INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH
(ENG1C04)

STUDY MATERIAL
I SEMESTER
CORE COURSE
MA ENGLISH
(2019 Admission onwards)

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CORE COURSE:

ENG1C04- INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction

2. English in India & The Birth of Indian English Literature

3. Section – A (Poetry)

1. Toru Dutt : “Our Casuarina Tree”
3. Nizzim Ezekiel : “In the Country Cottage”
4. Jayanta Mahapatra : “Hunger”
5. A.K. Ramanujan : “Obituary”
6. R.Parthasarathy : “River, Once”
7. Kamala Das : “The Old Playhouse”
8. Gieve Patel : “The Ambiguous fate of Gieve Patel, he being neither Muslim nor Hindu in India”
10. Arundhati Subramaniam : “Home”
11. Meena Kandaswamy : “Dead Woman Walking”
4. Section – B (Fiction)
   1. Mulk Raj Anand : *Coolie*
   4. Amitav Ghosh : *The Hungry Tide*

5. Section – C (Drama)
   1. Girish Karnad : *Yayati*
   2. Mahesh Dattani : *Tara*

6. Section – D (Prose)
   1. Jawaharlal Nehru : “What is Culture?”
   2. Amartya Sen : “Reason and Identity” (From *The Argumentative Indian*, Part IV)
INTRODUCTION

This course provides a brief overview on Indian English Literature in order to familiarize students with the various trends and movements in Indian English Literature from its inception to the present. This Study Material has been divided into three sections of which the first Section deals with poetry ranging from traditional writers like Toru Dutt and Tagore to contemporary writers like Meena Kandaswamy. The next Section deals with four major works of fiction in Indian English Literature. The third section deals with three two plays that deal with Indian social issues. The final section contains prose works in Indian English Literature. Since this Self-Learning material was prepared and compiled during the Nation-wide lockdown period and therefore compiled with very limited access to libraries and reference materials. As post graduate students of English literature, we recommend you to use this study material as a mere outline which has to be supplemented with extra reading and self-research. We hope you will be able to learn and imbibe as well as enjoy literature in the course of your study using this SLM.
ENGLISH IN INDIA & THE BIRTH OF INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE (A Brief Introduction)

English came to India in the early 1600’s when the East India Company started trading and English missionaries also began their efforts for the first time. Sir William Jones, one of the early officials of the East India Company was impressed by the Indian culture and he along with Sir Thomas Munro were in favour of using classical languages of the Indian tradition, like Persian, Sanskrit etc. On the other hand, there were the Anglicists who supported the usage and propagation of the English language as they looked down upon Indian tradition and languages. There was a conflict between the Orientalists and Anglicists.

Until the year 1813, the East India Company held the commercial monopoly and The British people in India had already taken charge of missions of educating as well as civilizing the Indians. The basic idea was to promote Oriental education among the masses. In the beginning of the 18th Century, printing presses began in different parts of the country; printing books in both English and the vernacular language. Thus, it was during this time that the first ever newspaper, Hicky’s “Bengal Gazette”, took birth. Private schools that imparted English education was started and then The Hindu College (which later came to be known as The Presidency College) was started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his friends.

The Orientalists soon started losing their ground as Western education spread quite rapidly through the
country, over taking Oriental education. Macaulay’s Minutes settled the issue once and for all. Around this time there was a pressing need for Indian clerks, translators and lower officials in administration and knowledge about the English language was necessary for these jobs. Christian Missionaries also poured in during this time in order to propagate Christianity and this resulted in a huge number of English imparting missionary schools being set up. It was in the year 1835 that Lord Macaulay drafted a document which later came to be known as “Macaulay’s Minutes on Education”. Lord Macaulay’s aim was to form “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect”. Although the Orientalists expressed their strong disagreement with Macaulay’s Minutes, they could not prevent it from being passed and on the 7th of March, 1835, the Minute received a Seal of Approval from Lord William Bentinck and an official resolution on the Minute’s was passed which went on to form the basis of India’s language policy back then.

Very soon Indians started reading and speaking in English, gradually they began writing as well. Indian writing in English is often considered as the literary Renaissance in India. Literary creations in local Indian languages itself was stimulated by the study of English literature and Indian English literature also shared the same origin. But it was in Indian English Literature that English features and elements were more evident. The Renaissance in modern Indian literature may be traced back to Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He was a person who
was against the rote learning method of teaching English and he believed in the importance of introducing subjects like Science, Mathematics etc. as subjects in schools. He felt such ‘modern’ subjects would give Indians a better understanding of the world. Although he was against British rule in India, he did believe that India had much to gain from them in terms of education and culture. Just like Roy, poets like Henry Derozio and Michael Madhusudhan Dutt believed in the benefits of English education. Much of early Indian English writing were imitations of works of popular English authors. The most famous literary figure in India during this time period was probably Rabindranath Tagore who won the Noble Prize for Literature in 1913. Although he wrote more in Bengali, he did translate some of his works into English, especially after the success of his work “Gitanjali”.

By the early 20th Century, English became the official as well as academic language of India. However, the nationalist movement in the 1920s did bring in some anti- English sentiments, leaders like Gandhi and Nehru demonstrated how English could be used as a tool to attain freedom. The impact of the Gandhian movement on Indian English Literature was the rapid growth of realistic novels in the 1930s. The realistic novels of authors like R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand depicted the social and political issues faced by the Indians. Gandhi’s movement also gave more subject matters to the writers of that time like the struggle for freedom, the East-West encounter, the miserable condition of the untouchables and so on.
After gaining Independence, although the British left India, their language remained. It was still widely used in media, Higher education and government and also remained as the common language for communication and India was then considered as the largest English-speaking community outside the USA and the UK. But one major development in post-independence Indian English was the distinct Indian voice that it had acquired. Also, English in India began imbibing bits and pieces of local Indian languages. Some of the popular Indian English writers are Toru Dutt, Tagore, R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kamala Das.
SECTION : A (POETRY)

TORU DUTT

Toru Dutt (1856-77) is a pioneer of Indo-Anglian poetry. She is an Indian poet who wrote both in English as well as French. Born to the RambaganDutt family, she was the youngest child. Their family converted from Hinduism to Christianity in 1862. Toru did her higher education in England. She was proficient in Bengali, English, French and even Sanskrit. She wrote two novels, the unfinished “Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden” written in English and “Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers” which was written in French. Her poetry collection “A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields” consisted of translations of French poetry into English and was published in 1876. At the time of her death, she left behind an incomplete volume of original poems in English titled “Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan”. Some of her popular poems include Lotus, Sita, Buttoo and Lakshman.

“OUR CASUARINA TREE”

(Text of the Poem)

LIKE a huge Python, winding round and round

The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars,

Up to its very summit near the stars,

A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

When first my casement is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
Sometimes, and most in winter, —on its crest
A gray baboon sits statue-like alone
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;
And far and near kokilas hail the day;
And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear.
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree’s lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!
Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
   And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,
When earth lay trancèd in a dreamless swoon:
   And every time the music rose, —before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

Therefore, I fain would consecrate a lay
Unto thy honor, Tree, beloved of those
   Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose, —
Dearer than life to me, alas, were they!
   Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done
With deathless trees—like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
“Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,
And Time the shadow;” and though weak the verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh, fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from Oblivion’s curse.

EXPLANATION

“Our Casuarina Tree” by Toru Dutt was published in 1881. The Casuarina tree here refers to an ever-green, huge tree found in the courtyard of the poetess house. The poem contains five stanzas. The first stanza is a description of the beauty and strength of the tree. The Casuarina tree has a creeper growing round it like a python and the trunk of the tree is rough and stands tall. The trunk is embraced, almost strangled, by the creeper, but the tree defies it. The Casuarina tree is personified here. The tree bears the creeper and wears it like a scarf of bright red crimson flowers. The branches are laden with them. On this tree, birds and bees gather. Darkling means in the dark. The tree here symbolizes vitality.

In the second stanza, the poetess describes her view from her window (referred to as “casement” in the poem). Toru, being a nature poet, watched the reassuring sights of nature. A grey baboon sat on the summit of the tree, watching the sun rise. The small and weak offspring of the baboon leaps about and plays. The Kokilas (a symbol often used by Sarojini Naidu in her poetry) welcomed
the day. The old tree cast a shadow in the pond thus lending a shelter for sleepy cows to lie around. Toru blends the East and West in her description of white lillies which appeared like bunches of snow on the top of a lake.

It is in the next stanza that Toru moves from a description of the physical beauty and strength of the tree to its emotional value in her life. The poetess childhood memories and her siblings are brought into the picture. This tree is probably the only link she has left with her past and her happy childhood days. This tree had been dear to Toru not only because of its beauty but also because of its association with memories of her formative years. Beneath this Casuarina tree Toru had played with her siblings during her childhood. The tree in Toru’s mind was hence not objective, but subjective (typical Romantic element). This memory of her childhood days made her weep fresh tears. Toru then moves on to the realization that her siblings are no more and their death is described as a form of sleep. The tree also laments along with the poetess. Now Toru feels that the tree will take her message to the unknown land of the dead and thus convey her sorrow to her siblings.

In the fourth stanza, Toru remembers the tree exactly as it was in her childhood days. But though the tree lives her playmates have passed away. The tree now remains a constant reminder of her loss and the poetess describes her anguish. Even while the poetess is abroad, the tree would appear in her mind just as she had seen it in her
native land and would help her connect strongly with memories of her siblings and motherland.

In the fifth and final stanza, the poetess says that the tree is dearer to her than her own life. The Casuarina tree was also loved by her siblings, who are unfortunately now in a “blessed sleep” (death). She realizes that she would also leave the world one day to rejoin her siblings but hopes that the tree would remain immortal. The poetess hopes that her poem and her love for the tree would stop the tree from being forgotten.

ANALYSIS

“Our Casuarina Tree” is a poem that celebrates the majesty of the Casuarina Tree along with reviving memories of the poetess' childhood days spent under it with her brother and sister, namely, Abju and Aru. The poem is aptly titled using the word “Our” rather than “My” implying that it is not associated only with Toru but also with her beloved siblings. The tree connotes nostalgic feelings and memories of past golden days. The creeper described in the first stanza may be a reference to the killer disease Tuberculosis which killed her siblings. The trunk of the Casuarina Tree being embraced by the creeper growing around it may also be considered a typical example from the puranas of the embrace of Dridharashtra. The image of the tree surrounded by birds and bees highlights the vitality of the tree. Gradually Toru moves from a description of the physical charm of the tree to a philosophical reminder of family ties. The Abju-Aru-Toru bond which also comes up in another poem titled “Sita” by Toru Dutt she writes
of “Three happy children...” is one of the main themes of this poem as well. The beauty of the tree thus is just an added bonus, the real value of the tree in Toru’s life is that it is the only link that remains for her to connect with her dead siblings. The term ‘unknown’ in the third stanza stands for both the native home of the poet as well as the world of the dead.

The casement mentioned here refers to a window. Probably borrowed from Keats “Ode to a Nightingale” where we find the line “Charm’d magic casements opening on the foam” and “Thou were not born for death, immortal bird”. Such instances of imitation and Romanticism may be found throughout the poem. The words ‘sleepy cows’ and ‘hoar’ remind us of resemblances with Thomas Gray’s “Elegy written in a Country Churchyard”. The dirge (borrowed from Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”) and shingle - beach (borrowed from Arnold’s “Dover Beach”) are examples of imitation of Romantic poetry which was typical of poets of Toru’s time. Just as Arnold felt “the eternal note of sadness” (“Dover Beach”), here Toru also feels sad when she hears crashing on the shingle beach. It must be noted that the very name Toru in Sanskrit means tree. The word ‘unknown’ repeated in the ending of the third stanza and the beginning of the fourth stanza shows an influence of Romantic poetry (especially Keats “Ode to a Nightingale”). Here we find echoes of both Shelley and Keats. The image of a sheltered bay comes in Shelley’s “The Cloud”, so does a bay come in Arnold’s “Dover Beach”. As Toru studied and travelled abroad widely her picture of the Indian landscape is often coloured with
memories of familiar English landscape as well hence the reference to the trees of Borrowdale here. The trees of Borrowdale could also be an allusion to the Yew trees that Wordsworth wrote about. Though the poem bears resemblances with Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale”, the Casuarina tree does not make Toru long for “easeful death” as Keats does. She does not wish to fade far away or dissolve like Keats but rather the tree stands as a pure reminder of the joys she experienced with Abju and Aru under the tree in the past. This is where Toru differs from her influencers. There is hope that love can transcend the pain and fear of death and loss. There is a sort of wholeness felt in the entire compilation of the poem, both in form and content.
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Rabindranath Tagore is a Bengali poet, short-story writer, song composer, essayist, painter as well as playwright. He studied English Literature at the University in London. He played a major role in introducing Indian culture to the West and he went on to become the first non-European to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 1913. In 1901, he founded an experimental school that clubbed both the Indian and Western traditions. This school went on to become Visva-Bharathī University in 1921.

He became a successful writer in his native language, Bengali. Although he tried a lot of different literary genres, he was at his best as a poet. Some of his popular poems are “Gitanjali”, “The Golden Boat” (1894), “The Child”, “The Gardener” etc. Tagore’s plays were also quite popular and “Chitra” (1892) stood out among them. Tagore was a versatile genius who initiated cultural awakening in India and raised India into a nation through song and worship. His artistic genius consciously and deliberately embraced the long-submerged culture of Indian tradition, ancient, medieval and folk. There seems to be no branch in Indian literature that his genius left untouched and enriched. Poet, novelist, playwright, critic, composer and educationalist. Three major strands combine to make Tagore’s poetry unique; they are Romanticism, Humanism and Mysticism. It is this combination of many diverse strands and themes that lend a certain uniqueness and resilience to his poetry.
“THE CHILD”

(Text of the poem)

(I)

What of the night?' they ask

No answer comics.

For the blind Time gropes in a maze and knows not
its path or purpose.

The darkness in the valley stares like the dead
eye-sockets of a giant,
the clouds like a nightmare oppress the sky,
and the massive shadows lie scattered like the torn
limbs of the night.

A lurid glow waxes and wanes on the horizon,
is it an ultimate threat from an alien star,
or an elemental hunger licking the sky?
Things are deliriously wild,
they are a noise whose grammar is a groan,
and words smothered out of shape and sense.
They are the refuse, the rejections, the fruitless failures
of life,
abrupt ruins of prodigal pride, -
fragments of a bridge over the oblivion of a vanished
stream,
godless shrine that shelter reptiles,
marble steps that lead to blankness.
Sudden tumults rise in the sky and wrestle
and a startled shudder runs along the sleepless
hours
Are they from desperate floods
hammering against their cave walls,
or from some fanatic storms
whirling and howling incantations?
Are they the cry of an ancient forest
flinging up its hoarded fire in a last extravagant
suicide,
or screams of a paralytic crowd surged by lunatics
blind and deaf?
Underneath the noisy terror a stealthy hum creeps up
like bubbling volcanic mud,
a mixture of sinister whispers, rumours and
slanders, and hisses of derision.
The men gathered there are vague like torn pages of an
epic.
Groping in groups or single, their torchlight tattoos
their faces in chequered lines, in patterns of frightfulness
The maniacs suddenly strike their neighbours on suspicion
and a hubbub of an indiscriminate fight bursts forth
echoing from hill to hill

The women weep and wail,
they cry that their children are lost in a wilderness of contrary paths with confusion at the end.

Others defiantly ribald shake with raucous laughter
their lascivious limbs unshrinkingly loud,
for they think that nothing matters.

(II)

There on the crest of the hill
stands the Man of faith amid the snow-white silence,
He scans the sky for some signal of light,
and when the clouds thicken and the night birds scream as they fly,
he cries, Brothers, despair not, for Man is great.
But they never heed him,
for they believe that the elemental brute is eternal
and goodness in its depth is darkly cunning in deception.
When beaten and wounded they cry, 'Brother, where
art thou?'
The answer comes, I am by your side.'
But they cannot see in the dark
and they argue that the voice is of their own
desperate desire,

that men are ever condemned to fight for phantoms
in an interminable desert of mutual menace.

(III)
The clouds part, the morning star appears in the East,
breath of relief springs up from the heart of the earth,
the murmur of leaves ripples along the forest path,
and the early bird sings.
The time has come, proclaims the Man of faith.
The time for what?

For the pilgrimage.

They sit and think, they know not the meaning,
and yet they seem to understand according to their desires

The touch of the dawn goes deep into the soil
and life shivers along through the roots of all things

To the pilgrimage of fulfilment,' a small voice whispers, nobody knows whence

Taken up by the crowd
it swells into a mighty meaning.

Men raise their heads and look up,

women lift their arms in reverence,

children clap their hands and laugh.
The early glow of the sun shines like a golden garland
on the forehead of the Man of faith,
and they all cry: Brother, we salute thee!

