His three novels *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937) have gathered much admiration.
- Anand's sympathies are not confined to the poor and the outcasts, as it is alleged. He is no political propagandist and resents being called one.
- *Coolie* is Mulk Raj Anand's first novel, though it was published after *Untouchable*.
- The novel traces the journey of Munoo from the hills of Kangra to Shimla. Munoo was only fifteen when his uncle thought that Munoo was grown up and must fend for himself.
- As Anand viewed, Indian society as depicted in *Coolie* is caught in the vortex of confusion of incompatible thinking.

#### 4.10 KEY TERMS

- **Pyol:** It is sort of front stoop where Indians often visit with neighbors and watch the world going by.
- **Impresario:** A person who sponsors or produces entertainment, for e.g. a director of an opera company.
- **Festoons:** An embellishment consisting of a decorative representation of a string of flowers suspended between two points; used on pottery or in architectural work.
- **Fresco:** A picture that is painted on a wall while the plaster is still wet; the method of painting in this way.
- **Satire:** It is a literary composition, in verse or prose, in which human folly and vice is held up to scorn, derision, or ridicule.

#### 4.11 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. (a) 10 October 1906; (b) Grandmother; (c) Four; (d) Book review; (e) Publisher; (f) *The Bachelor of Arts*; (1937)
2. (a) False; (b) False; (c) True; (d) False; (e) True; (f) True
3. (a) Railway station; (b) Marco; (c) Railway Raju; (d) Mangala; (e) Tourist guide; (f) Sister; (g) Sainthood; (h) Albert Mission; (i) One rupee; (j) Railway; (k) Flashbacks
4. (a) True; (b) True; (c) False; (d) False; (e) True; (f) False; (g) False; (h) True (i) False; (j) True; (k) True; (1) True
5. (a) *Moksha*; (b) Money
6. (a) True; (b) True
7. (a) Box of jewellery; (b) Mempi Hills; (c) Dignified, noble; (d) Husband; (e) Space traveller; (f) Madras

8. (a) True; (b) False; (c) False; (d) True; (e) False; (f) True
9. (a) *Swami and Friends*; (b) *The Dark Room*
10. (a) True; (b) False
11. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao are the pioneers of Indian novel writing in English.
12. According to Anand, the measure of development of society is in terms how many who are not known or recognized as human at all, are admitted within society, such as all kinds of outcasts.
13. It is because Anand's later novels are found to be weak variations on the same theme of social protest and have failed to win critical acclaim.
14. It is well-rounded because it moves from the hills of Kangra to end up in the hills again, this time of Shimla.
15. Munoo arrives at the hypothesis that all inequalities are because of money.
16. Natural laws are sounder than metaphysical laws because the latter are no more than descriptions of how phenomena behave. They are not explanations of why they behave as they do.
17. The positive stage is the one which envisages that as society advances, individualistic concerns yield to social concerns, altruism triumphs over selfish impulses and we realize that public functions are more important than private functions.

## 4.12 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. What was Narayan's place in Indian English literature?
2. Write a brief note of the story of *The Guide*.
3. How does Narayan use Rosie to broach the subject of women's emancipation?
4. What was the reason for the marital discord between Rosie and Marco?
5. Who was Mulk Raj Anand? Give a brief sketch.
6. Why was Munnoo forced to leave his uncle's place?
7. What lesson did Munnoo learn from life?
8. What do you know about Mrs Mainwaring?
9. Write a summary on *Collie*.
10. What difficulties did Munnoo face on his way to Shimla?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain Raju's obsession with Rosie. What are the events that compel Raju to exit from Rosie's and Marco's life?
2. Describe the scene in Raju's house when his uncle visits them.
3. Raju's greed and insecurity brings his downfall. How?
4. Describe Raju's ultimate spiritual transformation.
5. *The Guide* is a typical picture of Indian society. Why?



6. Discuss Raju as an anti-hero.
7. The character Munoo represents not only the infancy of an individual but also of the entire human race. Explain.
8. 'The sweeper is worse off than as slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, bora into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them' Explain in your words.
9. Analyse the role of women characters in *Coolie*.
10. Social transformation is an important theme of *Coolie*. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

## 4.13 FURTHER READING

Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1982.

Iyengar, K.R.S., *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling Publication, New Delhi, 1962.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *The Twice Born Fiction*, Arnold Heinemann, Delhi, 1971.

# UNIT 5 ANITA DESAI AND AMITAV GHOSH

## Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Unit Objectives
- 5.2 Anita Desai: A Brief Sketch
- 5.3 *Voices in the City*: A Summary and Critical Appreciation
  - 5.3.1 Reflections on Urban Life
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- 5.5 Amitav Ghosh: A Brief Sketch
- 5.6 *The Shadow Lines*: A Summary and Critical Appreciation
  - 5.6.1 The Title
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  - 5.7.4 The Narrator
- 5.8 Summary
- 5.9 Key Terms
- 5.10 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 5.11 Questions and Exercises
- 5.12 Further Reading

## 5.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit studies the work of two prominent authors of today—Anita Desai and Amitav Ghosh; particularly their novels *Voices in the City* and *Shadow Lines*, respectively. Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* reveals a dominant characteristic of Indian society—its male-dominated culture, portrayed through an orthodox husband who is a puppet of his family and takes his wife for granted. There are three main characters in the novel—Monisha, Nirode and Amla.

The character of Monisha depicts the archetypal Indian woman and her emotional conundrums after marriage in a society that looks upon women as objects, which often rejects women their independent personality and existence. The character of Nirode bears resemblance to the youth, which is dejected and depressed when faced

with life's problems. It also portrays the weakness of the young who surrender to situations and compromise, despite having the capability to fight the tide. The third character, Amla, projects the flighty dreams and ambitions of the young. But these dreams fade away in the world of reality. Unable to chase their desires, the youth often sacrifice themselves on the pyres of orthodox thoughts.

Anita Desai analyses every aspect of city life with her penetrative and perceptive vision. The urban milieu engenders a certain mindset in the people who live therein. The relation between the geo-physical background and the psycho-mental landscape has been brilliantly sketched by Desai. Desai's *Calcutta* also brings to the mind the hopelessness of Eliot's *Wasteland*— a place devoid of values and hope.

Born in Kolkata in the year 1956, Amitav Ghosh completed his schooling from the famous Doon School and graduated from Delhi University. He then went on to do his Ph.D. in social anthropology from Oxford University, England.

Like most authors, Ghosh too witnessed hardships as a struggling young writer, even renting the servant's quarter in his early years. His writing career began at the *Indian Express* in New Delhi in 1986 when his first novel *The Circle Of Reason* was published. The book went on to win France's top literary award.

## 5.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Recall important aspects of Anita Desai and Amitav Ghosh's biography
- Critically appreciate and summarize the novels: *Voices in the City* and *The Shadow Lines*
- Discuss the characters of the two novels

## 5.2 ANITA DESAI: A BRIEF SKETCH

Anita Desai is one of the most renowned Indian writers in English. Born in 1937 to a Bengali father and German mother, she has been writing since the age of seven. She boasts of eight novels and numerous short stories, articles and literary pieces for journals and periodicals. She has won a number of awards, both in India and abroad. She was honoured with the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. The very next year *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* won her the Federation of Indian Publishers and the Authors Guild of India's award for Excellence in Writing.

### Popular Works

- *The Artist Of Disappearance* (2011)
- *The Zigzag Way* (2004)
- *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* (2000)
- *Fasting, Feasting* (1999)
- *Journey to Ithaca* (1995)
- *Baumgartner 's Bombay* (1988)
- *In Custody* (1984)
- *The Village By The Sea* (1982)
- *Clear Light of Day* (1980)
- *Games at Twilight* (1978)

- *Fire on the Mountain* (1977)
- *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976)
- *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975)
- *The Peacock Garden* (1974)
- *Bye-bye Blackbird* (1911)
- *Voices in the City* (1965)
- *Cry, The Peacock* (1963)
- *India- A Travellers Literary Companion*

Desai's writing goes beyond observing the mundane, superfluous realities. To quote her,

One's preoccupation can only be a perpetual search—for meanings, for values, for dare I say it, truth. I think of the world as an iceberg—the one-tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore.

Writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things. Next to this exploration of the underlying truth and the discovery of a private mythology and philosophy, it is style that interests me most—and by this I mean the conscious labour of writing language and symbol, word and rhythms—to obtain a certain integrity and to impose order on Chaos.

Anita Desai is concerned about "the enduring human condition". Her themes are existentialist and include: maladjustment, alienation, absurdity of human existence, quest for the ultimate meaning in life, decision, detachment and isolation. Desai explains how women in the contemporary urban milieu fight against discrimination of various types, but some do surrender before the relentless forces of absurd life. A perusal of Desai's novels reveals her deep involvement in the inner emotional world of her characters. To aid her literary interests she, therefore, resorts to the use of symbols and images. She tries to drum the clouds of the varied complexities of man-woman relationship and also the varying states of human psyche. Desai is a great artist and has employed techniques of stream of consciousness, flashback, montage and reveries which suit her existential themes and her externalization of internal emotional turmoils and tumults. Consequently, her novels do not have a well-constructed plot and a tightly-knit structure. There are episodes, happenings, incidents, encounters and reminiscences. Her characters are both typical as well as individualistic. They are typical as they suffer from a universal predicament of isolation and uncertainty. They are individualistic as they appear to be more sensitive and reflective in nature rather than the mass of common humanity around them. Her canvas is also reasonably large and it encompasses a large variety of characters representing various hues and colours of humanity. In fact, Anita Desai turns novel into a serious, intellectual endeavour rather than an object of mere entertainment. In her hands, novel is a mature and evolved genre fit for expressing somber and reflective thoughts. Desai is thus a highly evocative, intense and engrossing novelist who makes the modern reader aware of a new perspective to perceive life. Her protagonists lead a tortuous and exacting existence which is made comprehensible through Desai's own keen and profound sensitivity towards life.

London's famous Arts Guardian succinctly sums up the author:

...One of the best known and highly regarded novelists working in English in the sub-continent. The style she has evolved is lucid, tight, undramatic... her

imagistic phase acquires an ambiguous and terrible power—the words hold down the events forcibly.

### Awards won

- 1978 - Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize- *Fire on the Mountain*
- 1978 - Sahitya Akademi Award (National Academy of Letters Award)- *Fire on the Mountain*
- 1980 - Shortlisted, Booker Prize for Fiction - *Clear Light of Day*
- 1983 - Guardian Children's Fiction Prize - *The Village By The Sea*
- 1984 - Shortlisted, Booker Prize for Fiction - *In Custody*
- 1993 - Neil Gunn Prize
- 1999 - Shortlisted, Booker Prize for Fiction: *Fasting, Feasting*
- 2000 - Alberto Moravia Prize for Literature (Italy)
- 2003 - Benson Medal of Royal Society of Literature

## 5.3 VOICES IN THE CITY: A SUMMARY AND CRITICAL APPRECIATION

### SUMMARY

*Voices in the City* is a novel with intense, expressive characters living in Calcutta, which exists more at the intellectual than the physical plane. It has three major characters, Nirode, Monisha and Amla. The three siblings interact with various other characters with the city of Calcutta as the backdrop.

The characters include the following:

- **Nirode:** The protagonist of the novel. He is a rudderless person who feels deeply depressed at times when he recalls how unsuccessful he has been in all his enterprises. He is frustrated as he has not been as lucky as his younger brother Arun, who left India for studying abroad.
- **Monisha:** Nirode's sister who is married to Jiban and is also living in Calcutta. Jiban and Monisha are incompatible, dull and stagnant. She leads the life of a recluse in her own house and is even blamed for theft by her in-laws, who seem to exist on a level different from that of Monisha. Monisha is unlike the traditional bride and keeps herself away from her husband and his family. She eventually commits suicide unable to carry on the facade any longer.
- **Jiban:** The inconsiderate husband of Monisha.
- **Monisha's in-laws:** They leading complacent, respectable life which is different from Monisha's and in which Monisha is a total misfit. This is a metaphor for Indian society.
- **Amla:** She is the youngest sibling, who arrives in Calcutta after completing her studies in Bombay. She works in an advertising firm and is a free bird. She is a liberal girl who loves Dharma. She feels that Dharma is a person with whom she can communicate. She feels that her wavelength matches with his and finds him aesthetic and humane. However, she turns out to be as disillusioned as her elder sister monisha and brother Nirode.

She realizes how stubborn and self-centered Dharma is. She is shocked by his anger towards his daughter who refused to obey him and also his casual attitude towards his wife.

- **Gita Devi:** Dharma's wife who is considered an appendage by her husband. She goes about serving food to the guests silently.
- **Dharma:** He is the painter friend of Nirode.

Nirode has a deep sense of worthlessness as he has been a 'congenital failure' in all his endeavours. He wants to know the reasons for surviving in the world. He rejects all routine roles, duties and expectations and loathes every work he starts. So he thinks:

Better to keep out of the window and end it all instead of smearing this endless sticky glue of senselessness over the world.

Nirode revolts against his past, his upbringing, his family background, his family assets and everything else which might pull him down into a routine existence. He does not like any intimacy, relationship or a sense of commitment to anyone. After the departure of his younger brother Arun, he gives up his room in the hostel and his job as a photographer. His short enchantment with a magazine also fizzles out. He tells his friend David:

I want to fail quickly. Then I want to see if I have the spirit to start moving again, towards my next failure. I want to move from failure to failure, step by step to rock bottom, I want to explore that depth. I want to descend quickly.

To this, David answers;

That is more than defeatism Nirode, it is absolute negation. ;

Nirode is the voice of the novel. A voice in the wilderness failing to build any contact between itself and the world. Nirode admits the force behind his attempt,

Where is the will to get up, select another ladder and begin the journey of absurdity all over again? ... Nothing existed but this void in which all things appeared equally insignificant; equally worthless.

Nirode miriiniizes his needs to the barest and thus rebels against any imposition of time, place, status or occupation on his personality. He is shabbily clad and instead of buttons uses staples to keep his shirt together. During his illness he comes very close to death and looks so frightfully rundown, that his sister Monisha comments:

I realize... he has progressed beyond me. Here is a combination of acquiescence and renunciation I have not yet made. Here, it is, in this plant gesture, this wind gesture of a weak, invalid hand. Back he goes into the captivity of friendship, concern, criticism and world. Yet he will never again be a part of it as he once was with such passion and anxiety—this gesture has removed it, all to a safe distance from his self.

Later, Nirode confides in Amla that he had opted for this sense of rejection not due to morbidity, but in order to maintain his sanity,

At the end of it I realized that the only thing I wanted to protect, what any sane man needs to protect—his conscience.

But he also admits that his pursuit of failure and isolation was wrong. The death of his sister Monisha awakens Nirode and reconnects him to normal human life. The springs of connectivity which had dried up within him once again get refurbished and invigorated.

He seemed unable to remain still or silent, he was filled with an immense care of the world that made him reach out, again and again touch Amla's cold hand when

he saw it shake, or embrace the old woman in the battered wicker chair when he saw her sleep. He pressed them to him with hunger and joy, as if he rejoiced in this sensation of touching other's flesh, other' pain, longed to make them mingle with his own, which till now had been agonizingly neglected.

The religious fanatic is excited by the death of a saint. The desire to touch and feel and get involved with others caused a sense of excitement as a "religious fanatic is excited by the death... of a saint."

Monisha's suicide is an attempt to break the monotony of routine existence. It is an attempt to give meaning to her death. With her self-willed deliberate act she is able to shake off the complacency and apathy entrenched in the psyche of her brother Nirode. To some extent, even her husband Jiban feels compelled to confess that he had failed his wife in their marriage.

Amla is the youngest of the three. She is charmed and mystified by the aloofness and nullity expressed by Monisha. She is never able to comprehend or analyse the real malaise behind the apparent withdrawal of her sister from normal life. Amla comes from Bombay as an energetic and vivacious girl, but does realize that Calcutta, as a city, saps up the energy and vitality of life from within a human being. Nirode's transformation comes as a rude shock to Amla, as much as does the frustrated existence of Monisha. Amla's relationship with Aunt Lila turns tense when she falls in love with Dharma, a married man much older than herself. However, Amla too has to go through her moments of remorse and disillusionment.

The mother exercises a strange, bewitching influence on the family. She is referred to as a beautiful socialite, fond of the good life. She is a refined and accomplished lady married to an idler whose only satisfaction is in criticizing his wanton-natured wife. Mother offers financial help to Nirode but he refuses angrily. She has a self-proclaimed admirer in Major Chadha who showers praise and gifts on her and earns the wrath of the three children. The mother appears rather cruel and callous in her aloofness and pithy even in moments of grief, as at the untimely death of her daughter, Monisha. When she comes to Calcutta to attend the funeral, her bond with the two remaining children is rather minimal and she soon reverts to her isolated, indifferent identity. She hardly shares soothing or comforting moments with either Amla or Nirode. Her financial self-sufficiency and good looks as well as her self-centeredness have made her more of a hateful figure than a mother-head.

The interconnection of other characters such as Sonny, Jit and Sarla, Dharma and Gita Devi, David Raghvan, Nikhil, Aunt Lila and Rita is well joined in the novel. All these characters form the fabric of the novel. The novel's ending too is very symbolic. A procession led by the beating of drums and chanting of the names of Goddess Kali is moving somewhere in the city and its sounds seem to be reverberating everywhere. A strange figure clad in white steps on to the verandah and watches them intently. Thus the novel takes the reader to a circumvented journey, a sojourn through the minds of the characters who live in their isolated cells in the otherwise teeming city of Calcutta. Throughout the novel, the readers feel a sense of identification with the characters and see their own shadow in the happenings of the story.

### **Critical Appreciation of the Novel**

*Voices in the City* is based on the Middle class intellectuals of Calcutta. Caught in the cross-currents of an urban city - Calcutta, this is an unforgettable story of a brother

and his two sisters. In different ways, this is a story of a society in transition, where the older elements are not fully dead while the emergent ones are not fully evolved.

### 5.3.1 Reflections on Urban Life

The novel *Voices in the City* is a peep into the recesses of the psyche of three characters, Nirode Ray and two his sisters, Monisha and Amla. Calcutta forms the social backdrop for the novel. Calcutta is a city full of noises, of 'voices'. It is the 'devil city', 'monster city', the city of Kali, the Goddess of Death, the city which entraps the denizens who feel the pressures and tensions of this "devil city in which the character of the novel Nirode is frightened of walking on its roads. He shudders and walks swiftly and is almost afraid of the dark.

There is no diving underground in so over-populated a burrow, even the sewers  
and gutters are choked, they are so full.

Feeling forlorn, even in this otherwise packed milieu, Monisha seeks escape which ultimately results in her death. Her young sister, Amla, comes to Calcutta to work in an advertisement firm. She has spent a few years in an art school in Bombay, so she finds the city (Calcutta) even more grotesque and unbearable. She finds it morbid and feels the morbidity of the place reflected in the lives of her sister Monisha and brother Nirode. This Monster city that lived no normal, healthy, red-blooded life but one that was subterranean, underlit, stealthy and odorous of morality, had captured and enchanted—or disenchanted—both her sister and brother." She herself, who is otherwise a vivacious and enthusiastic girl, cannot escape the bizarre influence of Calcutta. She tells Nirode, "This city of yours, it conspires against all who wish to enjoy it, does not it?"

### 5.3.2 Alienation and Existentialism

However, it is not the city alone which is responsible for the plight of the inhabitants. The seeds of self-destruction are present within the characters' individual selves. We are told that Monisha is an introvert given by nature to 'morbid inclinations'. Her father realizes that she "ought not to be encouraged in her morbid inclinations," and married her into a middle-class family thinking "that it would be a good thing for her to be settled into such a stolid, unimaginative family as that, just sufficiently educated to accept her with tolerance." However, Monisha fails to establish any contact or rapport with her husband, Jiban, or his family members. She finds Jiban conceited and his family mean and petty. On their part, Jiban's folks consider her (Monisha) strange and insolent and criticize her actions openly. They even blame her of being a thief, an allegation to which even her husband accedes. She does not have any well-defined religious ideology, so she is rather rudderless. Her predicament makes her reflect:

Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood over forever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution? Only a conundrum— is that, then, Life?

Monisha is also haunted by thoughts of death. She feels that love is the mission in nearly all her relationships, be it with Jiban, her husband, Nirode, her brother, or her mother. She has lost the verve to enjoy small, ordinary things. So she fails to respond like other spectators, men and women, to bawdy and lewdly suggestive songs sung by strolling street-singers. It is not that she had never possessed "this essential instinct of theirs. It is only that she has lost touch with mundane things now." She feels,



They put me away in a steel container, a thick glass cubicle, and I have lived in it all my life, without a touch of love or hate or warmth in me.

As the pain of a wasted life weighs heavily on her heart, she hurries out of her 'stale room, filled with sounds of other people's emotions' and commits suicide.

On the other hand, Nirode is more a victim of self-created complexes and afflictions, which lead him to degeneration. He is an artistic, sensitive and independent young man but the insecurities he has carried from childhood have made him unsure and unaware of his own potential. Comparing himself with his younger brother Aran, Nirode feels deprived of the money left by their father for the education abroad for one of his children. Aran was good at studies as well as games, so he could get that amount and left the grotesque city of Calcutta for brighter avenues. As a child, Nirode had once fallen from a horse and declared to his father that he would never play games or ride a horse again—an expression which denied him his father's beneficence. Nirode is reminded of this incident time and again, making him take refuge in "shadows, silence, stillness" for "that was exactly what he would always be left with." He tells Professor Bose,

"I do not know. How can one survive? It seemed hard."

Another problem which Nirode faces and which causes his undoing is his obsession with his mother. His childhood had been regulated and conditioned by his love for his mother and hatred for his father. After the father's demise he wants to be the support and succour for her, but the mother is more inclined towards her paramour, Major Chadha. This makes Nirode exceedingly jealous and in his failure to receive her love, he starts detesting and fearing her.

To think that all through his life he had despised his father and adored his mother, only to turn after his father's death, to pity for him and loathing of that same, unchanged mother—this moved him now.

In his role of a lover-son, the mother's image of indulging in wanton escapades and amorous relations constantly gnaws at Nirode's soul. Caustically, he suggests Amla to "go home to mother for a while, and grow up a bit by listening to her experiences of love." This deeply entrenched loathing for the mother severs his relationship with the family. Nirode tells his friend Sonny,

Look, do me a favour. Do not keep bringing my family in Sonny boy... I neither inherited nor do I now borrow a single damn thing from my family. May they rot, may they flourish-as long as they leave me alone.

He refuses to take any financial help from his mother and later when she desires him to sign the papers for transfer of money in his name, he tells Monisha,

Tell her to go shove it up that old major of hers, all her stinking cheques... I am done with signing my name, believing my name, or having a name.

But despite his extreme alienation from his mother, Nirode cannot rid himself of her influence. When the mother comes to Calcutta on learning about Monisha's death, he goes to receive her at the airport. Even then, he cannot take his eyes off her and watches her with awe and fascination.

She is still beautiful, he thought, with fear... She is still beautiful, he repeated, and her beauty compelled him to embrace her.

Released from her embrace "he fell away and felt himself drained of blood and passion. His mother's deep composure and aloofness to her daughter's death amazes and terrifies Nirode and he visualizes her as Kali, the goddess of death. But mother is

more than that. In her "Kali, the goddess and the demon are one." Reacting hysterically

to her presence in Calcutta, Nirode rants before Amla:

Do not you see, in her beauty, Amla, do not you see, the amalgamation of death and Ufe? Is it not perfect and inevitable that she should pour blood into our veins when we were born, and drain it from us when we die.