(IV)

Men begin to gather from all quarters,
from across the seas, the mountains and pathless wastes,
They come from the valley of the Nile and the banks
of the Ganges,
from the snow-sunk uplands of Thibet,
from high-walled cities of glittering towers,
from the dense dark tangle of savage wilderness
Some walk, some ride on camels, horses and elephants,
on chariots with banners viesing with the clouds
of dawn,
The priests of all creeds burn incense, chanting verses
as they go.
The monarchs march at the head of their armies,
lances flashing in the sun and drums beating loud.
Ragged beggars and courtiers pompously decorated,
agile young scholars and teachers burdened with
learned age jostle each other in the crowd.
Women come chatting and laughing,
mothers, maidens and brides,
with offerings of flowers and fruit,
sandal paste and scented water
Mingled with them is the harlot,
shrill of voice and loud in tint and tinsel.
The gossip is there who secretly poisons the well
of human sympathy and chuckles.
The maimed and the cripple join the throng with the
blind and the sick,
the dissolute, the thief and the man who makes a
trade of his God for profit and mimics the saint
The fulfilment!

They dare not talk aloud,

but in their minds, they magnify their own greed,

and dream of boundless power,

of unlimited impunity for pilfering and plunder,

and eternity of feast for their unclean gluttonous flesh

(V)

The Man of faith moves on along pitiless paths strewn

with flints over scorching sands and steep

mountainous tracks.

They follow him, the strong and the weak, the aged

and young

the rulers of realms, the tillers of the soil.

Some grow weary and footsore, some angry and

suspicious.

They ask at every dragging step,
"How much further is the end?

The Man of faith sings in answer

they scowl and shake their fists and yet they cannot resist him;

the pressure of the moving mass and indefinite hope push them forward.

They shorten their sleep and curtail their rest,

they out-vie each other in their speed,

they are ever afraid lest they may be too late for their chance

while others be more fortunate

The days pass,

the ever-receding horizon tempts them with renewed lure of the unseen till they are sick.

Their faces harden, their curses grow louder and louder.

(VI)

It is night.
The travellers spread their mats on the ground under the banyan tree.

A gust of wind blows out the lamp and the darkness deepens like a sleep into a swoon,

Someone from the crowd suddenly stands up and pointing to the leader with merciless finger breaks out:

False prophet, thou hast deceived us!

Others take up the cry one by one, women hiss their hatred and men growl

At last one bolder than others suddenly deals him a blow

They cannot see his face, but fall upon him in a fury of destruction

and hit him till he lies prone upon the ground his life extinct
The night is still, the sound of the distant waterfall comes muffled,
and a faint breath of jasmine floats in the air.

(VII)
The pilgrims are afraid.
The women begin to cry, the men in an agony of wretchedness
shout at them to stop.
Dogs break out barking and are cruelly whipped into silence broken by moans
The night seems endless and men and women begin to wrangle as to who among them was to blame.

They shriek and shout and as they are ready
to unsheathe their knives
the darkness pales, the morning light overflows
the mountain tops
Suddenly they become still and gasp for breath as they gaze at the figure lying dead.

The women sob out loud and men hide their faces in their hands.

A few try to slink away unnoticed, but their crime keeps them chained to their victim.

They ask each other in bewilderment, "Who will show us the path?

The old man from the East bends his head and says: The Victim.

They sit still and silent

Again speaks the old man,

We refused him in doubt, we killed him in anger,
now we shall accept him in love,
for in his death he lives in the life of us all, the
great Victim.

And they all stand up and mingle their voices and sing,
Victory to the Victim.

(VIII)
To the pilgrimage calls the young,
to love, to power, to knowledge, to wealth
overflowing,
We shall conquer the world and the world beyond this,
they all cry exultant in a thundering catarat of
voices,
The meaning is not the same to them all, but only the
impulse,
the moving confluence of wills that recks not death
and disaster.
No longer they ask for their way,
no more doubts are there to burden their minds
or weariness to clog their feet.
The spirit of the Leader is within them and ever
beyond them.
the Leader who has crossed death and all limits.
They travel over the fields where the seeds are sown,
by the granary where the harvest is gathered,
and across the barren soil where famine dwells
and skeletons cry for the return of their flesh.
They pass through populous cities humming with
life,
through dumb desolation hugging its ruined past,
and hovels for the unclad and unclean,
a mockery of home for the homeless.
They travel through long hours of the summer day.
and as the light wanes in the evening they ask the man who reads the sky:

Brother, is yonder the tower of our final hope and peace?

The wise man shakes his head and says:

It is the last vanishing cloud of the sunset.

Friends, exhorts the young, do not stop

Through the night's blindness we must struggle into the Kingdom of living light.

They go on in the dark

The road seems to know its own meaning and dust underfoot dumbly speaks of direction.

The stars-celestial wayfarers-sing in silent chorus:

Move on, comrades!

In the air floats the voice of the Leader:

The goal is nigh.
The first flush of dawn glistens on the dew-dripping leaves of the forest.

The man who reads the sky cries:

"Friends, we have come!

They stop and look around,

On both sides of the road the corn is ripe to the horizon,

the glad golden answer of the earth to the morning light.

The current of daily life moves slowly

between the village near the hill and the one by the river bank

The potter's wheel goes round, the woodcutter brings
fuel to the market,

the cow-herd takes his cattle to the pasture,

and the woman with the pitcher on her head

goes to the well

But where is the King's Castle, the mine of gold,

the secret book of magic,

the sage who knows love's utter wisdom?

The stars cannot be wrong,'assures the reader of the sky.

Their signal points to that spot.

And reverently he walks to a wayside spring

from which wells up a stream of water, a liquid light,

like the morning melting into a chorus of tears and laughter

sings

'Mother, open the gate!

(X)

A ray of morning sun strikes aslant at the door
The assembled crowd feel in their blood the primeval chant of creation:

Mother, open the gate!

The gate opens.

The mother is seated on a straw bed with the babe on her lap,

Like the dawn with the morning star.

The sun's ray that was waiting at the door outside falls on the head of the child.

The poet strikes his lute and sings out:

Victory to Man, the newborn, the ever-living.

They kneel down, -the king and the beggar, the Saint and the sinner,

the wise and the fool,-and cry:

Victory to Man, the newborn, the ever-living."

The old man from the East murmurs to himself:

I have seen!'
EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS

Rabindranath Tagore’s “The Child” was originally written in English and then later translated into Bengali with the title “Sishutirtha”. This poem is Tagore’s only poem written originally in English. “The Child” is a poem which was inspired by both Mahatma Gandhi and Jesus Christ. The poem is titled “The Child” as Tagore believed that it is through children that the world could be redeemed.

In the first section of the poem humanity is groping in the darkness. People do not know what the purpose of life is. The man who reads the sky is probably predicting the climate or the future. In this section Tagore uses imagery that suggests the utter confusion and trouble that the people find themselves in. Tagore says that Gods have left shrines because of the activities of the people. The confusion soon gives way to violence and people start attacking each other. As the poem was written sometime after the First World War, Tagore might have had it in mind when he wrote it.

In the second section of the poem, we see the entry of the leader, the Man of Faith. This could be a reference to Gandhi or Christ who both were men of faith and leaders of people. The man of faith tries to reassure the people that they have the power to overcome their difficulties and confusions even when the circumstances are difficult. The people however do not believe what the
leader is saying. Even though the leader suffers alongside the people they cannot see him in the dark.

In the third section, the morning arrives and the man of faith tells the people that the time has come to go on a pilgrimage. Tagore uses beautiful imagery to describe the morning. Slowly the people agree to join the Man of Faith on the pilgrimage. People have different hopes about the pilgrimage. They want to achieve different things.

In the fourth section the people who take part in the pilgrimage are described. Tagore makes this the journey of mankind by describing people from different parts of the world. They belong to different sections of the society and are not ready to identify with the group. They bring their social status, and class consciousness to the pilgrimage. Their minds have not undergone any change. There is a prostitute among the mothers, maidens and brides and a thief along with a man who acts like a saint to earn money. Most of the people are motivated by their selfish interests. They dream and wish for ‘boundless power’ which they can steal and raid.

In section five we see the people becoming impatient. All the different age groups gathered begin growing tired of the journey and ask how much more they have to drag on to reach ‘the end’. The journey is very difficult and they lose their hope. They are angry with the Man of Faith as they haven't reached their destination yet and they start cursing loudly.
Section six describes the murder of the Man of Faith. The wind blows out the lights and darkness fills. The appearance of ‘darkness’ might signify the coming death of the ‘Man of Faith’. Now, at night, the people are not able to control their anger. They attack the leader and kill him. At the time of his death the scent of jasmine fills the air. It is symbolic of the life that the Man of Faith led and his influence over the people.

In the seventh section, we see that the people start regretting what they have done. They do not know what to do now. They have no leader now and they feel afraid and insecure now. Nobody is there to lead them. When the morning light appears and they see the dead body women start wailing and men try hiding their faces. But the crime they committed keeps them locked or connected with the victim. The old man from the east says that the victim (the man of faith) will lead them even though he is no longer alive. The man of faith will live through the people who are making the pilgrimage. So, they all rise together and sing ‘Victory to the Victim’ in united voices.

In the eighth section, the pilgrimage starts once again. This time the spirit of the man of faith is helping them to move past all hurdles that they come across in their journey. Even when they face hardships, they do not accuse each other or fight. Still they have worldly riches in mind when they travel. They pass through different landscapes. Some places are blessed with a good harvest, some places have been deserted due to drought. However, the group travels on. When the night comes,
the pilgrims want to know whether the destination is near. However, the wise man tells them to travel through the night. They keep on travelling guided by some unknown force.

In the nineth section, the pilgrims have reached their destination. What they see is a normal village where people are doing normal everyday things. On both sides of the road one can find corn which is ripe and indicates that it is time to harvest. The ripe corn is golden in colour also because of the sunshine falling on it. The word ‘current’ is used here as opposed to static, so there is movement. The word ‘daily’ symbolizes the mechanical nature of the work. There are no riches or books of wisdom or anything like that. They expected a ‘mine of gold’ or a ‘secret book of magic’ or at least a ‘King’s castle’, but none of them are there. The reader of the sky assures the group that the stars can’t go wrong and points to a spot that the stars point to. He takes them to a stream of water, a liquid light. Since the light is described as ‘liquid’, it fills each person according to what he is searching for. The morning now blurs into a chorus of tears as well as laughter. All the different people gathered there are now united by their emotions. Nearby we find a leaf-thatched hut in a palm grove. It must be noted here that the palm tree symbolizes fertility, growth, sexual gratification and even feminine beauty. The date palm was also a symbol of the Tree of Life. At the gate they arrive at, the poet of the unknown shore sings to the Mother in order to open the gate. The poet belongs to an ‘unknown shore’ so as to emphasize the universality of Motherhood here.
In the tenth section, the morning sun’s rays knocks at the door of the hut. The gathered crowd feel themselves slipping into primitive states or their roots. They have come from the Mother and now they want to go back to her which is why they ask her to open the entrance. The gate ultimately does open up and the Mother seated there is clearly reminiscent of Mother Mary sitting on the ‘straw bed’ with the miracle child, Jesus Christ, on her lap. It must be remembered that Tagore was considerably influenced by Christian ideology during his lifetime. The pilgrimage comes to an end when the pilgrims witness the new born baby. The baby is a symbol of eternal creation and hope. All the pilgrims worship the child. They understand that the immortality of human beings is represented by every new born child. The ‘morning star’ preludes the beginning of dawn and also symbolizes a new beginning or freshness. The rays of the sun fall upon the child’s head like a divine halo. As if nature too was waiting for the birth of this child, just as mankind was. The word ‘lute’ may be a reference to the Pied Piper of Hamelin who is compared to the poet here who is leading the people to their destination. ‘Lute’ also stands for a substance, such as a dried clay or cement which is used to pack or seal pipes. This meaning leads to the idea of man the ‘lute’ being used as a tool to heal the trials and sufferings of mankind. The newborn symbolizes that mankind is not dead yet and also indirectly points to the Resurrection of Christ. Now, despite all differences of race, creed or class, the entire group sits and cries and is united in their act of crying. All distinctions and differences that existed till now are blurred now. The poem thus ends on a positive note. The
old man from the East could refer to Tagore himself. The poem could also be read on a different level of trying to attain freedom from colonial or imperial rule which is maybe why all members take part together in the struggle putting aside all their differences. When the poem is read in this light, the Man of Faith (i.e., the old man) could represent the Father of the Nation. And the child symbolizes a new beginning and freedom achieved successfully.
NISSIM EZEKIEL

Nissim Ezekiel was an Indian born poet coming from a Jewish family. He is described as the “father of post-independence Indian verse in English”. He worked as an English teacher in both India and abroad. He also worked as a broadcaster on Indian radio, a critic and a playwright. A distinguished figure in the cultural, literal and the intellectual circle of India, Ezekiel has contributed a creative, straight forward point to point and more direct approach to the Indo Anglian poetry. Just like most of the new Indian poets in English, Ezekiel’s poems are self-revelatory, self-confessional and at other times plainly autobiographical. Ezekiel’s poetry is both the instrument and the outcome of his attempt as a man to come to terms with himself. The writing of Ezekiel is one quick movement across the various psychological stages of man, not necessarily autobiographical. It is the biography of each and every thinking individual. His later poems however are full of self-analysis and introspection as they are still in search of a ‘finished man’. Some of his popular poems are “Night of the Scorpion”, “Background, Casually” and “The Visitor”. “Night of the Scorpion” is a poem that contrasts scientific temperament with superstitions. It is believed that Ezekiel has composed the very best of his poetry out of the ordinariness of human life as is evident in “In the Country Cottage”. He shows the world that poetry doesn’t necessarily have to deal with great philosophical truths in order to be impressive and revealing, in fact, ordinary situations are more than enough.
“IN THE COUNTRY COTTAGE”

(Text of the Poem)

The night the lizard came
our indolence was great;
we went to bed before
our eyes were heavy, limbs
prepared to stretch or love.
Immobile, tense and grey,
he taught us patience as
he waited for the dark.
From time to time we could
not help but glance at him
and learn again that he
was more alive than us
in silent energy,
though his aim was only
the death of cockroaches.
When we awoke the next morning we found as we expected that the job was done, clean and complete, and the stout lizard gone.

EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS

The speaker talks of a particular night when a lizard came out at night. On seeing the lizard, the members of the country cottage seem to become lazy (indolence means idleness or laziness) and drop their guards. They decide to go to bed early even though they weren’t really sleepy, either to stretch their limbs and relax or to make love. The lizard lay without any movement, stiff and grey in colour as if to hide its presence. This lizard was obviously waiting for its prey. To the speaker, the lizard seemed to teach a lesson of patience through its act of waiting motionlessly for hours in hope of catching its prey. The lizard was more alive and full of concentration in this act of waiting in silence than humans could be in silent energy. All this energy from the lizard’s side was merely for the act of killing a cockroach. The next morning when all the members of the house awoke, they found that the lizard had done its job well and left the place. The lizard is described as a sturdy or stout lizard who did a ‘clean and complete’ job without leaving anything behind.
Through this poem, Nissim Ezekiel draws a comparison between human beings and lowly creatures such as the lizard. The lizard is used as a symbol to highlight the importance of cleanliness, perseverance and dutifulness. The lizard shows so much concentration and energy for achieving such a small task as killing a cockroach unlike human beings who don’t bother to show the same energy or hard-working mentality for achieving bigger or more important aims in their lives. Instead humans are indolent and fail to complete tasks as completely and neatly like the lizard does. The lizard, unlike man, also had a strong sense of responsibility and dutifulness which is why it cleans out all traces of the cockroach after killing it as wanted by the members of the cottage, hence described as a ‘clean’ job. The words ‘immobile’, ‘tense’ and ‘grey’ are used literally to describe the stout lizard. But it could also connote the state of being indolent human beings. Nissim Ezekiel uses the poem to shed light on the fact that achievers are always both patient and energetic and thus succeeds in completing the task he sets for himself just like the lizard in the poem. Instead of wasting precious time and energy on futile activities, the poet urges them to save their energy for better purposes or to achieve one’s goals in life just like the lizard that remains silent, saving its energy for the task it needs to complete that day. The lizard in the poem teaches human beings important lessons on patience, determination and will power. Thus, Ezekiel proves an ordinary lizard to be far superior to man.
Jayanta Mahapatra was born on 22nd of October, 1928. He belonged to a lower middle-class family and held a Master’s degree in Physics. He worked as a lecturer in different colleges in Orissa. He was a physicist, a bilingual poet and essayist and also the first Indian English poet to have received the Sahitya Academy Award (in 1981) for the poem “Relationship”. In 2009, he was awarded the Padmasri Award” for his outstanding contribution to the field of literature. He began writing poetry when he was thirty-eight years old and published his first book of poems in his early 40s. This is considered quite late by normal standards. Yet he turned into one of India’s most prominent poets who wrote in English. His collection of poems includes “A Rain of Rites”, “Life Signs” and “A Whiteness of Bone”. He was also an editor as well as translator. Although, he chose English as his medium of writing, he admitted that English was just a medium through which he wants to represent the voices of Indians. He denies any influence from any poet. Being an extremely subjective poet, he draws his images from the experiences in his own life. He is also one of the first Indian English poets to be honoured both at home and abroad. Having chosen English as his medium of writing, Mahapatra admits frankly that he feels at home only in his native country. English is merely a medium through which he wants to represent the voices of the Indians. He denies any influence of any other poet. Being a very subjective poet, he draws his images from his own experiences in life. In most of his poems, he depicts sex as an uncertainty
which produces a void instead of contentment and completeness. There seems to be an unbridgeable gap between the two people who participate in it. The trilogy comprising the poems - “Hunger”, “The Whorehouse in Calcutta Street” and “Man of his nights” should ideally be studied together. In these poems, the poet blends the literal and the metaphysical together.