Amongst the three siblings, it is only Amla who is able to maintain balance and composure during their sister's death. Monisha's death points the way for her and she decides she would never lose herself. She knows she would go through life with her feet planted on the ground firmly. "However, she too has certain regrets in her life— her decision to come to Calcutta instead of remaining in Bombay or going to Kalimpong. The oppressive heat of Calcutta only adds to her sense of 'general atmosphere of disintegration'." Another regret she feels is for her sister Monisha whose carefully "arranged marriage by her parents to cure her of her 'morbid inclinations'" has only increased her psychological ailments. Amla's interest in Dharma, the painter friend of Nirode, grows into an emotional attachment. But she is disillusioned when she comes to know of Dharma's cruelty towards his daughter, his apathy towards his wife, Geeta Devi and his self-imposed withdrawal from life in general. Amla reminds the readers of a vibrant spring whose waters seem to dry away with the passage of time and circumstances but whose desire to Ufe and fight does not wither away completely.

## **Novel Structure**

A glance at the characters of the novels would reveal the brilliant and contemporary projections by the author. However, the point of view is mostly that of the omniscient author or an observer and occasionally that of the first person. Besides the usual means of communication, letters, diaries, paintings, magazines, dreams and visions are employed to communicate the views of the main characters.

## **5.4 CHARACTER ANALYSIS**

After assessing the novel it becomes essential to study the characters individually.

### **5.4.1 Monisha**

The character depicts the state of married women. Their condition and their intellectual conflicts after marriage in Indian society—a society in which women are considered as objects to be used and exploited; where she is always taken for granted and where the male-dominated society rejects her independent existence. In her youth, Monisha is a fun-loving and vivacious girl but turns into an introvert and self-absorbed lady following her marriage. Her marital life is like a dungeon and Jiban, her husband, is an inconsiderate life-partner. Monisha is considered odd for not thanking her stars for the family she has been married into. She cannot transform herself into the mould of a complacent, bejeweled housewife who is satisfied in displaying her material pomp. The other ladies of the household and even the children find her responses extraordinary. Monisha is some kind of a derelict as she herself confesses of having no faith in any religious ideology or the desire to establish communication with any of her relations. She is denied space and respect by her in-laws and husband who go the extent of branding her a thief. When Amla visits her, the two sister are allowed no moments of private talk and the mother-in-law insists on being a permanent fixture between them.

Monisha's loneliness is further enhanced by her inability to have a child, which leaves her even more isolated and frustrated.

Thus, Monisha is a typical example of a misfit in an established, settled society. So removed she becomes from everything and everyone that she fails to react even to the song and dance of the street singer. She too acknowledges the negative effect generated by Calcutta on her psyche.

Desai has always been interested in delineating the agony and pathos of women, especially married women, who feel inhibited and shackled by the constraints of society.

#### 5.4.2 Nirode

The character Nirode represents the youth that is dejected and depressed, when faced with the problems of life and that surrenders before situations and compromises with the conditions despite having the capability to fight them. Nirode is the male protagonist of Desai's novel. He is a sensitive and artistic young man but who has lost the mooring and meaning of life. When the novel starts, Nirode is seen grumbling about the better lot of his brother Arun, who had been bequeathed with their father's property and thus was going abroad for further studies. Nirode feels condemned to live a suffocating and unenterprising existence in Calcutta. He seems rudderless as he keeps changing his profession. He tries to settle down with a magazine entitled *Voice* but the venture fails. This failure takes away the residual desire left in him to strive for any aim in life. He tells his friends that he would like to fail hurriedly so that things were concluded once and for all. The novel portrays Calcutta as a reason for his downfall; he 'had fallen into the city's clutches as a weak prey'.

Nirode has hardly any filial feelings for his married sister Monisha and is oblivious of the mental turmoil she is suffering. Nirode did have strong attachment to his mother but she failed him by developing an amorous relationship with Major Chadha. Consequently, Nirode shuns all attempts of financial help suggested by her. But he is still fascinated by his mother's beauty and dignified aloofness.

Nirode seems to be on better terms with his other sister, Amla who comes to Calcutta to take up a job in an advertising firm. Amla questions him about his vocation and his whereabouts to which Nirode remains largely evasive. Nirode is in reality an idler who refuses to own any responsibility as he feels life has not treated him fairly. His emotions for Monisha are aroused only after her death. He realizes the need to connect himself with her and with those mourning her. In her death Nirode realizes the meaning of life and death and is thus awakened to human considerations. Desai has projected Nirode as a typical example of bohemian youth of Bengal who fritter away life in idle, superfluous activities. Nirode is no hero as there is hardly anything heroic about him. Nor is he truly tragic as most of his loss is self-caused and self-inflicted. He is nevertheless a key character, as Desai devotes the entire first section of her novel to him. He fulfills no duties of his—neither towards his sisters, mother and friends nor towards himself. But despite this life of inactivity and alienation, Nirode is not a villain. Failures and neglect have made him passive but his behavior remains restrained and reserved. He knows he cannot change things around him and he makes no tall claims. In that sense he is pragmatic. He also realizes that Calcutta has a negative effect on him, and he surrenders to the superior might of the city. He visualizes Calcutta as some divine entity—the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer. Thus Nirode typifies a modern young man who is unable to keep pace with the demands of society and family.

### 5.4.3 Amla

The third character, Amla, portrays the dreams and soaring ambitions of a young girl. But these dreams and ambitions often disappear like a whiff when they face the realities of the world.

Amla is the young and vivacious unmarried sister of Nirode and Monisha. She is full of plans and vision when she arrives from Bombay after completing her studies and joins an advertising firm in Calcutta. She has a positive attitude towards life and would like others too, to share her bright and sunny approach. At the same time, she does realize that Calcutta exerts a strange defeating and despondent influence on its inhabitants. She is surprised to see the sad state of Nirode and Monisha. Both seems to have lost the zest for life and neglected themselves. She questions Nirode about his livelihood and is rather appalled to find him still drifting in uncertainty. She is at a loss to understand the problem nagging her sister, who appears to be a mere ghost of her earlier self. This bizarre transformation in both her siblings befuddles Amla at first and she cannot comprehend it.

Her emotional involvement with Nirode's painter friend, Dharma makes the reality of life dawn on her. She had considered Dharma to be an ideal with whom she could communicate on all planes. His artistic disposition and sensitive demeanor greatly influenced the young girl. She is swayed into considering him as a reliable and honest friend. But she is disillusioned when she comes to know the reality behind the apparent. She comes to know that Dharma is callous and inconsiderate towards his wife and has disowned his daughter as she had refused to accede to his will. Thus, his artistic nature was pure artifice and he was a very different man than what he appeared. The advertising firm in which she was so enthusiastic to work also turns out to be a damp squib. Hence alienation and disillusionment grow gradually in the case of Amla. She seems to be less attached to her mother and more to her brother and sister. The death of Monisha convinces her that Calcutta is definitely a discomfiting and suffocating place.

Amla's life seems something of a bohemian like her brother's. She is casual and unconcerned and enjoys partying and having a good time. But she is more than that. She is far above a superficial being interested only in the mundane activities of life.

### 5.4.4 Jiban

Jiban plays the role of a typical Indian husband for whom the wife is nothing more than an object of utility. He treats his wife like a domestic help and an object of decoration, meant to look presentable, serve the guests and fulfill the family's never-ending demands by burning herself .

Jiban is a minor character in the novel, although, he should have been given more space, being the life-partner of Monisha, a principal character. However, the role of Jiban is insignificant since he hardly does any action worth our attention. He is a conventional man who refuses to come out of the mould into which he has been born and brought up. He is symbolic of the pretentious bourgeois mentality which believes more in pretense than in reality. Jiban fails to understand the needs and ambitions of his wife and wants her to be content performing the functions of the house just as the other ladies. Since he belongs to a well-settled, rich family of Calcutta, he has inherited their thinking as well. Monisha's father marries her off to him because

he felt she would lead a comfortable life. What happens is quite the contrary. Jiban is busy with his work and Monisha is a mere fixture of his house, like the furniture and other objects of decoration. Monisha, on the other hand, belonged to a family which had given her vision, dreams and ambitions, none of which were appreciated by Jiban.