“HUNGER”

(Text of the Poem)

It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back.

The fisherman said: Will you have her, carelessly, trailing his nets and his nerves, as though his words sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself.

I saw his white bone thrash his eyes.

I followed him across the sprawling sands, my mind thumping in the flesh’s sling.

Hope lay perhaps in burning the house I lived in.

Silence gripped my sleeves; his body clawed at the froth
his old nets had only dragged up from the seas.

In the flickering dark his hut opened like a wound.
The wind was I, and the days and nights before.
Palm fronds scratched my skin. Inside the shack
an oil lamp splayed the hours bunched to those walls.
Over and over the sticky soot crossed the space of my mind.

I heard him say: My daughter, she’s just turned fifteen…
Feel her. I’ll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.
The sky fell on me, and a father’s exhausted wile.
Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.
She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.
EXPLANATION

“Hunger” belongs to the collection “The Rain of Rites”, 1976. This poem by Jayanta Mahapatra depicts the miserable plight of a fisherman who is forced to sell his daughter in order to earn money for feeding his family. The first stanza introduces us to two people, the poverty-stricken fisherman and his customer, who is also the narrator of the poem. Here, the narrator himself finds it hard to believe the intensity of his hunger for sex. The fisherman tries to casually offer his daughter to satisfy the sexual urge of his customer in return for money. Although his eyes brim with guilt, he tries to brave it (“his white bone thrash his eyes”) and tempt the narrator asking him carelessly whether he would like to “have her”. The phrase “Will you have her” makes his daughter sound like a commodity or product to be sold. Both the fisherman and the narrator are desperate here. The former is desperate out of hunger for food and the latter for sex.

In the second stanza, the narrator is being led to the fisherman’s home to meet his daughter. The narrator feels a strong sense of guilt for what he is about to do. His body tries to hold up or support his throbbing mind (filled with fear and guilt) just as a sling would hold up a fractured arm. He even considers burning the house he lived in as expiation for the sin he is going to commit. While the first stanza depicts the desperateness of the narrator, this stanza shows the strong sense of guilt that accompanies the desperation for sex. Despite the guilt, the narrator remains silent thus accepting the offer. Here,
although his mind wishes to refuse the offer, his body is too weak (or desperate for sex) to refuse. The last line shows us that the fisherman has not caught any fish and has rather only caught froth in his fishing nets. This could also metaphorically mean that the narrator too has caught nothing but sin out of his sexual desire.

In the third stanza, the narrator describes the fisherman’s house (if it may be called so). The “flickering dark” could be a symbol of the sorrow and anguish of the dwellers of the little hut where only darkness fell. The hut opened for him and it was like a wound upon his soul as well as the fisherman’s and his daughters. All three were wounded in the process. The palm leaves scratched his skin while he entered the hut leaving marks of guilt upon his body. This scratching by the palm leaves again emphasizes the narrator’s dilemma on whether he should go in or turn down the offer. The smoke from the oil lamp in the hut kept on coming into his mind, either because the smoke was intoxicating him or it was pushing him into a state of helplessness.

In the final stanza, the narrator describes how the fisherman tries to tempt him by saying that his daughter has just turned fifteen. The age is relevant as it would be the year that a girl blossomed into womanhood, a perfectly eligible age for satisfying male lust. “Feel her” says the fisherman as he indirectly asks his customer to have sexual intercourse with his daughter. The fisherman also ensures that he will leave them alone for some time so that the narrator gets time alone with his daughter to satisfy his sexual hunger. A fisherman's desperate luring
of a customer to have sex with his daughter in order to satisfy the hunger of his stomach hits upon the narrator’s conscience (hence, “The sky fell on me…”). The narrator than describes the fisherman’s daughter as tall and thin. Although just fifteen years old, she felt “cold as rubber” probably due to undernourishment or it would be a depiction of her coldness towards him. Her disinterestedness and mechanical act of sex is shown here. Her legs are described as “wormy” maybe because they're thin out of poverty and hunger. The word “wormy” also shows that the sexual act he was indulging in was feeling disgusting now rather than satisfying. Instead of feeling contentment at the end of the sexual act, he feels or understands the other kind of hunger, the hunger of the stomach. The phrase, “fish slithering, turning inside” is a reference to the feeling felt inside the stomach when one is starved. He realizes the intensity of the physical hunger for food which drove the father and daughter into such a business.

ANALYSIS

“In “Hunger”, I was writing from experience” says Mahapatra. Whether this experience was his own or somebody else’s is not clear. The poem is commonly considered as depicting the poverty experienced in a country like India. The kind of poverty that forces people to practice social evils like child prostitution. A similar theme can be found in Jayanta Mahapatra’s “The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street" where he deals with brothels, brothel-mongers, and the pains and agonies felt by prostitutes who are forced into this profession. The
poem “Hunger” is often rated as an unapologetic commentary on the Indian society. On a close reading of the poem, we can make out that it portrays three types of hunger, one, the basic, physical hunger for food, two, hunger for sex and three, hunger for emotional support. The sexual hunger and physical hunger (for food) are mutually satisfied in the poem. Surprisingly, both the narrator and the fisherman’s acts are justified in the poem. The fisherman is justified in his act of pawning his daughter’s flesh for the sexual gratification of a lustful customer because it is his only means of livelihood and poverty and hunger forced him into it. The narrator is also justified in the poem through the depiction of both the intensity of his sexual urge/hunger as well as his strong sense of guilt. Both the fisherman and the narrator are desperate, both are also equally fighting their guilty conscience. The narrator's mind is burdened both by guilt and passion and there is also a yearning for spiritual intimacy or emotional support which he does not gain here. Instead, the poem paints a picture of a revolting sexual experience that is too burdened with guilt and too mechanical in nature. Silence is an important symbol in the poem. The narrator's silence shows his acceptance of the offer even though he had a choice of turning it down. The daughter’s silence is even more painful as it depicts her helplessness. The narrator who only knew hunger for sex evolves into a man who also understands the desperateness that arises out of the hunger for food by the end of the poem.
AK RAMANUJAN

Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan was a poet, linguist and translator. Born to a Brahmin Iyengar family in Mysore, Karnataka he did both his graduation and post-graduation in English Literature from the University of Mysore. He did his Ph.D. in Linguistics at Indiana University through the Fulbright scholarship he earned himself. He then went on to teach at several prestigious colleges across the U.S. such as Harvard University, University of California- Berkeley etc. Being fluent in various languages, he is considered to be one of the most prominent poets of Indo-American poetry. He received the Padma Shri Award in the year 1976 and in 1983 he was also awarded the MacArthur Prize Fellowship. He passed away in 1993 in Chicago.

Some of the common features of Ramanujan’s poetry are his integration of the individual with the family, his focus on Indian traditions and culture and the changes taking place within Indian society. Almost all these features are reflected in the poem “The Obituary” which we are about to discuss. Another prominent characteristic of his poetry is an encounter between the East and West as well as between the past and present. Some of the common themes recurring in his poetry are his childhood memories with his father, or his mother, or grandparents and his role in the family. A.K. Ramanujan believes that one needs to have a link with his past in order to grasp present realities. He often finds comfort in traditions and beliefs of the ancient world.
“THE OBITUARY”

(Text of the Poem)

Father, when he passed on,
left dust
on a table of papers,
left debts and daughters,
a bedwetting grandson
named by the toss
of a coin after him,

a house that leaned
slowly through our growing
years on a bent coconut
tree in the yard.
Being the burning type,
he burned properly
at the cremation
as before, easily
and at both ends,
left his eye coins
in the ashes that didn't
look one bit different,
several spinal discs, rough,
some burned to coal, for sons
to pick gingerly
and throw as the priest
said, facing east
where three rivers met
near the railway station;
no longstanding headstone
with his full name and two dates
to hold in their parentheses
everything he didn't quite
manage to do himself,
like his caesarian birth
in a brahmin ghetto
and his death by heart-
failure in the fruit market.

But someone told me
he got two lines
in an inside column
of a Madras newspaper
sold by the kilo
exactly four weeks later
to streethawkers

who sell it in turn
to the small groceries
where I buy salt,
coriander,
and jaggery
in newspaper cones
that I usually read
for fun, and lately
in the hope of finding
these obituary lines.
And he left us
a changed mother
and more than
one annual ritual.
EXPLANATION

“Obituary” by A.K. Ramanujan is a poem that looks back on the life and times of a beloved family member after his death. The poem comprises of eight stanzas of seven lines each. In the first stanza, the speaker says that when his father died all that he left behind for the family were burdens like debts and an unmarried daughter. The speaker’s father also left behind insignificant things like a table of papers and a bedwetting grandson who shares his father’s name. Here the poet is more concerned about all the responsibilities left behind by his father like paying off debts and getting his sisters married off along with a young nephew to be taken care of rather than being grieved by his father’s death.

In the second stanza, the poet tells us that their house is in a poor state as it is leaning on a coconut tree which itself is a bent one. He calls his father the ‘burning type’. This particular phrase (burning type) may either refer to the fact that his father was a hot tempered or impatient man or may also mean that their father was someone who tolerated all difficulties of life silently burning inside. And hence he burned properly and quickly at his cremation.

In the third stanza, the speaker describes his father's eyes as ‘eye coins’. The term ‘eye coins’ could either refer to greed for money or eyes that showed no emotion or sentiment. These eyes and his spinal disc remain the same (or has failed to burn properly) even after the body is burned.
In the next stanza, the poet ridicules the Hindu tradition of picking up burned pieces of the dead ones remains and throwing it to a certain direction or place as instructed by the priest. They throw it in the direction of east where three rivers meet right next to a railway station. The speaker also lets us know that his father has no proper gravestone inscribed with his name or date of birth and death. Probably because they, as a family, cannot afford to put one up.

The fifth stanza begins as a continuation of the previous stanza where the speaker tells us that there is no gravestone to hold in parenthesis all the things his father left unaccomplished. The poet also lets the readers know that the cause of his father’s death was a sudden cardiac arrest in the market and that his father was delivered into this world through a caesarian delivery in a slum area or minority area of Brahmins. This stanza highlights the fact that there was nothing great or different about his father as both his birth and death seem ordinary and almost insignificant.

In the sixth stanza, the speaker says that he heard from someone about an obituary of his father written in an unpopular Madras newspaper. The insignificance of the newspaper also is shown in the poet’s lines where he says that this newspaper would be sold by the kilo to street vendors exactly a month later of publication.

In the seventh stanza, we find that the street vendor in turn sells the newspapers to small groceries from where the poet buys his groceries like salt, coriander and jaggery from. These groceries that the poet buys are sold
to him wrapped in such newspapers which sometimes he reads just for fun.

In the final stanza, he has now begun to buy more groceries in the hope that he would someday come across his father’s obituary lines in one of these newspaper wraps. He further tells us that the final things his father left them with his death were a changed or bereaved mother and an annual tradition or ritual to celebrate the memory of his father for his peace. In the end, the readers are left with the knowledge that except for the few lines of obituary printed in the newspapers, the poet’s father failed to leave anything else of value. On the other hand, all he did leave were unbearable burdens on the poet’s shoulders.

ANALYSIS

The poem “Obituary” dwells on the death of the poet’s father. The title ‘obituary’ is literally a published piece of news article that is written in tribute to a dead person informing others of his death and focuses on the achievements of his life. This poem is right the opposite of the literal or usual meaning and purpose of an obituary. Instead of a serious tone, the poem employs a comic, ironic and non-romantic tone. The poem contains two obituaries, one the poem itself and the other the published obituary (in a Madras newspaper) mentioned by the speaker of the poem. Ramanujan’s “Obituary” points out all the things left incomplete or undone by the dead person instead of highlighting his achievements. This is what makes Ramanujan’s “Obituary” ironic in nature. This poem hints at the essential absurdity of life
and its memory. Memory is portrayed as an extremely limited means of constructing a semblance of coherent meaning. The poem sheds light on the transience of life. The physical remains of his father’s cremation seem to be the only tangible evidence of their dead father. The poem also portrays a typical male-dominated Indian society where the mother and sisters are dependent on the men in their family for their livelihood and well-being. The metaphor of the leaning house depicts the deterioration in the quality of their life as a family. It could also be a symbol of their dependency on others throughout their life for their livelihood. An amalgamation of the old and new is apparent in the description of the rituals at the junction where the three rivers meet next to the ‘railway station’. Here, he tries to mix Hindu traditional values with cosmopolitan values. Throughout the poem, the speaker makes it quite clear that he does not intend to speak heavily on loss or depression on the death of his father. The poem also shows the poet’s disregard for traditional Hindu rituals and customs on posthumous ceremonies.
R. PARTHASARATHY

Rajagopal Parthasarathy was born in the year 1934 and educated partly in Mumbai and partly in the UK. He worked as an English Lecturer in Bombay for around ten years. In 1971, he began working as Regional Editor of the Oxford University Press in Chennai. His works include “Poetry from Leeds” (1968), “Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets” (1976) and “Rough Passage” (1977). In “Modern Indian Poetry”, Brice Kings says that “Parthasarathy gives more emphasis to the loss of root, through this English language education and poetry which places a wall between himself and the traditions of Tamil culture. Thus, the poet feels that he has become a stranger to the traditions of Tamil culture and thus has lost his roots.”

His works depict this constant awareness of being an exile both abroad and in one’s own country. In his works, one can detect a need to overcome this sense of alienation from his own native culture and to rediscover his roots. He attempts to forge or invent an English language that is naturalized to express the Indian sensibility. This predicament is that of an IndoAnglian poet who is stuck in between the dilemma of a bilingual and bicultural situation. Parthasarathy is perhaps the only contemporary Indo-Anglian poet to explore and dramatize the poetical predicament. In his poetry’s confessional, personal and authentic tone, he may be compared to poets like Kamala Das and A.K.Ramanujan. In his seminal essay titled “Whoring After English Gods”, Parthasarathy points out two problems of the
Indian poet in English – the quality of experience and the choice of medium. To sum up, Parthasarathy’s poetry is an intense search for identity, a search for roots in his native cultural environment and language.

“RIVER, ONCE”

(Text of the Poem)

With paper-boats
boys tickle my ribs
And buffaloes have turned me
To a pond.
There’s eaglewood in my hair
and stale flowers.
Every evening
as bells roll
in the forehead
of temples
I see a man
on the steps
clean his arse.
Kingfishers and egrets
whom I fled
have flown
my paps.
Also, emperors and poets
who slept
in my arms.
I am become a sewer
now, no one
has any use for Vaikai
river, once
of this sweet city.

EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS

This poem highlights the exploitation of nature by human beings. The river in Parthasarathy’s “River, Once” refers to Vaigai River in the city of Madurai. The river is personified as a mother in this poem. The old glory of the river is now lost as it has turned into a mere sewer due to human exploitation or misuse of the river. The poem begins by describing the present, pitiable condition of the river Vaikai. It is now frequented by
children who come to float paper boats in it and by buffaloes who wallow in it, degrading the river into feeling like a pond. There’s wood barks and stale flowers all over the river. It’s as if the mother’s (rivers) hair is decorated with eaglewood and dead flowers. And men come to defecate or bath in the river even while the temple bell tolls. The river’s divinity is lost forever now. The word ‘ribs’ used here is a metaphor for the banks of the river. The river itself is conscious of its ugliness and dirt (which is concrete evidence of man’s abuse). The once glorious river is now reduced to merely a storehouse of junk, a place for unhygienic and unholy activities.

The poet then describes the past glory enjoyed by the river. How it was once a source of inspiration for poets and a place of refuge for Emperors and Kings. As a mother, she proudly fed birds like the Kingfisher and Egrets (egrets are white herons). It must be noted that ‘egrets’ in Chinese symbolism are considered as a symbol of purity, patience and long life. Herons were also thought to have the ability to communicate with Gods. And Kingfishers are generally considered as a promise of prosperity. Hence both the kingfisher and egret refer to the once prosperous, pure and divine state enjoyed by the river Vaikai. Now, they have all flown away from her breasts (paps) as she is unable to feed them as she has turned or degraded into a mere sewer. She is no more a river and this takes us to the significance of the title of the poem, “River, Once”. It was a river once indeed but not a river anymore and has instead become a sewer due to man’s exploitation and
indifference towards nature. The poem ends by the river’s self-realization that no one has any use for the river Vaikai now. Contrastive pictures are presented throughout the poem which helps to highlight the difference between the old glory of the river as compared to the present degraded state. River, which is considered as a symbol of life, is now contaminated just like human life.