Desai has reflected more on the plight of Monisha than that of Jiban in her novel, so the reader is unable to visualize his character clearly. He hardly has any individual traits and is more of a symbolic force whose indifference and callousness lead to Monisha's suicide. Jiban never bothers to understand what Monisha really wants. They do not have children, which is another reason for their having drifted apart. So ignorant and unconcerned does he turn that when his mother calls Monisha a thief and accuses her of stealing money, Jiban agrees to his mother and complains that she (Monisha) could have at least told him before taking the money. This hurts Monisha intensely and she grows even more alienated from him. In fact, there is acute lack of communication and extreme passivity in their relationship. Jiban never cares to probe into her psyche, understand her hidden emotions and insecurities. He expects her to accept the household and its norms mechanically. Jiban is thus a living example of a typical well-off individual who is not accustomed to asking and looking for questions. He is more comfortable following the beaten track.

As a character Jiban does not attract much attention. His reaction to Monisha and towards life is rather passive and rigid. He refuses to acknowledge that his wife is an independent individual with a psyche of her own. After Monisha commits suicide Jiban confesses that he had overlooked her problems and had been quite ignorant and oblivious of Monisha's turmoils. He holds himself responsible for the sad plight of his wife but this repentance comes too late and is of no avail. Jiban's insensitivity had caused Monisha her life.

Desai is more committed in analysing female psyche rather than the male mindset. Her haunted protagonists are usually women. In the present novel too, Jiban exists more as a shadow and it is Monisha's complex psychological turbulence that Desai's focuses on.

## 5.5 AMITAV GHOSH: A BRIEF SKETCH

Although hailing from a middle-class Bengali family, varied influences of his childhood kept Ghosh away from the typical *Bhadralok* (middle class) value system. His childhood, spent at his grandfather's home where the sitting room was lined with book shelves, was where Ghosh's love for books developed. In an interview, he accepted that Bengali culture was his inspiration. He also greatly valued his father Lt. Col. Shailendra Chandra Ghosh's storytelling. Serving in the British Army, his stories about exotic lands had a great impact on young Amitav's imagination. These early childhood experiences have had a great influence on his literary creations, which is visible in his various publications.

Ghosh's career has seen a meteoric rise. Among his numerous awards include the Pushcart Prize in 1999 and the Arthur C. Clarke Award for the *Calcutta Chromosome*. Earlier *The Shadow Lines* won the Sahitya Akademi. *An Antique Land*, a non-fiction work, was made into a documentary by BBC in the year of 1992.

Ghosh is now settled in America. After having taught Anthropology and Comparative Literature at various universities in America, he is now associated with

Queens College, a City University of New York, as a distinguished professor of comparative literature.

## List of works

### Novels

- *The Circle of Reason* (1986)
- *The Shadow Lines* (1988)
- *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995)
- *The Glass Palace* (2000)
- *The Hungry Tide* (2005)
- *Sea of Poppies* (2008)
- *River of Smoke* (2011) **Non-fiction**
- *In an Antique Land* (1992)
- *Dancing in Cambodia and At Large in Burma* (1998; Essays)
- *Countdown* (1999)
- *The Imam and the Indian* (2002; Essays)
- *Incendiary Circumstances* (2006; Essays)

## 5.6 THE SHADOW LINES: A SUMMARY AND CRITICAL APPRECIATION

*The Shadow Lines* is the story of a Bengali family through which the author submits his analysis of various issues that were debated in India in those times. The story spans across characters of three generations and through, it traces the growth of Kolkata as a city and India as a nation over a period of three decades. The story also draws from events in the author's own life and events of political significance.

Thamma, the grandmother of the unnamed narrator, discusses the issues of the Bengal partition and the whole idea of nation, nationalism and nationhood. Tridib, the eccentric Historian cousin, highlights the idea of history getting problematic, while Ila is a means for the author to raise the issues of diaspora and racism. The narrator plays the central role by elaborating and integrating the ideas, viewpoints and experiences of the various characters.

### Critical Appreciation of the Novel

*The Shadow Lines* begins when the narrator is an impressionable eight-year-old boy in a Gole Park flat in Kolkata and through the course of the story grows into an assured adult, not only physically but also in terms of his ideas on nationalism, nation and international relations.

All these issues and questions about them frame the narrator's journey into adulthood. They are not merely a male *bildungsroman*, an authorized autobiography with fixed agendas and priorities, but an open-ended dialogic telling of the perplexed interdependencies and inequalities that compose the biography of a nation.

The novel begins with the narrator talking about his experiences as a school boy in the Gole-Park neighbourhood of Kolkata. As the reader proceeds further, he/ she finds two branches of the narrator's family-the family of Grandmother Tha'mma and that of her sister Mayadebi. Acclaimed literary critic Meenakshi Mukherjee says that this rendition in the novel, amongst other details, helps the reader feel the "concreteness of the existential and emotional milieu... the precise class location of his family, Bengali *bhadralok*, starting at the lower edge of the spectrum and ascending to its higher reaches in one generation, with family connections above and below its own station..."

The narrator's *Bhadralok* family is depicted as one with great socio-economic disparities, brought out through the statuses of the two sisters. Tha'mma is a school teacher and the narrator's father is a middle-rung manager in a tyre company. Mayadebi's family on the other hand is more prosperous; her husband is a high-ranking official in the foreign service; her first son is an economist with the UN, the second a civil servant, while the third son Tridib does not achieve any notable material success.

Tha'mma was married to an engineer posted in Burma but she loses her husband very early, thus forced to nurture her only son single-handedly. Subsequent pages show her struggle to meet the daily needs and build her career as a school teacher in Bengal. The novel reaches its halfway point with her retirement.

The important aspect of Tha'mma's vision to be considered here is her perception of historical events, nationhood and nationalism. In her youth, Tha'mma was influenced by the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century. She idolized the extremists fighting for nationalism and secretly desired to be a part of radical organizations such as *Anushilan* and *Jugantar*. But being educated in the Western system, her idea of Nation as an entity was entirely adopted from England. She believed wars and blood baths only build grandeur the nations (**not clear what this means**). However, she does not pay much attention to her ideas since she belongs to a middle-class family where members are more involved in livelihood matters and she too has similar priorities.

Here the author talks of *phantom distances* through *the shadow lines* that the political machineries created in order to strengthen the idea of nation. On the other hand, in a large country like India, diversity abounds in every aspect of cultural, economic, social and linguistic existence and nationhood is imposed over these *imagined communities*.

### 5.6.1 The Title

The title *The Shadow Lines* is evocative of one of the major concerns of the novel, i.e. the creation of nations with boundaries that are both arbitrary and invented. This issue becomes more pertinent when viewed in the context of the partition of the Indian subcontinent. The author uses the trope of the house to explain this. As children Tha'mma and Mayadebi witnessed the family dispute between their father and his brother (*Jethamoshai*), leading to the division of the house.

Perhaps, the oblivion on Tha'mma's part of the happenings is equivalent to a deliberated non-admission of deeply disturbing facts. Tha'mma, therefore, has made this oblivion her, survival strategy.

Nationalism is redefined in many ways through experience. Whereas, the *great, historical project* of nationalism first undermines community (here the Bengali community that is common between East and West Bengal) to formulate nation, it

then 'narrates the nation'. The theorist Bhaba takes this project as comprising the creation of "the narratives ... that signify a sense of 'nationness': the ...pleasures of one hearth and the... terror of the space of the other." People in the newly formed

nations of Pakistan and Bangladesh are prompted through narration—'language, signifiers, textuality, rhetoric'—to create a difference where none exists. Therefore, the book looks at the creation of artificial conflict between two nations that are inherently one.