“River, Once” by Parthasarathy is a poem that was inspired by A.K.Ramanujan’s poem “A River”, as Parthasarathy himself admits. Both Parthasarathy and Ramanujan use literature as a means to shed light on ecological imbalances in the world. Parthasarathy seeks changes in human attitude towards nature, he wants them to realize the inter-dependable relation humans have with nature.
KAMALA DAS

Born into a Royal Hindu family in the year 1934, Das converted to Islam in the year 1999. Her mother, Balamani Amma was a popular writer who published over 20 anthologies of poetry. Kamala Das was described in “The Times” as the “mother of modern Indian English Poetry”. Her style of writing is often compared with that of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. She went on to win the Kendra Sahitya Academy Award in 1985. She passed away in the year 2009 after a severe bout of pneumonia.

One of the characteristic features of Kamala Das, as seen in many of her poems, is the casual, cynical view of male-female relationship. The female characters in Das’ poems have to face a male dominated world of sex, lust and lechery. There are strong notes of subjectivism in her poetry. Her poems are mainly concerned with herself as a victim of the circumstances of her life and sexual humiliations. Being subjective and confessional, her poems lets us peep into her sufferings and tortured psyche on one hand and the complexity of female sensibility. The speaking voice in the genre of poetry of Kamala Das is unmistakably the poet herself. Das’ poetry conjures up a world of unfulfilled love: a world in which the woman is frustrated at her partner’s stagnation.

E.V. Ramakrishnan states that confessional poetry is a struggle to relate the personal, private experience with the outer world as it is. Such a struggle is evident in the poetry of Kamala Das. In several of her poems, she
makes a candid and bold revelation of her sexual urge, unfulfilled longings and inner yearnings. By her bold confessions, iconoclastic attitudes and tongue in cheek attacks on social conventions and taboos, Das emerges as the emancipated Indian woman who comes to terms with her modern existence in the background of her Hindu ethos. Kamala Das is also called ‘poet of the body’ for she is the first Indian woman to speak frankly about sex.

“THE OLD PLAYHOUSE”

(Text of the Poem)

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her

In the long summer of your love so that she would forget

Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but

Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless

Pathways of the sky. It was not to gather knowledge

Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn

What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every

Lesson you gave was about yourself. You were pleased

With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow
Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured
Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed
My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices. You called me wife,
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
Questions I mumbled incoherent replies. The summer
Begins to pall. I remember the rudder breezes
Of the fall and the smoke from the burning leaves. Your room is
Always lit by artificial lights, your windows always
Shut. Even the air-conditioner helps so little,
All pervasive is the male scent of your breath. The cut flowers
In the vases have begun to smell of human sweat. There is
No more singing, no more dance, my mind is an old
Playhouse with all its lights put out. The strong man's technique is
Always the same, he serves his love in lethal doses,
For, love is Narcissus at the water's edge, haunted
By its own lonely face, and yet it must seek at last
An end, a pure, total freedom, it must will the mirrors
To shatter and the kind night to erase the water.

EXPLANATION

This poem belongs to the collection “The Old Playhouse and Other Poems”, 1973. The poem begins by the poetess comparing herself to a domesticated swallow, who is captured by her husband. He attempts to tame her just as one would tame a pet. The poetess feels like a caged bird whose dreams and freedom are curtailed by her husband. He also tries to make her forget how her life was before her marriage. The freedom, the comforts and the distinct identity she once enjoyed is no more now. She is made to forget all other seasons or in other words, she is made to forget all joys in her life. The speaker says that she married to discover herself and to undertake a journey of self-discovery. But then all her hopes, dreams and romantic notions of marriage are shattered as all that her husband teachers her is about himself. She feels degraded as she is treated as a mere object for sexual gratification. Her husband is so self-centered that he fails to realize that her soul is not
present in the process of love-making. He was pleased merely by the physical sight and response from his wife’s body and cared not for her emotional contentment. The speaker describes their love making act with disgust as a merely mechanical act without soul. Her husband only explored her body out of lust and never even attempted to explore her soul or mind. While making love, the speaker says that every part of the body is penetrated except the soul. Hence, she hardly ever experiences feelings of oneness with him. She is left emotionally unsatisfied and disappointed.

Being a wife, she was expected to serve him food and vitamins (or medicines) at the right time. She lived forever under his monstrous ego. She felt totally subjugated and this in turn made her feel like she has turned or degraded into a dwarf. She lost all her dreams, desires, even her identity and with this, all her former stature as well. This stifling life leaves her mentally perturbed, hence, her responses and reactions often sound illogical and incoherent. She is completely dehumanized in this caged experience. The “summer”, the “rudder breezes” and the “burning leaves” highlights the suffocation felt by the speaker.

Her husband turns into a source of pervasive oppression. A lot of urban imagery (artificial lights, cut flowers, air-conditioner, shut windows etc.) is used to describe the unnatural state of her lifeless married life and the fake love in it. The cut flowers losing their natural scent may be a symbol of all the joys of the speaker's life that have now faded. Her husband has reduced love to mere
lust and his fake love is almost deadly in nature. His love in fatal doses almost kills her. According to Greek legend, Narcissus is a Greek youth who is obsessively in love with his own image which is reflected in the water of a fountain. He doesn't realize it is himself and he thinks it's the nymph of the place. Thus, he tries to approach it and kills himself in the process. Narcissism also refers to sexual gratification found in one’s own body or a vain admiration of one’s idealized self-image. Basically, what the poet is trying to convey here is that excessive and obsessive self-love is self-destructive in nature. Hence, her husband’s self-centered, fake love would surely lead to a destructive end. It would not only kill her husband but also herself. She yearns for a release from the tyranny of her husband, even if this meant suicide.

SHORT ANALYSIS

“The Old Playhouse” by Kamala Das is in short, a description of an unsatisfactory and disappointing married life. It is more like a public protest against the poetess’ husband. Let us consider the title of the poem. A ‘playhouse’ is literally a miniature version of a house for children to play in, usually girls. Girls use playhouses for pretend play as they are trained by society to believe they are all naturally home makers who tend to homes and care for children while boys play around with toy cars, guns or balls. The playhouse is thus responsible for reinforcing stereotypical notions on gender and propagating male dominance. Thus, the playhouse could be taken as a symbol for a traditional patriarchal society.
The persona in the poem is a woman who is caged like a swallow even though she has an inborn “urge to fly”. The monotony of domestic life is hinted at in words like “tea”, “vitamins” and “flowers in the vases”.

Love, which is usually considered as the spirit of life is represented in this poem as the killer of life. The poem sheds light on the fact that physical gratification alone fails to provide contentment or fulfillment in married life. In fact, self-identity is lost through this act of spiritless love making.
GIEVE PATEL

Gieve Patel (born 18 August 1940) is an Indian writer, painter and a practicing doctor based in Mumbai. Patel belongs to a group of writers who have subscribed themselves to the 'Green Movement' which is concerned in an effort to protect the environment. His poems speak of his deep concerns for nature and exposes man's cruelty towards it. Patel's works include “Poems” (1966), “How Do You Withstand” (1976) and “Mirrored Mirroring” (1991).

Patel has also exhibited his paintings for Contemporary Indian Art, Grey Art Gallery, New York City etc. His poem titled "Licence" from the collection “How do you Withstand” is included in the anthology “Confronting Love” which was edited by Arundhati Subramanyam and Jerry Pinto.

“THE AMBIGUOUS FATE OF GIEVE PATEL, HE BEING NEITHER MUSLIM NOR HINDU IN INDIA”

(Text of the Poem)

"To be no part of this hate is deprivation.

Never could I claim a circumcised butcher

Mangled a child out of my arms, never rave"
At the milk-bibing, grass-guzzling hypocrite
Who pulled off my mother's voluminous
Robes and sliced away at her dugs.
Planets focus their fires
Into a worm of destruction
Edging along the continent. Bodies
Turn ashen and shrivel. I
Only burn my tail”

EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS

Gieve Patel’s “The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel, He Being Neither Muslim Nor Hindu in India” is a satirical poem on religious hatred and violence that ensues from it in India. To understand the poem, one must understand that Patel was a Parsi and the Parsi community suffered negligence during the post-independence stage of India when Hindu’s and Muslims were raging communal wars against each other. Patel is, therefore, neither a Hindu nor a Muslim and this is why he finds himself stuck in an ambiguous (undecided or unclear) fate. This poem conveys two messages basically. One, it is an ironic reference to the communal rioting in India and two, it sheds light on the estrangement or isolation felt by the Parsi community in the midst of these riots. The poem begins by the speaker saying that not belonging to either
the community of Muslims nor of Hindus itself a state of deprivation. He could never claim to have a child forced out of his hands by a Muslim (hence circumcised) butcher nor could he claim to be part of the vegetarian (milk-bibing and grass-guzzling) Hindus who could be potential rapists of women. These lines may also indicate that the real victims of any riot or violent act are probably the innocent women and children who play no role in these riots. When all the planets (probably a reference to Hindus and Muslims) were focused on destroying each other and the Parsi were reduced to mere bystanders or onlookers. As a Parsi observer, the speaker finds it difficult to choose to be on the part of either side. “Edging along the continent” may be hinting at how the Parsi community were marginalized and forced to migrate. Their suffering also arose from the fact that they witnessed this war between the other two communities and this itself felt like neglect and an estrangement from the society to which he belongs. While the entire country is on fire, the Parsis only ‘burn’ their ‘tails’. This shows that they are never directly involved or physically affected by the communal hatred between the Hindus and the Muslims. This poem also sheds light on the animal desire latent in human society and the rise of a cult of violence and urge to wound, to torture and to kill. In short, the poem grieves on the isolation faced by the Parsis.
MEENA ALEXANDER

Born in Allahabad, Meena Alexander was brought up in Kerala and Sudan. She received her PhD from Nottingham University. During the initial five years in India, she published her first three volumes of poetry: “The Bird’s Bright Ring” (1976), “I Root My Name” (1977) and “Without Place” (1978). She taught at various universities in India and then moved to New York in the year 1979. She then went on to publish two novels, six volumes of poetry, a play and an autobiography as well. One of the most distinguished themes that appears in her poetry are the difficulty in being a woman, of being in a woman’s body and also handling the societal and physiological pressures on the female body. Her perspective is complicated and often mixed up due to her alienation from the language and culture of her childhood.

“Raw Silk” is one of her best-known poetry collections to which the poem (“Blue Lotus”) which we are about to study belongs to. It was in 1993 that she published her autobiographical memoir titled “Fault Lines”.

BLUE LOTUS

(Text of the Poem)

"It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves"

Wallace Stevens
I

Twilight, I stroll through stubble fields
clouds lift, the hope of a mountain.

What was distinct turns to mist,

what was fitful burns the heart.

When I dream of my tribe gathering
by the red soil of the Pamba River

I feel my writing hand split at the wrist.

Dark tribute or punishment, who can tell?

You kiss the stump and where the wrist

Bone was, you set the stalk of a lotus.

There is a blue lotus in my grandmother’s garden,
its petals whirl in moonlight like this mountain.

II
An altar, a stone cracked down the spine,
a shelter, a hovel of straw and sperm
out of which rise a man and a woman

and one is a ghost though I cannot tell which
for the sharpness between them scents
even the orchids, a sharing of things

invisible till the mountain fetches
itself out of water out of ice out of sand
and they each take tiny morsels

of the mountain and set it on banana leaves
and as if it were a feast of saints
they cry out to their dead and are satisfied.

III
I have climbed the mountain and cleared
away the sand and ice using first my bare hands
then a small knife. Underneath I found

the sign of the four-cornered world, gammadion,
which stands for migration, for the scattering
of the people. The desolation of the mothers

singing in their rock houses becomes us,
so too the child at the cliff’s edge
catching a cloud in her palm

as stocks of blood are gathered on the plain,
spread into sheaves, a circlet for bones
and flint burns and the mountain resurrects itself.

IV

Tribe, tribute, tribulation:
to purify the tongue and its broken skin
I am learning the language again,

a new speech for a new tribe.

How did I reach this nervous empire,
sharp store of sense?

Donner un sens plus pur etc. etc.
does not work so well anymore,
nor calme bloc ici-bas.

Blunt metals blossom.
Children barter small arms.
Ground rules are abolished.

The earth has no capitals.
In my distinct notebooks
I write things of this sort.
Monsoon clouds from the shore
near my grandmother’s house
float through my lines.

I take comfort in sentences.

“Who cares what you write?”
someone cries.

A hoarse voice, I cannot see the face.
He smells like a household ghost.
There can be no concord between us.

I search out a bald rock between two trees,
ash trees on the riverbank
on an island where towers blazed.
This is my short
incantation,
my long way home.

William, Rabindranath, Czeslaw,
Mirabai, Anna, Adrienne
reach out your hands to me.

Now stones have tongues.
Sibilant scattering,
stormy grace!

EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS

The “Blue Lotus” by Meena Alexander belongs to the collection “Raw Silk” (2004). The female persona in this poem undertakes a journey into the past and this journey unravels pictures of ancestors and homelands.

In the first section of the poem, the speaker communicates feelings of un-belongingness. She then arrives at a spiritual residence where the red soil of the Pamba river in Kerala meets the ash trees on a New York riverbank. This is the place where a broken identity
can be restored back to wholeness through the use of the ancient magic of language. This stanza is a mixture of different emotions. Dream has been inserted inside as if it’s another layer of the speaker’s memory. Here, the phrase “stubble fields” represents how the poet has cleared out unwanted memories from her mind and heart. The clouds represent the cover or veil that hid the truth of abuse from the poet. The abuse itself is represented by mountains. When the poet tries to uncover these memories from her mind, the clouds stand in her way. In the third line, she explains how clear her life once used to be until these memories started resurfacing. This is when she loses clarity in her life. The memories come back and hurt her.

In the second part, the poet explores the space of memory in the poem. She attempts to identify herself and she meets herself as the woman in writing in a foreign land. The poet attempts to answer questions of identity and belonging and searches for a stone, a shelter, a hovel of straw or even a sperm out of which the life of a man and woman begins.

There seems to be an anguishing sense of nostalgia and a wish to belong to an imaginary homeland. The female speaker’s ethnic identity is brought out through the ‘Monsoon’ rains and sparkling ‘shores’. The poet uses stones as a metaphor for repressed memories of abuse that the poet hid from herself for most of her life. This brings us to the quote by Wallace Steven that Meena Alexander gives at the beginning of “Blue Lotus”. The quote (“It is not enough to cover the rocks with leaves”)
suggests that memories or repressed memories of abuse within one’s subconscious mind can’t be kept hidden for long, it’s bound to resurface at some point of time in one’s life. By the end of the poem, the leaves have cleared from the rocks. Years after the abuse, the ‘stones’ or ‘rocks’ finally have tongues and she is able to reflect on those painful memories now.

It is a place that is open enough to allow trans-cultural and trans-historical literary authors like Wordsworth, Mirabai, Rich etc. The speaker reaches out to her poetic ancestors to relieve and comfort herself. (“I search out...stormy grace”). Here, contemporary sorrows and sufferings invalidate distinctions of nations and countries.
ARUNDHATI SUBRAMANIAM

Arundhati Subramaniam is a poet and writer based in Mumbai. She has published three books of poetry: “On Cleaning Bookshelves” (2001) and “Where I Live” (2005) and “Where I Live” (2009). She is also the author of a prose study, “The Book of Buddha” (2005), and was co-editor of “Confronting Love” (2005), an anthology of contemporary Indian love poetry in English. Her poetry has been translated into Italian, Tamil, Spanish and Hindi. Subramaniam is India’s country editor for the Poetry International Web. She received the Raza Award for Poetry in 2009, the Visiting Arts Fellowship by the Poetry Society and the Homi Bhabha Fellowship in 2012. She has also written on literature, theatre, culture and even classical dance for various leading newspapers in India.

“HOME”

(Text of the Poem)

Give me a home

that isn’t mine,

where I can slip in and out of rooms

without a trace,
never worrying
about the plumbing,
the colour of the curtains,
the cacophony of books by the bedside.

A home that I can wear lightly,
where the rooms aren’t clogged
with yesterday’s conversations,
where the self doesn’t bloat
to fill in the crevices.

A home, like this body,
so alien when I try to belong,
so hospitable
when I decide I’m just visiting.

EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS

The poem begins by the speaker asking to be given a home that doesn't belong to her. Home is a place which
is usually believed to be a safe, secure and peaceful place, away from all the threats of the world. However, for women, home may turn into a place of suppression and subjugation almost to a point where it becomes more like prison for them. The speaker is probably trying to break free from this prison of domestic life, yearning for freedom. The lines “where I can slip in ... bedside” may refer to escaping from burdens of household chores that are dumped upon women for their entire lives. She yearns for a home which feels light on her mind and is not blocked with conversations (unwanted conversations maybe). A home which isn't filled in every nook and corner with self-ego. The speaker expresses a desire never to have belonged to any home at all so she could have explored all her dreams and desires freely. She never feels like she belongs to the place where she lives and is in constant search for a place to call her own. On another level, the poem could be a woman’s quest for regaining self-identity. A woman’s self-identity remains ignored and thus it gradually fades away into the dark corners and crevices of human existence. The poem may refer to the different identities donned by a woman.
MEENA KANDASAMY

Meena Kandasamy was born in 1984 and is based in Chennai. She is an Indian poet, fiction writer, translator as well as activist. Her debut collection of poems was titled “Touch” (2006) and the poems in this collection revolved around caste and untouchability. Her second collection titled “Ms. Militancy” (2010) contained feminist re claimings and reworkings of Hindu and Tamil my ths. The poem “Dead Woman Walking” is a part of this collection. “The Gypsy Goddess” (2014), “When I Hit You: Or, The Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife” (2017) and “Exquisite Cadavers” (2019) are the novels penned by Meena Kandasamy. Her works have appeared in around eighteen languages.