Another subtle way in which the author has exposed this strategy is by describing the experience of an Indian (Ila) outside India (London). While in London she inhabits the space where the India-Pakistan-Bangladesh differentiation does not exist. During their visit to London, Ila takes Robi and the narrator out for a dinner "at my (Ila's) best-loved Indian restaurant". As it turns out the "Indian place" is a small Bangladeshi place in Clapham. A seemingly insignificant incident ridicules the intense feeling of difference that these two countries otherwise harbor and how these differences are reduced to a naught, if viewed from a space that is outside the two. So these boundaries that are created due to political reasons seem tangible enough to be called *lines* but if analysed closely, fade away like *shadows*.

## 5.6.2 The Structure

Everyone lives in a story...because stories are all there to live in.

The structure of *The Shadow Lines* is dominated by two characteristics:

1. Non-linear structure
2. Digressive narrative

*The Shadow Lines* is a novel without any determined outset, centre and closing; instead it relies on the loop-structure of a story- within a-story and in turn is linked to the second characteristic of digressive narrative. This interferes with the 'unity of theme and action' as a hallmark of good writing as perceived by the Western poetics. This novel is told in the form of stories, therefore, we can say that the narrator is more of a listener than a speaker. His method of narration is bringing together all the available versions, rather than telling new stories. Out of this merging of varied and contradictory versions comes out a better version that is more representative and comprehensive.

Both these elements of an unnamed narrator and a non-linear progression are more peculiar to Indian than Western poetics. Indian works have also traditionally not used the Western cause-effect structures. The Western ideal of a palpable beginning, middle and end is not present in Indian works. A story as seen in this novel is a form that is not moving towards a preconceived culmination but is being constituted of several voices, all of which serve to make it richer.

The book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming Home*. Both phrases indicate the queer sense of home and homelessness which the Partition victims have experienced and that allows them to dispense with a fixed point that signifies a point of departure.

## 5.6.3 Theme of the Novel: Partition

The trauma of the Partition has been expressed well in the novel.

The idea of 'nation' became prominent and was at its peak in the year 1947 in India. The dream of attaining freedom from colonial rule was realized. Freedom from colonial rule was ushered in and a long cherished desire of a free country fulfilled and



made available to the Indians. However, the arrival of freedom also signaled virtual dislocation for a big fraction of the population: the birth of the free nation was accompanied by excruciating labour pains of the event of Partition. Histories of both sides portray this event in passing as a misfortune that arose out of the power interests of the 'other' side. In the history textbooks the battle for independence is seen to have heralded the practice of the new philosophy of *ahinsa*.

Although no memorials were built in honour of this event, the Partition has very well been preserved by the communities in the confines of their homes through stories and anecdotes told by the way of mouth and passed down through generations.

Indian writing in English have seen a spurt in the publication of Partition-related literature. *The Shadow Lines* is, among other issues, a book about the Bengal partition. The story of the old uncle *Jethatnoshai* captures the poignant side of human experience. The penury and destitution of Thamma's poor relatives in the novel describes the economic effects of Partition.

#### 5.6.4 Community and Communal Strife

*The Shadow Lines* discusses the issue of Partition (1947) and the author has done an elaborate critical review of the whole idea of the nation, as it emerged in the prevailing circumstances. *Community* prior to the Partition is seen in an ideal state and the narratives that the community produced are more emblematic of their experience than history in its factuality. The natural community—what is seen as the family in the Indian subcontinent—in Punjab and Bengal was split into two nations following the Partition, resulting into the physical dislocation of 15 million people from the places that they traditionally called home. Those who crossed over to the Indian side arrived landless, clueless and resourceless to be a part of the rejoicing in Delhi on the eve of the country's independence.

A classification into natural and interest-oriented communities is used by Sudipta Kaviraj to draw up an elaborate case about the difference between *nation* and *community*. He draws heavily on the work of the sociologist Toennies to discuss two kinds of communities: *gemeinschaften*, which is the primary, traditional group and which according to Kaviraj "one does not make an interest actuated decision to belong." On the other hand is *gesselschaften*, similar to modern nations, which is based on the convergence of political and economic interests. The Partition demanded the disruption of *gemeinschaften*, embodied in the old communities of Bengal and Punjab, with the objective of creating *gesselschaftens*—India and Pakistan. Further, "these imagined communities can place their boundaries in time and space anywhere they like unlike the former which have 'naturally limited contours'." So whereas the former state reflects a cultural bonding, the latter is based on political interest.

To these groups are also then linked their own forms of narration. Narratives, according to Kaviraj, are always told from someone's point of view. "They try to paint a picture of some kind of an ordered, intelligible, humane and habitable world.. .literally produce a world in which the self finds home."

The *gemeinschaften*, therefore has its own community-specific narratives and *gesselschaften* acquires it in due course. Whereas, the former lives in age-old stories shared in various forms by the community, the latter finds a home in Histories.

The Partition of India is justified to have been the consequence of communal tension between Hindus and Muslims, but our literatures have presented to us far

more complex designs of communities with composite structures that have for considerable time of a century or more shared cultural values regardless of religious differences. Bhalla has argued in this regard that there are hardly any chronicles, songs, *kissas* and *tamashas* in Punjab which record a long history of irreconcilable hatred between Hindus and Muslims. What the governments never addressed was the culture instead of religion.

The author also focuses on how the newspapers and the author's imagination have portrayed the varied pictures of the riots between the communities. Whereas, in the author's imagination they have stood out as the single most important event of his childhood, in the newspapers and other sources they do not even merit a mention. The author searches for the reasons that lead to the state keeping silent on the—the difficulty in representing an enemy that arises from *within* rather than *without*.

It is also ironic that post-Partition, people across the border share all their old stories but from completely separate histories. And as Ghosh points out the nature of this relationship is governed by

... that indivisible sanity that binds people to each other Independently of their governments. And mat prior, independent relationship is the natural enemy of government, for it is in the logic of the states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationships between people.

*The Shadow Lines*, shows how when communities give way to nations, their narration is taken over by a totalizing history in *The Shadow Lines*. On the other hand, riots, civil strife and communal riots do not find expression in the official records because the same incidents at one time supported the political decisions and their documentation would only raise several questions about authenticity. In any case, both the communities' experiences and their depiction had to suffer. The account of the Partition completely ignores the composite quality of relationships that existed between people of different religions and that there were other potent factors of cohesion like a shared cultural ethos. *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh talks of such a definition of community in the village of Manomajra. This book and some others show the existence of an alternate religion with people of different faiths looking upon a common shrine (in this case a sandstone slab) as religious. Interestingly, this feature about close-knit, cohesive communities later gets transported to the imagined community of the state of otherwise riot-ravaged India.

### 5.6.5 Nation and Home/Homelessness

In the novel, 'home' displays an allegorical relationship with nation. Tha'mma talks of her upside-down house in Dhaka and the story of that house is indeed, the story of the Partition of India. As they had spent their childhood in a joint family in Dhaka, Tha'mma and her sister Mayadebi witnessed the conflict between their father and his brother, which has lead to the division of the ancestral house. This division is so tangible that an actual line is drawn in the middle of their house dividing everything including the commode. The other side of the house after the partition becomes inaccessible to the two girls. The two nations, just like the two parts of the house, were existing as a single unit but the course of history separated them and to sustain their separation a line of dispute had to be created. The stories that Tha'mma creates to bring alive to her younger sister the situation of the other part of the house are in spirit comparable to the modern version of fake national pride that is also based on false stories of difference.

The book has two sub-sections: *Going Away and Coming Home*. Both phrases indicate the queer sense of home and homelessness that the victims of Partition have experienced.

## 5.7 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

After looking at the various aspects of the novel, let us study the characters in detail.