“DEAD WOMAN WALKING”

(Text of the Poem)

I am a dead woman walking asylum corridors,

with faltering step, with felted, flying hair,

with hollowed cheeks that offset bulging eyes,

with welts on my wrists, with creasing skin,

with seizures of speech and song, with a single story

between my sobbing, pendulous breasts.
once i was a wife: beautiful,
made to a merchant: shifty-eyed.
living the life, until he was lost in listless doubt—
of how, what i gave him was more delicious
than whatever, whatever had been given to me.
his mathematics could never explain
the magic of my multiplying love—this miracle—
like materializing mangoes out of thin air,
like dishing out what was never there.

this discrepancy drove him away:
a new job in another city.
he hitched himself to a fresh and formless wife.
of course, as all women do, i found out.

i wept in vain, i wailed, i walked on my head, i went to god.
i sang in praise of dancing dervishes, i made music
for this world to devour on some dejected day.

i shed my beauty, i sacrificed my six senses.

some called me mad, some called me mother

but all of them led me here,

to this land of the living-dead.

EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS

This poem by Meena Kandasamy is woven around the legendary story of KaraikkalAmmaiyar. KaraikkalAmmaiyar is a mythological character who was a great devotee of Lord Shiva and is believed to have strong faith in Shiva right from childhood onwards. She was later married to Paramadhatthan, the son of a wealthy merchant. She continued to take care of Shiva devotees as she did in her childhood days feeding them and giving them clothes. Once her husband gave her two mangoes to be kept for him and as she had an unexpected Shiva devotee as guest for lunch and lunch wasn't ready yet, she gave the guest one of these mangoes. Later, when her husband came home she served him a mango and he asked for the second. She didn't know what to do as it had already been served to the guest at lunch so she prays hard to Shiva and suddenly a mango appears in her hand as if by magic.
This second mango tasted extremely delicious as compared to the first and her husband started questioning her. As he wasn't a believer of Shiva, she refrained from telling the actual truth and her husband began suspecting her. He asked her to get another fruit and she prays again and gives him a mango but it disappears as soon as he touches it. This makes her husband realize that she is no ordinary woman but a divine person and thus calls her “ammaiyar” (meaning mother). He could no longer take her as a wife so he leaves her and moves to another place where he marries another woman named Chellam through whom he had a child as well. Dejected, Karaikal Ammaiayar prays to Lord Shiva to give her a different form and is granted her wish by becoming a fiery form of Kali. It is this story upon which Meena Kandasamy’s poem “Dead Woman Walking” is based upon. The poem narrates how this once beautiful and loyal wife is turned into a ‘dead woman walking’ by her husband’s dejection and desertion.

The poem begins with a description of the woman (Karaikal Ammaiayar) who now resembles a dead, spiritless woman who has lost her sanity as well. Her untidy hair, sunken cheeks, protruding eyes, wrinkled skin, her epileptic fits of speech,songs and bruises on her wrist further emphasizes the mental anguish she may have gone through due to her husband's desertion. The phrase ‘pendulous breasts’ implies the loss of former beauty as well as youth. She couldn’t comprehend her husband’s logic for rejecting her for her ‘multiplying love’. The miracle of the mango in KaraikkalAmmaiyar’s story is referred to her and she is
shocked that by performing a miracle and serving her husband a delicious fruit he abandons her instead of holding on to her and loving her more. Her sincerity and love for him is completely disregarded. And this miraculous act drives her husband away from her into another city where he finds a new job and a new wife. Just as all women find out about their husbands’ affairs or secret marriages, she too finds out about this act of deception. This makes her weep at first, but her sorrow could not be contained and so the sobbing turns to wailing. She then turns all her attention to Lord Shiva, and she loses herself so much in this devotion that she soon loses all her six senses as well as her beauty and youth. Soon people start calling her mad while some others revere her as ‘mother’. But one thing that the speaker is sure of is that everyone is equally responsible for driving her into the ‘living-dead’ state she is in. Not just her husband, but even the patriarchal society had its role in leading her to insanity and spiritless body.

This poem sheds light on the difficulties and anguish of dejected, exploited and abandoned women. The poem also uses KaraikalAmmayar as a representative of Dalit women who are sexually exploited and later abandoned by men. “Dead Woman Walking” thus sarcastically highlights how such women die inside while they are physically still alive.
SECTION B: FICTION

MULK RAJ ANAND

Born in Peshawar in 1906 as the child of a coppersmith, Mulk Raj Anand graduated in India and received his Ph.D from abroad. And while in Europe, he became politically active in India’s struggle for autonomy. Along with Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand is considered as one of the pioneers of Indian English literature. Mulk Raj Anand is Western educated and he wanted to live with Gandhi at Sabarmati Ashram. While RK Narayan and Raja Rao celebrated Gandhi as a national leader, Anand actually followed him, practicing a Gandhian life. Anand was thus awakened to a new side of India, a social reality to which he was blind until then.

Social realism in literature tends to turn didactic, but rarely did Anand’s works slip into didacticism. While in Europe, Anand wrote with Marxist principles, back in India he added Gandhism to it and hence his characters are always from the working class. He focuses on the injustices that are experienced by the downtrodden (which is very evident in novels like “The Untouchable”(1935),“Coolie” (1936)etc.). He always sided with the lower class people. He also wrote other novels and short story collections along with taking up editing work of various magazines and journals. He also worked now and then on a proposed seven volume
autobiographical novel titled *Seven Ages of Man*, but was able to complete only four volumes.

**COOLIE**

Coolie, by Mulk Raj Anand, was first published in 1936. This novel is concerned with the consequences of British Rule in India and the effects of the rigid caste system that structured Indian society. “Coolie” is a term used for an unskilled labourer in India. This novel tells the story of Munoo, a young boy from the Kangra Hills in Bilaspur. He is an orphan who lives under the care of his aunt and uncle. Unfortunately, early on in the story itself they reveal they can no longer support Munoo and insist on him finding a job for himself. This is the beginning of a journey that will take Munoo to Bombay and beyond and sadly, it simultaneously marks the end of his childhood.

**SUMMARY**

Munoo, accompanied by his uncle, travels to a nearby town where he finds a job as a servant to a bank clerk, Babu Nathoo Ram. He pays a meagre Rs.3 for Munoo’s service and this is taken by Munoo’s uncle. Munoo is mistreated by his master’s wife but he admires his master’s younger brother, Prem Chand, who is a doctor. Babu Nathoo Ram himself is a typical example of a Middle-Class Anglophile who has internalized the values of the colonizer and firmly believes in the supremacy of white people. A great fuss is made when the aptly named British native, Mr. English visits the bank where Babu Nathoo Ram works. However, this episode disillusions
readers about the apparent supremacy of White people or the colonizers. When Prem Chand asks about the best place in Britain to further his medical training to Mr. English, we find out that he has no clue about it as he himself is an uneducated man.

After accidentally injuring Sheila, Babu Nathoo Ram’s daughter, Munoo is beaten up and so he decides to run away. He makes it as far as Daultapur, where he is taken in by a person called Prabha who runs a pickle factory. Prabha and his wife are kind to Munoo, but the work he has to perform is quite hard. Prabha is set on appeasing his neighbor, Sir Todar Mal, who is the Public Prosecutor, by offering him free pickles and jam to prevent him having the factory shut down because the smoke irritates him. Ultimately, however, it is Prabha’s own business partner, Ganpat, who cheats him and leaves him bankrupt.

When Prabha loses the factory, Munoo is again left jobless and has to manage by himself once again. He chances upon an elephant driver who is travelling to Bombay with a circus and decides to join them. Bombay was a promising aspect for Munoo as factory work there paid around fifteen to thirty rupees. While Munoo is mesmerized with Bombay initially, he soon realizes that, even here, “coolies” must sleep on the streets. He manages to find work at Sir George White’s cotton mill where he meets Ratan. Ratan is a wrestler and a member of the worker’s union, a man who has chosen to fight his masters and reject the exploitative conditions in which he works in and Munoo idolizes him. The possibility of a
positive outcome which is symbolized by Ratan doesn't live long for Munoo, however, as a riot breaks out during a workers’ strike and he becomes lost.

While wandering the streets, he is run over by Mrs. Mainwaring’s car. In order to compensate for this accident, she hires him as a servant and takes him to Simla. Mrs. Mainwaring offers insight into another dimension of Indian society. She has English, as well as Indian, ancestry, and longs to be accepted by English society. As a result, she travelled to England and married a young English soldier. Even Though Mrs. Mainwaring treats Munoo kindly, Munoo contracts tuberculosis and dies at the age of fifteen in a quarantine shed.

SHORT ANALYSIS

“Coolie” is a proletarian novel which highlights the way in which lower classes are exploited by those above them. Munoo, the central character of the story is the best example of this sort of exploitation. It is also a satire against the injustices that prevail in the Indian society. Some of the recurrent themes in “Coolie” are poverty, exploitation, brutal suppression, class hierarchies and the power of money. The lower class seems helpless and portrays absolutely no control over their lives. Munoo is merely a representative of the thousands of lower class people like him who suffer abuse and exploitation due to poverty. Munoo has zero control over his life, over the jobs he has to do or the places he ends up in or how people treat him. As he struggles to survive it seems
almost as if he is just moving from one tragedy to another.

A postcolonial analysis of the novel reveals the presence of a lot of Homi K. Bhabha’s kind of ‘mimic men’ like Nathoo Ram Babu, Ganpat, Mrs. Mainwaring etc. These characters aspire to be accepted as English people, they ill-treat the poor and are proud of their association with the British. Mrs. Mainwaring suffers from inferiority complex about her origins and yearns to go to England to be recognized as a “pukka”. Characters like Ratan, the trade Union Personnel and Mohan show elements of colonial resistance.

Munoo on the other hand shows subservience to colonial power, it seems wired into him and in turn he is ill-treated by everyone, family, employees and everyone. His death raises questions on whether the down trodden “coolies” like him will ever have a promising future or chances of being uplifted.

Another thing to be noted in the novel is the language used in it, especially the extensive use of abuses. The author seems to have deliberately chosen offensive and abusive language to highlight his theme of class discrimination. Some of the other major themes coming up in this novel are exploitation (at different levels), social injustices, communal violence, greed, selfishness, poverty etc. “Coolie” also exposes the issues faced by ordinary men due to an unjust economic and social structure.
FOR FURTHER READING:

1. Visit the following link for a brief Study on *Coolie*: [http://ignited.in/I/a/55332](http://ignited.in/I/a/55332)


Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayanswami was born in 1906 in Madras. He completed his education in 1930 and worked briefly as a teacher before dedicating himself entirely to literature and writing. During his literary career, he published around fourteen novels, out of which “Swami and Friends” (1935). Most of Narayan’s novels were set in a fictitious Indian town called ‘Malgudi’.

R.K.Narayan is known as the Indian Jane Austen as both of them portray the middle class people in their fictions. In his introduction to “The Financial Expert”, he states that Graham Greene is his mentor. Almost all of his novels focus on a specific character and tell the story through his perspective. Autobiographical elements can be found in his novel “The Bachelor of Arts”. He focuses on the mundane life and anxieties of the middle class society. His novels have been translated into various languages. Although he writes in English, he never really loses his Indian-ness. It is interesting to note that his characters are both individuals as well as universals. Once we finish reading one of his novels, we are left feeling like there is a Margayya, a Swami or a Raju inside each of us. His last published work was “The Grandmother’s Tale” (1993). Some of the common themes he dealt with in his novels were the ironies of daily life in India, modernity and tradition, exile and return, education, myths and the ancient Indian past, appearance and reality etc. He also published abridged
prose versions of the two great Indian epics, namely, “The Ramayana” (1972) and “The Mahabharata” (1978). “Lawley Road”, “A Horse and Two Goats and other Stories” are examples of his short story collections.

**THE GUIDE (1958)**

**SUMMARY**

“The Guide” narrates the life story of a person called Raju. Raju is the son of a modest shopkeeper in the fictional town of Malgudi. Raju grows up to be a person who easily changes and adapts according to what other people want him to be. The construction of the railways in Malgudi changes Raju’s family’s fortune forever. Raju’s father begins a second shop next to the Railway station and the family prospers. But after his father’s sudden death, Raju is forced to take over the shop to continue his father’s business. While engaged as shopkeeper at his father’s shop, Raju begins to show visitors arriving at the Railway Station around the sites at Malgudi. In order to impress his customers and act as a tourist guide, Raju would fabricate tales and exaggerate facts. Fortunately for him his reputation as a guide grows and he comes to be known as “Railway Raju”. Tourists and visitors from afar start asking for him and it is while being engaged as a tourist guide that he meets with Marco Polo. Marco Polo is a studious student of ancient civilizations and he came to Malgudi in order to research cave paintings and temples surrounded in Malgudi town. He employs Raju as his tourist guide to navigate the sites he needs for his studies. Raju impulsively dislikes the dominating Marco
and this hatred is further aggravated when he meets Marco’s young wife Rosie. Rosie arrives at Malgudi two weeks after Marco’s arrival. Despite having a foreign name, Rosie is actually an Indian woman trained in Indian Classical dance. Raju realizes that she is the best dancer he has ever seen when he takes her to visit a snake charmer. In order to get closer with Rosie, he devotes all his time to take care of Marco and Rosie’s needs. He soon realizes that Marco’s and Rosie’s marriage is not a happy one. Learning of Rosie’s unsatisfied married life which arose primarily out of Marco’s disinterestedness in her passion for dancing, Raju utilizes this opportunity to seduce Rosie. He compliments and flatters her, always praising her dancing skills and Rosie ends up having an affair with Raju.

In an argument on Rosie taking up classical dancing as a career, she blurts out that she was having an affair with Raju. She describes Raju as a man who understands and appreciates her talent unlike her husband. This leads to the formation of a crisis between the husband and wife. When Raju comes by Rosie asks him to leave them alone and so Raju returns to Malgudi. He tries to adjust himself to his old jobs of shopkeeper and tourist guide. Few weeks later, Rosie appears at his house along with her luggage and declares that Marco has left her. Raju’s mother is a traditional Indian woman who seems shocked at the idea of a single young woman living in the house with her son and herself. However, she accepts Rosie’s presence for the time being. Thrilled by Rosie’s
presence, Raju encourages her to dance again and she begins practicing daily.

However, his mother soon learns that Rosie is a married woman and is also a dance belonging to the lower caste. In between Raju is caught in financial troubles and his negligence of the railway shop further aggravates the losses incurred. Raju’s uncle comes to his house and insults Raju and Rosie and also demands Rosie to leave. When Raju sides with Rosie, his mother is infuriated and she leaves with her brother. Finally, Rosie becomes ready for her public debut performance and chooses the name ‘Nalini’ for her stage performance. She becomes a huge success right from the beginning of her debut and Raju takes up the role of her ‘manager’. Everyone starts asking for ‘Nalini’ and the role of managing Rosie’s career makes Raju wealthier. In order to meet his financial debts, they move into a larger and more luxurious house to host all the important personalities who seek ‘Nalini’ like bankers, politicians and rich merchants. While everything was prospering, Raju began growing jealous of the artist friends whom Rosie enjoyed spending time with. Rosie starts feeling uneasy due to this jealousy and Raju senses this. Marco’s book published based on his research in Malgudi arrives at Raju’s house, however Raju hides the book from Rosie out of his jealousy. Now the news that Marco’s book has been published reaches Rosie and she shows excitement on reading about the book in a magazine. When she finds out that Raju had hidden the copy Marco had sent to them, she picks up a quarrel with Raju. Due to Raju’s increasing jealousy and possessiveness, he also hides a
letter which was sent to Rosie from Marco’s lawyers. The letter talks of a box of valuable jewelry which Marco wishes to release to Rosie. Raju greedily tries to forge Rosie’s signature but ends up being caught and he is put in jail for this act of forgery. Rosie is shattered on discovering that due to Raju’s reckless spending they have very little money left despite her dancing continuously and tirelessly. They don’t even have money to meet the legal expenses of Raju to defend him in court. Rosie takes to dancing again to hire an expensive lawyer but the lawyer fails to get the charges off Raju and Raju is sentenced to two years of imprisonment. Raju spends the rest of his time in jail reading news of Rosie’s stardom and ever blooming career but he musters the courage to meet her again. After being released from prison on completion of his two year term, Raju decides not to go back to Malgudi due to the social alienation and gossip that he is bound to face. He sits by the banks of a river near a small village not knowing where to go. A stranger named Velan from the nearby village passes by and stares up at him reverently mistaking Raju for a holy person. Velan confesses his troubles to Raju about one of his half-sisters refusing to accept a marriage proposal that was arranged for her. Even though Raju feels a bit unsettled at this unwarranted respect and reverence towards him he agrees to help. This sister accepts the marriage proposal after being brought to visit Raju and Velan’s family gives all credit for this to Raju. This leads the villagers to believe that Raju is indeed a holy man with powers. Raju decides to act the role as he had nowhere else to go and the villagers provided him with free food as offerings
which took care of his basic needs. He grows his beard long and starts living in the temple next to the river in order to play the role out more convincingly. He began delivering lectures on a daily basis to a congregation of villagers. All the while Raju is aware of being a fraud but still continues the drama. Things start changing when a severe drought affects the village and the villagers draw Raju into a two week long fast in order to bring in the rains. Afraid of the expectations the villagers had on him and due to the huge sacrifice he was expected to undertake he finally reveals his true life story to Velan. However, instead of realizing that Raju is a fraud, Velan’s views remain unchanged and he looks up to Raju with the same reverence and respect he had before. Raju is taken aback and at the same time moved by the continued respect. In order to pay back for the respect and faith the villagers had in him, he decides to begin the fast. News of Raju’s fast spread far and wide and people and journalists from all over started arriving to meet this heroic holy man. On the last day of his fast, Raju feels so weak that he cannot even descend the river by himself. It is only with Velan’s help that he reaches the depleted river. Verging on the brink of falling unconscious, Raju looks ahead into the horizon and tells Velan that he can sense that it is raining in the hills. With this Raju droops down and the novel ends.

**ANALYSIS**

“The Guide” narrates the journey of a tour guide in the fictional place of Malgudi to a spiritual guide. This novel focuses on spiritual transformation and self-realization.
It is the story of the transition of a conman to a holy man and this transition is portrayed in a comic way which is simultaneously didactic in nature. R.K. Narayan also satirizes certain aspects of Hinduism in “The Guide”. A postcolonial reading of the novel reveals that the construction of the railway in Malgudi may be considered as a symbol of intrusion of colonial values and Western ideology into the traditional and undistinguished Malgudi. Raju’s lack of self-confidence could be seen as an outcome of the dependency that the colonial power had forced upon its subjects.

Let us now take Raju, the central character into consideration. Raju’s entire life seems to be built upon deception, self-deception and hypocrisy. He is a self-made man who takes up multiple careers according to situations in his life. He is a classic example of a counterfeit guru who seems to have absolutely no uneasiness in cooking up tales. He has a sort of inborn tendency towards deceit and disguise, a master actor who even takes care to change his physical appearances and costumes according to the role he assumes. Raju keeps on reinventing himself according to the needs of others and for his own selfish gains as well. “The Guide” reveals how Raju, the corrupt man, is turned into a saint by the end of the story. But despite putting on masks of pretence every now and then, Raju portrays a sincere concern for the welfare of others. As a tour guide and lover, he exhibits impulsiveness and self-indulgence. On the other hand, as a spiritual guide, he is more careful, thoughtful and self-disciplined. He turns from sinner to saint, but he is never truly either of them. At the same
time, in his interactions with Rosie, one can understand that he is also an open, broad minded person with modern thoughts and attitudes towards many issues including women, caste, career etc. His lust for money is the tragic flaw that brings him down. But even then, he picks himself up swiftly after each fall. Marco, on the other hand, is described as “impractical” and “helpless”. He is way too nerdy to comprehend Rosie’s passionate and dreamy nature. Rosie is portrayed as an instinctive, educated, romantic dreamer who belongs to a lower caste. She is a born dancer who grew up dancing in temples right from her childhood onwards. Her irresistible urge to dance is suppressed by her husband Marco. The vacuum he creates in her life by not appreciating or understanding her passion for dance is filled up by Raju’s appreciation of it. Even her description of her marriage with Marco shows that it was not a marriage born out of love, rather a totally uninvolved or disinterested set-up. Her relationship with Raju is not an ordinary extra marital affair born out of love or lust, both Rosie and Raju have their own reasons for it. While Raju has monetary benefits in mind, Rosie yearns for appreciation and validation and all that is missing in Marco. She is a woman struggling to find fulfillment. Initially she seems to be living in a bubble but she is gradually disillusioned in the end as Raju is exposed. But despite Raju’s imprisonment her fame and career continue rising and seems not to have been impacted by Raju’s imprisonment and his dwindling of their wealth. This shows that like Raju, she also rises and stays strong despite the harsh realities she had to face due to Raju’s deception.
Towards the end of the novel however Narayan conveys the fact that there is still hope and one’s past need not define one’s life. The novel highlights the fact that people are capable of change and although destiny or fate can play a huge role in determining one’s life, our individual character and our attitude towards life can make a difference. In short, there is hope for mankind and Raju’s journey is proof of this hope.

FOR FURTHER READING:

1. For themes, characters and symbols of *The Guide*, visit
   https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-guide/characters
   Or https://www.gradesaver.com/the-guide

2. Major Symbols in the novel:
Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born on the 19 of June, 1947 in Bombay as the son of a wealthy Muslim businessman. He did his schooling both in India as well as in England. He graduated from the University of Cambridge. After graduation, he lived with his family who had moved to Pakistan in 1964 before returning to England again. His first novel, “Grimus”, was published in 1975. “Midnight’s Children” was his second novel and it was published in 1981. It was this novel that won him international recognition.

With the publication of his novel “Satanic Verses” in 1988, he had to face accusations of blasphemy against Islam. As a result of this, a fatwa (sentence of death) was issued against him by the Iranian government in 1989 and he had to go into hiding under the protection of the British government and police. Although his movement was restricted after this, he continued to write and publish novels, short stories and essays. In 1998 the fatwa against Rushdie was withdrawn and he recalls his experience of his life under the fatwa in a memoir titled “Joseph Anton” (2012). “Midnight’s Children” was adapted into a movie in 2012, for which Rushdie himself drafted the screenplay.
**MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN (1981)**

**SUMMARY**

The protagonist, Saleem Sinai, is born on the 15th of August, 1947. He was born at midnight, at the exact moment when India gained freedom from the British. The novel begins by Saleem narrating his life story as he feels he is about to die. He is thirty years old while he narrates his story and Padma, his faithful lover is the listener and audience while Saleem narrates the story of the ‘midnight’s children’. Saleem is in fact writing his story and all the while reading it out as Padma is illiterate and can’t read. In Saleem’s story, a doctor named Aadam falls in love with his patient while treating her. For reasons of modesty and propriety his patient Naseem stays behind a sheet with a small hole and only the place where she is ailing can be seen by the doctor through the hole. Aadam finally gets to see her face when she has a headache and instantly falls in love with her just as Naseem’s father had hoped and expected. They both marry and move to Amritsar where they witness protests being suppressed violently and end with the protestors being mass murdered. Meanwhile, Aadam and Naseem are blessed with three daughters and two sons. Aadam becomes a follower of an activist named Mian Abdullah, the ‘Hummingbird’ who is murdered for his beliefs. Mian Abdullah’s assistant, Nadir Khan takes refuge in Aadam’s house despite Naseem’s disapproval of this. Nadir lives under the floor
of the house all the while. Aadam’s daughter Mumtaz and Nadir fall in love with each other and get married.

They fail to consummate their marriage even after around two years. Nadir is found out at Aadam’s and he is forced to flee leaving his wife behind. Mumtaz therefore remarries Ahmed Sinai, a merchant who had courted her sister earlier. Mumtaz changes her name to Amina and she moves to Delhi with her husband. Amina(Mumtaz) gets pregnant from there and meets a fortune teller in order to learn about her future child. The fortune teller predicted that her child would never be older or younger than his country. In the midst of this Ahmed’s factory is burned down by terrorists and they decide to move to Bombay.

Mumtaz and Ahmed buy a house from an English man named William Methwold in Bombay. They have a neighbour there named Wee Willie Winkie who lives with his pregnant wife, Vanita. Willie is ignorant of the fact that Vanita had an affair with Methwold and is pregnant with Methwold’s child. Both Mumtaz and Vanita go into labour on the eve of India’s independence and give birth at the stroke of midnight. Vanita dies shortly after delivering her baby. The midwife, Mary Pereira, being alone with the two infants switches the nametags of the two babies as a “private act of revolution” so that the poor baby could have a life of privilege and vice versa. However, Mary begins feeling guilty about this act and her guilt becomes so severe that she offers her services as an ayah to care for the newborn (named Saleem) to Amina. Amina accepts and Mary
returns to the Methwold’s Estate with the Sinai’s. She continues to keep her secret for many more years until she finally blurts it out, out of her own guilt.

Saleem’s birth gained wide press coverage because it coincided with Indian Independence. He is described in the novel as strange looking, with a cucumber shaped nose and blue eyes. Saleem had a habit of hiding himself in his mother’s washing chest when he was a child. One day while hiding out he accidentally witnesses his mother using the toilet. As a punishment, his mother forces him to be silent for a day and this is when Saleem discovers his magical power to hear the thoughts of others. He finally realizes that he can also hear the thoughts of those children who were born in the same hour as he was born (“the metaphorical mirror of the nation”). He also finds out that all of these children were also endowed with their own magical powers of which the strongest ones were those born closest to midnight. Shiva, the real son of Amina, who was switched with Saleem, is described as being physically strong and gifted with powers of fighting.

Mary Pereira is forced to admit that she had switched babies when Saleem is taken to the hospital and doctors reveal his blood type which proves he cannot be the biological son of Ahmed and Amina. The now alcoholic Ahmed is infuriated and becomes violent on hearing this news. This in turn makes Amina decide to live with her sister in the recently created nation, Pakistan. However, they return to Bombay after Ahmed’s death. This is the time when India was caught up in a war with China.
Saleem has an operation done to fix his nose and after the surgery, he loses his magical power of telepathy. Instead he is now left with an enhanced sense of smell which helps him sense other people’s emotions. The family again moves back to Pakistan after India loses to China. Soon Indo-Pakistan wars begin and Saleem Sinai’s entire family is killed except for his sister, Jamila. Saleem is hit on the head by an airborne spittoon in the midst of this. This incident causes Saleem to lose his memory temporarily. He loses all sense of identity, forgetting even his own name. He is taken into the Pakistani army and he is not quite sure of how he ended up in the army but manages to escape into the Bangladeshi jungles after witnessing many war crimes. When he emerges from the jungles, the war is ending and India emerges victorious. Although Saleem recovers his memory partially he still cannot remember his name until he meets Parvati-the-witch, who is another one of the ‘midnight’s children’. The two fall in love and they retreat to a magician’s ghetto. Although Parvati wants to get married to Saleem he refuses to do so. She then goes on to have an affair with Shiva by casting a spell on him. Shiva impregnates her but he soon loses his interest in her and finally Saleem agrees to marry her and father her unborn child. The then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency and began mass sterilization camps to control India’s population. Parvati is killed right after childbirth and at the same time, Shiva kidnaps Saleem and takes him along with the other children at midnight to a sterilization camp. Finally, Indira Gandhi’s emergency ends as she does not win her first election and all the midnight’s children are set free.
Saleem goes in search of Parvati’s son, Aadam. He finally finds Aadam (who is endowed with enormous ears) with a snake charmer they were acquainted with in the magician’s ghetto and the three of them together travel to Bombay. In Bombay, Saleem happens to eat some chutney which reminds him of his nanny, Mary Pereira. He tracks her down and discovers that she is the owner of a chutney factory. It is from here that he meets Padma whom he decides to marry. But as he finishes off his life story, he decides to narrate his future too which starts with a description of his wedding to Padma in Kashmir. But then just as he had himself predicted, he finally succumbs to the cracks in his skin and crumbles into six hundred million pieces of dust.

ANALYSIS

Rushdie’s “Midnight’s Children” is a 1981 magical realism novel that revolves around India’s independence, the partition and its aftermath. It is also considered as a national allegory. It is a semi- autobiographical novel that won Rushdie the esteemed Booker Prize as well as the special ‘Booker of Bookers’ Prize. Magical realism arose as a reaction against 19th Century realism. Magical realism novels are usually set in an unreal world that has nothing to do with the real world we live in. It questions the belief or demand that fiction must always imitate reality. It may be described as an attempt to challenge commonly held notions of the real and unreal. “Midnight’s Children” may also be included under postcolonial and postmodern literature. Personal history is intertwined with the history of a nation in this novel.
This particular novel of Rushdie’s is often compared to Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s “One Hundred Years of Solitude” and Gunter Grass’ “Tin Drum”.

“Midnight’s Children” mixes both fact and fantasy where there seems to be an evolving movement from the world of facts towards a more intuitive world of fantasy, dreams and memories. Some of the themes dealt with in the novel include national history, political reality, religious orthodoxy, social hypocrisy, brutal mentality of Pakistani Muslims etc. The novel is structured like the “Panchathanthra” and “Arabian Nights” where there is a frame tale in which lots of other stories are embedded in. Saleem Sinai, the narrator’s narration is a maze of strange stories which are told in a familiar or traditional way. Saleem creates an “Arabian Nights” like ambience when he insists that he has many “stories” to “tell”. The novel doesn't immediately begin on Saleem Sinai’s life history; even before his birth is narrated readers are taken through a range of digressions which takes up around 100 pages. And Padma complains of this when she says “you better get a move on or you’ll die before you get yourself born” (38). Saleem doesn't follow a proper sequence when narrating events also, in fact endings sometimes precede beginnings. Saleem is never an entirely reliable narrator, he makes mistakes here and there and this is probably Rushdie’s way of pointing out that written history is never completely true to facts. When histories are being written, very often facts which are favorable to a particular group of people are selected and these facts are made to be believed as the history of an entire community. In the novel, Padma symbolizes
the view of the ordinary, illiterate people of India who accept and never question the marvelous or extraordinary like the anglicized Indians do.

It is interesting that the fortune teller whom Amina approached predicts Saleem’s life even though it is Shiva who is in Amina’s tummy. His prediction of ‘two heads’ may refer to both Saleem and Shiva. Likewise, the phrase ‘nose and knees’ used by him refers to the magical powers of both Shiva and Saleem. Both of them were born closest to the midnight hour and are hence bestowed with the most powerful magical powers when compared to the other ‘midnight’s children’. Unfortunately, the novel lacks prominent female characters of any real value. Most of the female characters in the novel are mere stereotypes. Almost all of them are by nature cheats, or superstitious, or nagging, or gossiping, or irrational, or immoral, petty and stubborn.

Throughout the novel, Saleem tries to put himself at the center of his nation’s history and tries to prove himself important. But in the end, it is Shiva who actually emerges successful as he becomes ‘India’s most decorated war hero’ while Saleem ends up narrating his life story in a pickle factory. But the novel ends with hope as Shiva and Parvati’s son, Aadam is compared to the elephant-headed Ganesh in Hindu mythology. According to Hindu mythology and beliefs, Ganesh is the ‘remover of obstacles’ and it is he who brings the prophesied family line into place. Hence, Aadam
symbolizes a prosperous new beginning and a better promise for India’s future.

Some of the major themes dealt with in this novel are the effects of colonialism and the issues of a postcolonial world, gender related power struggles, identity crisis and religious pluralism.

FOR FURTHER READING:

1. For themes, character analysis and symbols visit either of the following sites:
   b. https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Midnight-s-Children/

2. A detailed introduction to the novel: https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-midnights-children

AMITAV GHOSH

Amitav Ghosh was born in 1956 in Calcutta. He graduated from the University of Delhi and received a Ph.D in social anthropology from the University of Oxford. He worked as a newspaper reporter and editor initially and then went on to teach in various universities in both India and the US. His first novel, “The Circle of Reason” was published in 1986 and uses magical realism to depict the life of a boy called Alu who lived in India but had to flee to the Middle East due to certain circumstances. Some of his other noted novels are “The Shadow Lines” (1988) where Ghosh focuses on the encounter between an Indian family and an English family. “The Glass Palace” (2001) is a story about three generations of a family and depicts themes of displacement and quest for identity. His works therefore, mainly revolve around the diasporic influence in his own life. “Diaspora” here basically refers to two different cultures and two different countries embedded side by side in a migrant’s mind. For Indian diasporic writers, it is usually memories of India that become material for most of their literary works. Some of the other writers who focus on diasporic subjects are Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. Ghosh is one of the trinities along with Salman Rushdie and V.S.Naipaul to popularize Diaspora in Indian writing in English.
In 2007, he was awarded the Padma Shri by the Indian Government for his contribution to literature. The very next year, Ghosh’s novel, “The Sea of Poppies” was shortlisted and received the Man Booker Prize(2008).

**THE HUNGRY TIDE (2004)**

“The Hungry Tide” (2004) is a novel about people and animals’ struggle for survival in the world. Nature and man seem to be in constant conflict throughout the novel. It is set in the world’s largest mangrove ecosystems, the Sundarbans. The ‘tide’, which is always hungry, comes in twice daily and thus uproots. As the story progresses, Piya comes to the realization that not all efforts of conservation are necessarily good for the world. Environmental and political histories are intertwined in the novel.