### 5.7.1 Tha'mma

Tha'mma's character is very crucial in the novel as she personifies a conventional yet interesting belief system challenged by the other characters including the writer himself. The novel makes readers see through the acts when the country was experiencing Partition. The submission of Tha'mma's personal details along with the documentation for visa, raises fundamental doubts within her of her identity. For the first time the confident, unperturbed Tha'mma is emotionally suppressed by some fundamentally disturbing introspection. Her uncle is the only one left in the ancestral house and who disagrees to the country's separation. Her visit to her home in Dhaka is painful in many ways. Tha'mma in her childhood had heard stories about the disputed house (one half of it was occupied by her uncle's family). The artificial constrictiveness of the 'otherness' of the house is apparent and many critics have found it similar to what the state indulges in when the partition of a nation has to be justified and therefore creates differences, even if there exists harmony. The two nations of India and Pakistan were like two parts of a family which were united at one time but the course of history (or failure of vision) divided them and for sustaining their separation differences were created.

It is the fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can suddenly and without warning become as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world—not language, not food, not music—it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror.

### 5.7.2 Tridib

Tridib, the narrator's uncle, is an unconventional character who does not fit into the genteel society of his family. He is deeply involved in researching into the ancient Sena Dynasty of Bengal. Tridib's character in this novel is more of a voice that bears the burden of a historical vision rather than a scholar of ancient history writing a thesis on the lost Sena Empire. He not only collects esoteric scraps of knowledge ranging from East European Jazz and to the intricate sociological patterning of the Incas, but has shaped his own and the narrator's preference also towards it. The narrator got his first lessons on scholarship from Uncle Tridib—a copy of Bartholomew's Atlas that remained with him as a symbol of the transference between them, reappeared in the author's hotel room in Delhi years later.

Tridib is shown to be a glib talker in the novel. The eccentric uncle has an audience at the *addas* of Gole Park. As a young man, Tridib falls in love with May, an Englishwoman. The relationship between them starts with the exchange of letters and continues till Tridib writes one in which he proposes to her and goes on to elaborate intimate love-making between two people in a war-devastated theatre in London.

May is initially confused but cannot resist the invitation and finally reaches India to see Tridib. But soon the romance in their relationship is replaced by resonance.

Tha'mma, Mayadebi and the child Robi are trapped in the communal riots during a visit to their ancestral house in Dhaka, to bring back the old uncle who had been left behind during Independence. While the three meander through the riot-ravaged streets of the city in their chauffeur driven-car, the old uncle follows them in a rickshaw, steered by the Muslim who looks after him. May observes that the mob first turned to them and upon being repulsed, attacked the old man on the rickshaw. Tha'mma, instead of saving her uncle, displays the same! unconcern that Tridib had earlier shown towards a dog and asks the driver to drive on without looking back. May feels impelled to get out of the car, run towards the mob and save the old man. But Tridib cannot watch her embrace death and therefore follows her. In the scrimmage, the mob attacks Tridib and he is killed.

### 5.7.3 Ila

Ila, the narrator's cousin is another important influence on the young, impressionable narrator. She, owing to her globetrotting father, reaches London to get settled. She has travelled extensively and her experiences of visiting various places as well as her schooling in these locations is threaded into delightful stories for the child narrator to initiate his first ever flight of imagination. Ila's experience as an Indian settled in London is the pretext to probe into the issue of citizenship, along with diaspora and the modern Calcutta bourgeoisie.

Ila's personal experiences, first as a student in London and later marrying a white man, throws up a range of polemics about the diasporic communities. When she narrates the story about the fantasy child Magda to the narrator, it is quite apparent that the child is a result of her mixed marriage. The absolute fear that she describes in the imaginary classroom of the child deceives her inner sense of complexity as a woman faced with questions about race in a mixed marriage. Ila in this conversation displays hyper-emotionalism which itself is a clear indication of deep complexities within her about race. Finally when Nick betrays her, her insecurity as a woman and especially as a disadvantaged due to her race comes out in the open.

### 5.7.4 The Narrator

The narrator is introduced in the novel as an eight-year-old child belonging to a genteel middle-class family where young children are generally concerned with their studies only. However, the narrator here finds support in his uncle Tridib to escape such a burden. The uncle has gifted an atlas to narrator which becomes a symbol of 'transference of knowledge' that happens between the two. The narrator has acquired from Tridib an extraordinary sensitivity towards knowledge, which becomes important for the role of narration that he attempts later. The narrator is not only a storyteller but also the string that brings together the other available versions in order to make a complete story. It is significant that the author has presented himself as more of a storyteller than a historian or an anecdote teller and the stories told are in circuitry in this book which has no definite beginnings or endings; they are indiscrete and seemingly belong to no one. Here, it is pertinent to narrate that the author, in spite of his omniscience, is unnamed and his stories mostly are the renderings of other characters.

These stories become more perceivable as the narrator joins them into meaningful wholes after collecting all the possible versions of the incident described

from various sources. The truth behind Tridib's death in Dhaka can be viewed as an example. Thamma, Mayadebi, Tridib's girlfriend May and Robi have witnessed the lynching of Tridib during the Dhaka riots. However his death, its cause and manner are not brought to the narrator's knowledge in toto as most middle-class parents are not open to discussing death and related issues in the presence of young children. The child Robi, witness to the public violence in Dhaka, refers to the experience with a hyper-emotionality characteristic of a traumatic childhood experience that one hasn't forgotten even as an adult. Later, Robi talks of all that happened during an evening out with the narrator and Ha. His account is complete to the extent that he as a child could only observe partially. His partial perception is a result of his intellectual inadequacy. Not only the intellectual inadequacy but the physical limitation has also been the reason of his partial perception i.e.—' an effect of that difference in perspective which causes all objects recalled from childhood to undergo an illusory enlargement of scale'. This makes him incapable of even observing the incident objectively. His account of the incident is therefore more of a psychotherapeutic outburst because it has been long repressed than an illuminating or insightful reconstruction of the past. The last person in the chain to recall and share the experience is May to whom the narrator then turns for an adequate explanation. It is in London that the narrator is made aware of the truth behind the death.

Another aspect of modern India that the narrator unveils through the novel is the typical twentieth-century phenomenon of civil strife and rioting, especially the one that results from communal disharmony. It is important to mention here that *The Shadow Lines*, written in 1988, was the author's response to another unprecedented event in post-colonial Indian scene: the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots that swept the nation after the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. The novel situates the 1964 communal riots of Calcutta, experienced by the narrator as a young school-goer, centrally in the boy's psyche as well as in his analysis of the difference of perception that pervades the recording of such incidents. In the book these riots and the riots at Dhaka become the occasion for the acid test of our recording systems whether of our history or of our newspapers.

The author holds the silence that he views in history as the resultant of happenings that cannot be accounted for in a given manner: "the kind of natural silence that descends when nearness /distance, friend/enemy become terms impossible to define". However it is difficult to define the terms originally in the scenario of artificial differences being imposed by the state. Riots and their memory become a case in point because as Ghosh puts it they are an instance of 'pathological inversion', i.e. violence of a state turning inwards unlike other conflicts like war where it turns outwards. The clear definition of enemy/friend, in-group/out-group, I/other becomes difficult. Who is to be called as a culprit or a victim becomes tough for the state and also the causes, if documented, subvert the idea of the nation, therefore having least value for the governments as historical objects. In the event of wars, on the other hand, there is a clearly specified enemy, a self-righteous *we group* and a legitimate action that reaffirms our belief in nationhood. Hence, there is a glory to wars, though violent, but one that makes sense within our defined notions.

### **Activity**

Watch the 1993 Merchant Ivory production of *In Custody*, directed by Ismail Merchant. It won the 1994 President of India Gold Medal for Best Picture and stars Shashi Kapoor, Shabana Azmi and Om Puri.

### Did You Know

In an interview with Harper Collins Publishers, Amitav Ghosh was asked about the title of his novel *The Glass Palace* to which his reply was; '*The Glass Palace* is one particular chamber in the old Royal Palace in Mandalay. It doesn't exist any more; it was destroyed during the war, in 1945. But we have lots of descriptions and photographs. It was a huge chamber covered with mirrors and glass. It was a symbol of the palace itself, and of the royal family. The dynastic history of Burma is called the Glass Palace Chronicles.'