**SUMMARY**

Kanai, a wealthy translator from New Delhi meets Piyali Roy (Piya), a young cetologist (a cetologist is a scientist who studies whales and dolphins) on a train to Canning. Both of them are travelling to the Sundarban Islands for different reasons. Piya is going there to study a rare species of river dolphin while Kanai is going there as his aunt (Nilima) requested him to read through and examine a long lost packet that was left by his late uncle (Nirmal). Nirmal had passed away around twenty years ago during a rebellion. Before Kanai and Piya separate at Canning, Kanai politely invites her to visit his aunt’s place at Lusibari (a remote island in Sundarbans).
Kanai is in Lusibari for the first time in thirty years and so he sets out to explore the landmarks he remembers. He is shocked when he hears about Kusum’s death. Kusum was his friend when Kanai was on the island back in the 1970s. He learns that Kusum has a son named Fokir who has married a trainee nurse named Moyna and that they both live on the island. When he reaches his aunt’s home, he is surprised at how much the place has changed since his last visit. He goes upstairs and opens the packet left by his uncle only to find out a notebook that was written during the course of a few days in May 1979 on the island of Morichjhapi. In a letter which is addressed to Kanai, Nirmal (his uncle) explains that he is with Kusum on the island and why he needs to record everything that is happening there. Nilima Bose (Kanai’s aunt and Nirmal’s wife) is not quite happy about the fact that Nirmal left the notebook to Kanai instead of her.

Kanai met Kusum in 1970 and they had been good friends. Kusum was under Nilima’s care at that time as her father had passed away and her mother was sold into sexual slavery. Kanai and Kusum had gone to watch performances of the local legend ‘The Glory of Bon Bibi’ and Kanai had found the story in it quite touching. After watching the performance one night, a fisherman named Horen took Kusum away claiming that it’s for her safety and nobody saw her again for years.

Piya, on the other hand, obtains permits from the Forest Department and begins her study along with a forest guard and is forced to hire an expensive launch whose
loud engines are sure to scare off dolphins easily. Piya intuitively feels things going wrong the moment she heads out in it and she struggles to adjust to the situation. When Piya spots a fishing boat in the river, she asks the guard to take her to it so she could enquire about the dolphins in the area. The guard and the boat pilot exploit this opportunity to fine the fisherman. When Piya realizes this and tries to offer money to the fisherman and falls into the river. However, she is rescued by the fisherman and she decides to stay with him on his small boat instead of returning to the forest guides. Fortunately, this decision proves to be a wise one. The fisherman introduces himself as Fokir (Kusum’s son) and he is accompanied in the boat by his young son Tutul. Although Fokir is illiterate and does not speak English he communicates quite effectively with her. All Piya had to do was show pictures of the dolphins and her equipments to Fokir to make him understand that she needed to hire him and his boat. Fokir treats Piya with kindness and respect unlike the guards. The very next day Fokir takes to a place called Garjontola where they spot seven Irrawaddy dolphins and Piya is shocked as she thinks that they do not behave as they are actually believed to. The next day Piya spends her time observing dolphins while Fokir fishes for crabs. Both of them are on their way to Lusibari when Piya nearly loses her hand to a crocodile. Once in Lusibari, Nilima invites Piya to reside at their guest house with Kanai and she accepts. Kanai agrees to help Piya talk with Fokir the next day. Over the next few days Kanai is busy reading his uncle’s notebook from which he finds out the story of how Nirmal gets involved with the settlement on Morichjhapi
after his retirement (he used to be a teacher). He used to be a famous Marxist member in Calcutta but then later on had to leave the city after he was arrested and suffered from a mental breakdown. Although Nilima disapproved of his Marxist beliefs, he continued to believe in Marxism while he spent thirty years of his life teaching in Lusibari. Nilima on the other hand, developed a Women’s Union in order to help widows in Lusibari as it was common for men to die while they were out fishing.

After retiring, Nirmal begins visiting schools along with the help of Horen. Horen and Nirmal were caught in a storm one day and they ended up meeting Kusum in Morichjhapi. She takes them in and narrates her story of her finding her mother after years and of getting married, of having her son who was named Fokir. Nirmal is delighted to find out that Morichjhapi was being developed in a Marxist way and so he offers to teach the children there. Nilima on finding this out is infuriated and refuses to provide medical services to the island of Morichjhapi. Nirmal then keeps his involvement secret and continues to visit the island now and then with Horen as his companion. The police begin a siege on the island which is survived by Kusum and Fokir. When Nirmal hears the police are going to assault the island, he went with Horen to warn Kusum about it and he filled in the notebook for Kanai overnight while he stayed on the island. Many weeks later, Nilima finds Nirmal disoriented in Canning and months later he dies.
Meanwhile, Piya and Kanai try to convince Fokir and his wife Moyna to go out for a week in order to survey dolphins at Garjontola. Piya seems irritated when Moyna belittles her husband Fokir. While Piya makes preparations to leave, Kanai offers to be her translator but Nilima is not happy with it as she feels Kanai is unaware of the risks. Nilima tries to explain how many people are killed every week by tigers. When Moyna confesses her fear of Piya and Fokir being romantically involved, Kanai exploits the opportunity and tries to convince her that he himself would be a better partner for Moyna than Fokir. This irritates Moyna further, however, the survey party leaves Lusibari the next day. Kanai too becomes jealous when Piya admits that she finds it very easy to work with Fokir despite language barriers. When they hear excited voices of the nearby island and investigate it, they find out that a tiger that had killed two people previously had got into a building along with the water buffalo. Villagers try to burn the tiger alive and Piya is horrified, but Kanai says that it is required in order to share habitats. The next day when Piya and Kanai go to observe the dolphins along with Fokir, Piya explains how she got interested in dolphins and Kanai translates how Fokir comes to the dolphin pool to visit Kusum’s spirit. When they reach Garjontola, Kanai barely escapes a tiger attack and he returns to Lusibari. Horen takes him back the next day and before leaving Kanai leaves a packet for Piya. Piya and Fokir spend their day tracking dolphins and they anchor at night near Garjontola while Piya reads Kanai’s letter. The letter contains a translation of ‘The Glory of Bon Bibi’.
The next morning, Horen admits to KAnai that both he and Nirmal were in love with Kusum but Kusum chose Horen in the end. A storm is gathering and they leave hopes of Piya and Fokir returning with them and so head to Lusibari. While Kanai wades to the shore, Nirmal’s notebook falls into the gushing water. He gets back to the guesthouse and asks Nilima if he could transcribe Nirmal’s story from his memory and Nilima agrees but asks him to record her side of the story too. Piya and Fokir brave the storm tied on to a tree on Garjontola. When the storm passes away, they spot a tiger. Fokir is hit by something large and he dies while Piya manages to take his boat in the direction of Lusibari the next day. When she returns to the village, she explains to Moyna and the others of Fokir’s heroism. Piya then returns to Kolkata to spend time with her relatives and meanwhile she raises fund money to help Moyna to buy a house and send their son to school. She also develops a conservation program to work with local fishermen and names the program after Fokir.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

The major characters in the novel and some of their basic characteristics have been given below for a better understanding of the novel:

- Piyali Roy: Piya is a cetologist. A cetologist refers to a biologist who specializes in marine animals like whales, dolphins etc. Piya was born in India to Bengali parents but grew up in Seattle and never really learned her mother tongue. But this does not appear to be a barrier when she tries
communicating with locals like Fokir. Interestingly enough, even though she can actually communicate better with Kanai, she does not share the kind of understanding or bond with him that she has with Fokir. Piya develops into a more practical person by the end of the novel as she realizes that conservation isn’t always helpful or necessarily a good act always.

- Kanai Dutt: Kanai is a middle-aged business man and translator from Delhi. Despite being a self-centered person, he is also quite observant and intelligent. He tries in vain to woo Piya. His self-centeredness and self-importance gradually reduces as the story progresses. And so his experiences transform him to a better person by the end of the story.

- Fokir: Fokir is a poor fisherman who rescues Piya after she falls into the water. He is also well informed about river dolphins and is more than happy to share his knowledge with Piya. Though they both don’t have a common language to communicate, they both strike up a bond using non-verbal communication. He has a really good presence of mind and acts practically when faced with a crisis. However, he dies during the heavy wind and storm. Later on Piya names her project after him and this shows us how much she valued him.

- Some of the other major characters in the novel are Nirmal Bose, Nilima Bose, Kusum, Horen and Moyna.
A HINT AT THE THEMES DEALT WITH IN THIS NOVEL

Some of the major themes dealt with in the novel is the conflict between man and nature, their mutual dependency as well as the deep connection between man and his environment. Ghosh also sheds light on the danger, violence and indifference that nature displays towards humankind. Another theme that the author brings out in “The Hungry Tide” is the failure of language as an effective means of communication and the importance of emotional bonding and communication through non verbal means. This novel also highlights how violence against people is made possible under the pretence of environmental preservation. Ghosh also takes a blow at idealism that is not combined with practical actions. The rigid caste system in India, political corruption etc. are also subjects that are dealt with in “The Hungry Tide”.

SECTION C: DRAMA

GIRISH KARNAD

Girish Karnad is an actor, playwright, author, film director and producer born in 1938. “Yayati” (1961) was his first play. His next play was “Tughlaq” (1964) which narrates the story of the fourteenth century Muhammed Ibn Tughlaq. It was “Samskara” that sketched his entry into filmmaking. He not only wrote the screenplay but also acted in the lead role in the film which is actually an adaptation of an anti-caste novel named “Samsakra” itself by U. R. Ananthamurthy. His play “Hayavadana” (1971) was widely recognized. For his contributions to the theatre in India, he was awarded the Padma Shri in 1974. His play “Nagamandala” describes the story of an unhappy contemporary marriage drawn from Kannada folk tales. In 1992, he also received the Padma Bhushan from the Indian government in recognition of his contributions to art.

Karnad’s plays deal with the moral problems that are left unresolved in myths, legends and folk-tales. In his opinion, myths and legends have an enduring significance and their logical conclusions are often open ended in reality. This open-endedness leaves enough scope for reworking the entire story and arguing out a philosophical, moral or psychological point. Karnad has probed India’s rich heritage for his source materials. He finds plots in Indian folklore and mythology that are in
themselves very dramatic and easily adaptable on stage. So what Karnad does through his plays is to examine ancient myths in the light of contemporary realities so that today’s concerns are made more meaningful and relevant. However, in the Indian context, most myths are related to religions. But Karnad re-interprets these myths from a non-religious dimension and exploits their inherent potential to arouse and sustain human emotions. Karnad does not take myths in its entirety; he takes them only in parts that are useful to him and the rest he supplements with his imagination. Although myths have traditional and religious sanction, they have within themselves the means of questioning these values. Karnad believes that the various folk inventions like the chorus, the music, the mixing of human and nonhuman worlds permit a synchronous presentation of alternate points of view. Thus, an ancient myth acquires new elements in the creative hands of Karnad, and the play gains diverse meanings. Some of his popular plays are “Hayavadana”, “Tughlaq”, “Samskara” and “The Dreams of Tipu Sultan”.

**YAYATI**

**SUMMARY**

The play begins with a Prologue where the Sutradhara introduces the play and creates a background to make it easier for the audience to understand and interpret the play that was going to be staged. The Sutradhara explains his role and then goes on to say that the play is based on an ancient myth, yet it was not “mythological” in nature. He also declares that “Our play has no Gods”
thus taking out any religious element that may be ascribed to the adaptation of the myth. He then goes on to give us a picture of the situation and setting in which the play is about to open in. The action of the play begins to unravel in a room located on the first floor or King Yayati’s palace. King Yayati and his wife Devyani await the arrival of Yayati’s son Pooru along with his new bride. He is returning after many years after completing his education and crowds throng outside the palace awaiting his return. Sutradhara makes it clear that Pooru is expected to lead a blissful marital life here in the Palace hereafter possibly being blessed with offsprings as well. But the play reveals changes in the expected fate. Sutradhara thus takes leave of the audience and asks the audience to relive the ancient mythical story.

**ACT I**

In Act I, we see King Yayati’s wife, Devyani having a conversation with her maid, Swarnalata, in an inner chamber of Yayati’s palace. Swarnalata accuses one of Devyani’s other maids in the palace for creating an unpleasant environment in the palace with her nastiness and asks Devyani to be wary of her. Thus, we are introduced to the character of Sharmishtha, Devyani’s other maid who Swarnalata is talking about. It is quite clear that even though Devyani knows about Sharmistha’s behaviour in the palace she is not ready to send her away. Devyani puts an end to this conversation by sending Swarnalata off to attend to the florists who
have come to deck up the chamber for Pooru’s arrival with his new bride.

Swarnalata exits and Sharmistha enters noiselessly. She has a conversation with Devyani which reveals herself as a jealous and revengeful woman who knows that she is creating an unpleasant situation in the palace and yet refuses to correct her behaviour. Their conversation reveals many important aspects in the story like the fact that Sharmistha is a Rakshasi by birth and that Devyani had a failed affair with another man named Kacha before her marriage with King Yayati. Devyani’s father, Sukracharya was a famous Guru who knew the secret to bringing back the dead and Sharmishthha hints that it was this knowledge that Yayati was after. Sharmishtha also dares to tell Devyani that Yayati did not marry Devyani for her beauty or love for her but instead married her only due to his lust for immortality. The story of how Devyani was rescued from a well by King Yayati is also revealed in this Act.

The initial calmness that Devyani portrayed gradually fades away with each passing remark by Sharmishtha. Infuriated by Sharmishtha’s allegations and nasty talk, Devyani is about to hit her when the King himself enters. Sharmishtha rudely excuses herself and leaves the room.

Devyani immediately asks King Yayati why he married her. Though Yayati tries to convince her that he married her for her beauty, she is not convinced and further asks him why he never asked her her name after pulling her out of the well. Now both Yayati and Devyani remain perturbed due to Sharmishthha’s nasty remarks. Yayati
declares that he is tired of Sharmishtha “sucking blood” from their married life and asks Swarnalata to send Sharmishtha in. He asks Devyani to continue preparations to make arrangements for Pooru’s arrival while he has a talk with Sharmishtha. Sharmishtha enters and an awkward silence ensues, Yayati waits for Devyani to leave to speak to her. After Devyani leaves, Yayati questions Sharmishtha on her behaviour and threatens to send her home in a month’s time if she continues so. Sharmishtha replies in the same unflinching manner in which she spoke with Devyani. Sharmishtha utilizes this opportunity to narrate her side of the story simultaneously justifying her current attitude and acts at the palace. She says that being a slave has turned her into an animal. The famous mythical fight between Devyani and Sharmishtha over the accidental mixing up of garments after a bath in the river is also revealed through her talk. Yayati almost feels sorry for her while listening to her story. Sharmishtha takes out poison from her blouse and threatens to drink it and commit suicide. Yayati in an attempt to stop her from drinking it springs forward and holds her right hand. The poison falls onto the bed out of her hand and Sharmishtha declares that Yayati’s act of holding her right hand has made her a Princess and she sits down on the bed. (Holding of the right hand is a symbol of marriage according to Hindu beliefs). Swarnalata enters to announce the arrival of the florists who are waiting to decorate the chamber. Yayati asks her to send them away for the time being and asks her not to admit anyone inside the chamber he is in until he says so.
ACT II

Act II begins with Yayati lying on the bed while Sharmishtha adjusts her dress. The scene makes it clear that they have just finished making love. A conversation on death and vitality ensues between them both and Sharmishtha also hints that this half an hour with her is going to cost Yayati as it will infuriate his wife. She declares she is going to leave and Yayati vows to marry and make Shamrishtha also his Queen in order to stop her from leaving the Palace. He then asks Swarnalata to send the florists in but Swarnalata makes it clear that Devyani has sent the florists away. The King is surprised that Devyani is there outside and he asks Sharmishtha to leave so that he can handle Devyani alone.

Devyani enters and asks where Sharmishtha is. Yayati tries to divert her in vain as she goes and pulls back the curtain to reveal Sharmishtha hiding behind it. Devyani calls the King a “treacherous hyena” for having been in bed with her maid. She orders Sharmishtha to go home and leave the palace but Yayati stops her and declares that he is going to marry Sharmishtha. Devyani pleads with the King and asks him to take anyone but her as his wife. But Yayati is adamant on his decision. Swarnalata announces the arrival of Pooru. When left alone in the chamber, Devyani removes and throws off all her jewellery including her marriage thread. Her maid Swarnalata tries to convince her to stay but in vain. She leaves the palace to meet her father whom she heard was in town (in Shambu Shrine). Sharmishtha runs after
Devyani as she leaves while Yayati, Pooru and his new bride, Chithralekha enter the chamber. Yayati asks for Devyani only to find out that she has left to see her father. Then a conversation between Yayati and his son begins, which reveals the rebellious nature of Pooru and his questions about his mother. This Act reveals the fact that Pooru’s mother was a Rakshasa woman and that Pooru was a half caste. Pooru also describes his marriage ceremony. All of a sudden, Sharmishtha runs in and falls at Pooru’s feet. It seems that Devyani’s father, Sukracharya had cursed Yayati to lose his youth and become a decrepit by night. She begs Pooru to go and appease Sukracharya. Yayati is infuriated and blames Sharmishtha for bringing this fate upon him.