## 5.8 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- Anita Desai lays no special emphasis on plot construction, on a well-made novel with the conventional notion of a beginning, middle and an end. Story, action and drama mean little to her. Desai feels that a story "imposed from the outside simply destroys the life of characters, reduces them to a string of jerking puppets on a stage." So whatever action is present in her novels is part of the integral whole composed of the human psyche and the human situation.
- One of the most important aspects of Desai's work is her ability to fuse form and content. In her novel, she skillfully explores the mental and the emotional. Her characters fight the ubiquitous forces of absurd realities and feel oppressed by the burden of living helplessly in the contemporary chaotic milieu.
- Delving deeper into the complexities of human existence, Desai endeavours to evaluate the various formidable factors that render life unendurable.
- The novel *The Shadow Lines*, tells the story of a Bengali family through which the author submits his analysis of various issues that were debated in India at that time. The novel witnesses the growth of the narrator from an impressionable eight-year-old boy into an assured adult. The growth however is not merely physical only but also in terms of ideas on nationalism, nation and its states and international relations.
- Events and experiences from the author's life are also depicted significantly. The grandmother of the unnamed narrator narrates and discusses issues related to the Partition of Bengal and whole idea of nation, nationalism and nationhood. Through Tridib, the historian cousin, the idea of history getting problematic is highlighted. The author uses Ila, the narrator's second cousin to raise issues of Diaspora and Racism.
- The author has also tried to unfold facts related to riots, civil strife and communal riots which did not find any depiction in the government records due to political reasons. The book also discusses the consequences of these riots.

## 5.9 KEY TERMS

- **Milieu:** The particular people and society that surround you and influence the way in which you behave

- **Appendage:** Something that is joined to something larger or more important, for example a small part of your body such as a hand or foot
- **Bildungsroman:** A novel which deals with an individual's formative years
- **Bourgeoisie:** Middle class. The social class between the lower and upper classes
- **Memoirs:** Autobiography, diary, journal, account, chronicle, record, life history
- **Hearth:** An open recess in a wall at the base of a chimney where a fire can be built

## 5.10 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The search for truth and exploration of style (writing language and symbol, word and rhythms) are the two preoccupations of Desai's writings.
2. Her novels do not have a well-constructed plot and a tightly-knit structure. Her stories are told through episodes, happenings, incidents, encounters and reminiscences.
3. The three principal characters are Nirode, Monisha and Amla.
4. Dharma's stubborn and self-centered attitude, his anger towards his daughter who refused to obey him and his casual attitude towards his wife Gita Devi disillusioned Amla.
5. Monisha's suicide is an attempt to break the monotony of routine existence. With her self-willed deliberate act she is able to shake off the complacency and apathy entrenched in the psyche of her brother Nirode.
6. The mother is a beautiful socialite, fond of the good life. She is a refined and accomplished lady. But her bond with her children is rather minimal. Her financial self-sufficiency and good looks as well as her self-centeredness have made her more of a hateful figure than a mother-head.
7. Calcutta is described as the 'devil city', the 'monster city', the city of Kali, the Goddess of Death, the city which entraps the denizens who feel the pressures and tensions of this monster city.
8. Monisha fails to respond like other spectators, men and women, to bawdy and lewdly suggestive songs sung by strolling street-singers.
9. After the father's demise Nirode wanted to be the support and succor for his mother, but she was more inclined towards her paramour. This made Nirode jealous and in his failure to receive her love, he starts detesting and fearing her.
10. The character of Nirode represents the youth that is dejected and depressed when faced with the problems of life and that surrenders before situations and compromises with conditions despite having the capability to fight them.
11. According to Amla, Calcutta exerts a strangely defeating and despondent influence on its inhabitants. She finds it a discomforting and suffocating place.
12. Desai has reflected more on the plight of Monisha than that of Jiban in her novel, so the reader is unable to visualize his character clearly. He hardly has any individual traits and is more of a symbolic force.

13. Varied influences of his childhood, Bengali culture and travels/stories about exotic lands have had a great influence on Ghosh's literary creations.
14. *An Antique Land*, a non-fiction work.
15. *The Shadow Lines* is not an authorized autobiography with fixed agendas and priorities, but an open-ended dialogic telling of the perplexed interdependencies and inequalities that compose the biography of a nation.
16. Tha'mma does not pay much attention to her ideas since she belongs to a middle-class family where members are more involved in livelihood matters and she too has similar priorities.
17. The great historical project first undermines the community to formulate the nation, it then 'narrates the nation'
18. The boundaries that are created due to political reasons seem tangible enough to be called *lines* but if analysed closely, fade away like *shadows*.
19. The structure of *The Shadow Lines* is dominated by two characteristics: 1. Non-linear structure and 2. Digressive narrative.
20. The Western novels have a palpable beginning, middle and end which is not present in Indian works.
21. Histories of both sides portray this event in passing as a misfortune that arose out of the power interests of the 'other' side.
22. The Partition demanded the disruption of the *gemeinschaften*, the community— embodied in the old communities of Bengal and Punjab)—with the objective of creating *gesellschaften*—the nations of India and Pakistan.
23. In the author's imagination the riots stood out as the single most important event of his childhood; in the newspapers and other sources they do not even merit a mention.
24. The partition of Tha'mma's house is symbolic of the partition of India. The two nations, like the two parts of the house, were existing as a single unit but the course of history separated them and to sustain their separation a line of dispute had to be created.
25. The submission of Tha'mma's personal details along with the documentation for visa raises fundamental doubts within her of her identity.
26. The narrator's first lesson on scholarship was a copy of Bartholomew's Atlas given by Uncle Tridib.
27. When Tridib's girlfriend confronts a mob to save Jethamoshai, Tridib follows her. In the scrimmage, the mob attacks Tridib and he is killed.
28. Ila's experience as an Indian settled in London is the pretext to probe into the issue of citizenship, along with diaspora and the modern Calcutta bourgeoisie.
29. The narrator is not only a storyteller but also the string that brings together the other available versions in order to make a complete story.
30. *The Shadow Lines*, written in 1988, was the author's response to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots that swept the nation after the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards.



## 5.11 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a note on the city of Calcutta in Amla's views.
2. What is the status of Indian women reflected in the character of Monisha?
3. Briefly talk about Nirode's character.
4. What was Nirode's relationship with his mother?
5. How is the novel *The Shadow Lines* both, an example of and diversion from the *Bildungsroman* (novel of growth) tradition of novel?
6. What was Thamma's views on nation and nationalism. How do her experiences account for these?
7. How does the author use the trope of a divided feud-ridden house to discuss the issue of Partition of India?
8. Write short notes on the following in the context of the novel:
  - (a) Partition,
  - (b) Community and nation

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically analyze the theme of alienation in Anita Desai's novel *Voices in the City*.
2. 'Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood over forever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution?' Who stated this? What does it reveal about the character and her circumstances?
3. How do Desai's characters symbolize various facets of cosmopolitan life in Calcutta?
4. Discuss Anita Desai's existentialist vision with reference to her novel *Voices in the City*.
5. Desai's characters exist more as abstractions outlining mental conditions rather than living, breathing beings. Discuss.
6. According to the author *The Shadow Lines* was influenced by the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. How does the book deal with the question of civil strife and rioting in modern India? Discuss in detail the narrator's description of his experiences as a schoolboy caught in the 1964 Calcutta riots, and his subsequent questioning of their depiction in history.
7. What are the 'Shadow Lines' that the author talks about? How is the question of invented nationhood, especially in relation with the Partition of India, discussed in the book?
8. Discuss the relationship between Tridib and May.
9. Discuss Ila as a typical example of the travelling cosmopolitan. Also highlight her experiences, including that of marrying Nick, which bring out her troubled racial and cultural identity?

10. Discuss the role of the narrator's cousin Tridib in fashioning the author's perception of life.

## **5.10 FURTHER READING**

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