**ACT III**

Pooru returns with the news that the curse would not have an effect on Yayati if Yayati finds a young man who is ready to take up the curse upon himself instead. Yayati rejoices and is quite confident that he can easily find someone to take the curse for him as he would provide all the riches necessary for that person. But unfortunately, Pooru failed to find anyone ready to take up a curse of old age and weakness upon themselves. Pooru suggests Yayati to accept the curse as Sharmishtha had suggested. But Yayati is in no way ready to lose his youth and vitality. Finally, Pooru selflessly takes the curse upon himself.

**ACT IV**
Chithralekha is in her chamber, it is night time and she is bored. Swarnalata enters and they strike up a conversation. Swarnalata first tries to divert her and keep the truth about Pooru having taken up the curse away from Chithralekha. She feels extremely sorry for Chithralekha who awaits her first night while her husband is losing his youth, vitality and gradually turning into an old, weak and senile person. She finally tells Chithralekha the truth about what happened with Yayati and the curse and how Pooru took it upon himself to save Yayati. However, Chithralekha’s initial reaction shows she only feels lucky and blessed to have Pooru as her husband. She does not cry as Swarnalata expects her to. But once Pooru comes in, Chithralekha loses all sense of calmness and is shocked. She screams out and asks Swarnalata to take him out. Without a word, Pooru allows to be taken away. He is too exhausted mentally and physically now. It is here that Swarnalata narrates her own story. She narrates the story of how her husband doubted if Swarnalata ever had an affair with her teacher who came to educate her only in the nights. Her teacher did so because he was a poor Brahmin who taught in return for a free meal a day and he did not want others to know about it. However, her husband’s possessiveness and doubtful nature got the better of him and he began revenging upon Swarnalata by indulging in drinks, women and such bad habits. Finally, she lies that the teacher had seduced her and her husband then disappears forever. Even now she waits for me with all his things intact in her home. If he doesn’t return she hopes he is dead and has found peace in death at least. After narrating her story she picks up the bottle of poison left
by Sharmishtha and says that she doesn’t have the courage to take it. Chitralekha asks if she could see it and Swarnalata hands it over. Meanwhile, Yayati and Sharmishtha come to meet Chitralekha. Yayati orders her to call Pooru back but Chitralekha refuses to admit Pooru in her room until he becomes a young man again. He reminds Chitralekha of her duties and responsibilities as a wife. Chitralekha takes a strong stand and explains her viewpoint and the tragedy she is going through. She points out that the gifts that waited for her in her chamber were Devyani’s marriage thread and Sharmishtha’s vial of poison. Yayati now pleads with her to give Pooru more time to accept things and find strength in his sacrifice. Chitralekha accuses Yayati of cowardice and says that she married Pooru so that he would be able to impregnate her. Now the only person capable of doing that is Yayati so she invites him to do so, so that she can have the seed of Barathas planted in her. Yayati is shocked at this suggestion and calls her a Whore. She decides to drink the poison and die as Yayati refuses to either give her youthful Pooru back or share her bed. Yayati, terrified, is about to stop her but refrains from holding her right hand and she smilingly drinks the poison. But as death approaches she calls out for Swarnalata and asks her to help her because she does not want to die. But it is too late, Chitralekha dies. This in turn leads Swarnalata to lose her sanity. It is now that Yayati realizes the mistake he made. He regrets the choices he made. He calls for Pooru and asks him to take his youth back. Finally, Yayati is ready to accept the curse which was meant for him by himself. He is ready to face his fate in the forest and Sharmishtha
accompanies him. The play ends with Pooru asking God “what does all this mean...” Pooru leaves the stage picking up Chithralekha’s body followed by Swarnalata. Sutradhara makes an appearance once again and tries to interpret Pooru’s question to God. He ends by stating that the ancient epics hold that Pooru ruled wisely for a long time and so we may assume that he did find an answer to his question after all.

ANALYSIS

“Yayati” was written originally in Kannada in 1960, when Karnad was just 22 years old. In the preface to the English version of “Yayati”, Karnad admits that he had no experience of theater when he wrote it. In the Afterword, he narrates that he was going through “an intense emotional dilemma” when he wrote “Yayati” on whether to go abroad for his studies following a scholarship he had earned himself or to stay home as his parents and family suggested and give up the opportunity of developing his career abroad. He says that he wrote the play merely to escape from the stressful situation he was in at that time. Years later, when he looked back upon the play, he realized how perfectly and aptly the myth explained his situation at that time and his “resentment with all those who seemed to demand that I sacrifice my future”.

Girish Karnad, like Shakespeare, adapts recognized plots and then re-works on them. But, every time he uses the familiar, old story to produce a completely new and fresh perspective apt for contemporary times. It is almost as if these old myths and ancient stories offer Karnad a safe
place to present his views on topics that are considered taboo or forbidden. Girish Karnad thus uses adaptations of ancient stories and myths to shed light on his commentary on contemporary social and political conditions.

“Yayati” is an adaptation of an ancient myth from the Mahabharata. The original myth narrates the story of Yayati who is the second son of Nahusha. In this story, Sharmishtha is the daughter of the King of Danavas, Vrshparvan and Devyani, the daughter of Sukracharya. Both of them are companions and a quarrel ensues between them when their garments accidentally mix up after a bath and they exchange harsh words. Infuriated, Sharmishtha pushes Devyani down a well. King Yayati happens to pass by the well and goes to the well for water. Devyani cries out for help and King Yayati instantly helps her out. Devyani refuses to return to the court of Vrshparvan where she and her father had been staying. Instead she sends over a maid to inform her father about her plight. Vrshparvan also comes to learn of these incidents and he does not want to lose a guru like Sukracharya. Hence, he decides to pacify Devyani and Devyani in turn requests Sharmishtha to be made her maid. Sharmishtha agrees to this as a sacrifice for her father and her clan. Later, Yayati marries Devyani and Sukracharya warns Yayati against displeasing Devyani in any way. Devyani and Yayati go on to have two children, namely, Yadu and Turvasu. Now, on request by Sharmishtha, Yayati marries her secretly and they have three sons, Drahya, Anu and Puru. Upon finding out about this secret marriage, Devyani leaves the palace and
returns to her father who in turn inflicts a curse upon King Yayati for going against his warnings. He curses Yayati to lose his youth and be gripped by decrepitude instead. When Yayati pleads with him, he offers one respite that he could exchange his decrepitude for the youth of any of his sons and that this son would become King in his place after a thousand years. Puru is the only son ready to accept the curse upon himself. Here, Yayati enjoys his youth and lives happily for a thousand years after which he takes the curse upon himself again and gives Puru his youth back. Yayati then leaves for the forest with both Devyani and Sharmishtha.

It is clear from the story of the original myth that Karnad invented characters like Chitralekha and Swarnalata. The deviations he made from the original myth are also clear. Unlike in the myth, Devyani is portrayed as more superior and it is Sharmishtha who seems inferior by caste in the play. A subplot is also created in Swarnalata’s story. Cast, class and gender differentiation play an important role in “Yayati”. Social hierarchy is drawn out in the play using caste. There is also a lot of jealousy and possessiveness underlying in the play. One of the messages conveyed by the play is the maturity of youth over old age and the consequences of denying undertaking one’s responsibilities.
MAHESH DATTANI

Born in Bangalore in 1958, Mahesh Dattani graduated from St. Joseph’s College, Bangalore. He then worked briefly as a copywriter for an advertising firm. In 1984, he founded his own theatre group in Bangalore called “Playpen”. It was in 1986 that he wrote his first play titled “Where There is a Will”. Soon he penned more plays like “Final Solutions”, “Dance Like a Man”, “Tara” etc. His plays usually deal with the not-so-obvious prejudices and problems in society which everybody usually ignores or hardly pays any attention to like social treatment of handicaps, child abuse, gender discrimination, effects of partition etc. For Dattani, theatre was a means of addressing the cause of the downtrodden and unprivileged segment of the society. He is also the only playwright to win the Sahitya Academy Award (won in 1998). He is also one of the twenty-one playwrights chosen by the BBC to write plays to celebrate Chaucer’s 600th anniversary in the year 2000. Besides being a playwright, he is also an actor, director, scriptwriter and dance teacher.

TARA

SUMMARY

ACT I

Tara is a two-act play by Mahesh Dattani. The play opens in London where we find Chandan (or Dan), a
playwright, attempting to write a play titled “Twinkle Tara”. But he keeps getting distracted as he is unable to stop the flow of childhood memories and recollections of the past with his sister Tara in his mind. He thus comes to the realization that no matter how much he tries to forget her she will always remain deep within him because they both are ‘inseparable’ as Tara once declared. Tara and Chandan were born as Siamese (or conjoined) twins who were later separated through a surgery.

The scene then shifts back to their childhood where we find Bharati, Chandan’s and Tara’s mother trying to force Tara to finish off her cup of milk as the doctor had advised that Tara must gain more weight. Bharathi runs around fussing after Tara while Patel, her husband tries not to fuss and takes things more lightly. But then after trying in vain to calm Bharathi down he gives up. He would like to take Chandan to office but Chandan does not want to go. Chandan says that Tara should be taken instead as she would make “a great business woman”. Patel, on the other hand, doesn’t think it is such a good idea to take Tara to office but he gives in to their demands and agrees to take both of them. Roopa, their neighbourhood friend enters and then a conversation between her, Tara and Chandan follows. When Tara explains Chandan is trying to write a story about herself, she describes herself as ‘Strong. Healthy. Beautiful.’ Immediately Roopa retorts saying, “That’s not you! That’s me!”.

Meanwhile, we also see Patel miming a conversation with a neighbour from which doubts of Bharathi’s present mental condition and instability is
confirmed. All of a sudden we are brought back to Dan again who wakes up with a jerk and starts to try to type again but in vain. He thinks that he could never do justice to her through his writing and believes that she never got justice of any sort while she was alive. His mind wanders off to thoughts of their separation and he feels that God probably never wanted them to be separate at all. He feels their separation was like a duel between their surgeon, Dr. Thakkur and God. What follows is a short interview like conversation between Dan and Dr. Thakkur, from whom he got details about the surgery that resulted in his and Tara’s separation. Dr. Thakkur explains how rare Siamese twins are, especially those of the opposite sex. The scene shifts again to their childhood and we find Tara and Chandan talking to each other about how hospitals or medical science has now become an inevitable part of their existence due to their handicap. They argue over the music they're listening to and finally decide it is Brahms music and not Beethoven’s. (Note that this music is repeated at crucial points throughout the rest of the play). They also talk about how their neighborhood friends treat them and the way they stare at Tara’s leg which she shows off to them as ‘the very best from Jaipur’. Chandan and Tara laugh together and share their mutual emotions about all such incidents were they, as handicaps, feel humiliated by the society. The scene shifts again and we see Roopa coming to Patel's house. Tara, Chandan and Roopa introduce themselves and try to make friends with each other despite the fact that Roopa does not understand English as well as the twins and therefore fails to get their jokes as well. But before Roopa leaves, Bharathi bribes her
when Roopa is alone to ensure Roopa visits them often and becomes Tara’s best friend. Immediately on leaving the Patel’s house Roopa goes and spills this story about how the twins are real freaks and how their mother is a ‘wandhtarah’ (which means ‘odd types’ in Kannada).

The scene shifts and we find Bharathi and Patel having a conversation about Bharathi’s decision to donate her kidneys to Tara which Patel objects to. He states there is no need to do so as he has already found another donor. Bharathi insists on donating hers though and gets hysterical about it. Now Patel insists that Bharathi should see a psychiatrist and Bharathi hints at revealing the secret behind the twins’ separation surgery. Hearing this Patel slaps her and declares that the twins would hear it from him if at all they should know about it and never from her.

The scene switches again to Dan, we find him busily typing away and reading out the last line. The scene moves again to their childhood where Roopa reveals to Tara that in olden times, the Patels were not happy with having baby girls thinking about dowry and such things. Roopa says that they used to drown their girl babies in milk so that it would appear as if the baby choked while drinking milk and died. Tara is shocked to hear this. Meanwhile Patel enters and finds Chandan and Bharathi busy unravelling Bharathi’s knitting at which Patel gets infuriated. He tells Bharathi that he does not want Chandan to be turned into a sissy. Chandan keeps on insisting that it was his idea and not hers to help with the knitting but Patel ignores him. Patel insists Chandan goes to college which Chandan refuses to do without
Tara being enrolled with him. Bharathi and Patel keep on arguing about Chandan’s future and on who loves Tara more. Here, Patel is on the verge of spilling the secret, but he holds himself back and lets Tara know that both of them love her. Tara suddenly slumps into her father’s arm and the scene shifts back to Dan who is reading his play aloud from which we learn that Tara is revived and Patel calls the hospital. This act comes to an end with the explosive opening of Brahms’ music.

ACT II

This Act begins with Bharati trying to demonstrate and convince Tara of her love. The scene fades off to show Dan going through an old scrap book which contains news cuttings of interviews with his mother and father based on the successful separation surgery of their conjoined twins. While going through this Dan points out that Dr. Thakkur got so much publicity using them. Scene fades off to show Dr. Thakkur explaining that the complications that arose out of the surgery were expected ones and that medical science completed what nature had left a bit incomplete.

In the next scene, we find Tara returning home after a surgery and Roopa and Chandan welcome her home with flowers. Tara notices that her mother is not in sight and is disappointed. Patel sits down with Tara and gently breaks the news that her mother has had a nervous breakdown and is now admitted in a hospital for treatment. Lights appear on Dr. Thakkar again who explains the great efforts he took to engage in this separation surgery. And then the play returns back to
Tara and Chandan talking of how Tara wants to visit her mother in the hospital and stay with her but Patel just would not allow it. They also have an argument over Tara not wanting to join college as she does not want to go to college for Chandan’s sake. Patel asks them both to sort it out between themselves and meanwhile also reveals the hard truth that their grandfather (Bharathi’s father) has left all his money to Chandan without leaving even a penny to Tara. Patel leaves to his bedroom and Tara accuses Chandan of being afraid to join college because he’s afraid of meeting up with new people. Eventually they make jokes and go out for some fresh air holding each other’s hands. They don’t spot any shooting stars but Chandan asks Tara to make a wish anyway and Tara wishes for two legs, not the fake Jaipuri ones, but real legs. The scene shifts while they hug each other and we come back to Dan again and then again to Dr. Thakkur and back to the Patel’s home again where Chandan is listening to music while Roopa sneaks in with a video cassette in her hand. Although Chandan tries to get rid of her, Roopa stays on. Chandan is engrossed in listening to the music while Roopa tries to seduce him and Chandan gives in when he just can’t ignore her presence and closeness. But when he attempts to touch her, she rises up and insults him calling him a ‘horrible thing’. Chandan tells her he did it only because she led him into it and tries to fight his tears back. They both call each other names and Tara comes at the door. Roopa leaves asking Chandan to try meeting up with Freni Narangiwalla as she is a mentally retarded girl who would suit him better than herself. Tara retorts back at Roopa calling her an ‘imbecile with uneven tits’. This
infuriates Roopa and she blurts out that she visits them only because Bharathi bribed her to and now that she has gone crazy. Roopa decides she won’t be getting much in return and vows never to come back. Tara and Chandan are left comforting each other of the pain of being one-legged creatures. Scene fades to Dan who is having a telephonic conversation with his dad who tells him that his mother is no more. Patel tries to persuade him to return but Dan refuses. Scene shifts back to Chandan’s childhood memory again and we find Tara telling Chandan that Patel hates her because he had instructed the hospital staff never to let Tara in to see her mother alone. Chandan tries convincing her that there must be a reason for it and Tara accuses him of not caring about their mother enough. Patel returns and when confronted about this issue by Tara Patel reveals the dark secret behind their surgical separation which took place while the twins were just three months old. He narrates the story of how Dr. Thakkur went against his personal and medical ethics as he was bribed by Bharathi’s father. Patel reveals that the twins were born with three legs. Bharathi’s father was a very wealthy and influential person during that time and so he and Bharathi together convinced Dr. Thakkur to give the second leg to the male child even though it was clear that the second leg received a major part of the blood supply from the girl and therefore rightly belonged to the girl baby. Patel narrates how he tried convincing their mother in vain about the risks of giving both legs to the boy. He regrets not having protested more strongly. The second leg however doesn't last more than two days on Chandan’s body and is thus amputated. Patel states that he meant to
reveal this only when they were older, but had to do so now. The scene shifts to Dr. Thakkur and then again to Dan who mockingly applauds Dr. Thakkur and then asks him to get lost from his memories. He picks up the typed sheets and tears it up as he speaks. He says there won’t be any masterpiece left when he dies, only his recorded voice will remain. A voice, which once belonged to a mere object (himself) which moves without any meaning, forgetting Tara, forgetting the sister with whom he shared his body once. And he says that sometimes he looks up at shooting stars and wishes that Tara would forgive him, forgive him for making it his tragedy. The play ends with Tara and Dan both appearing without limping, embracing each other as Brahms’ music plays.

ANALYSIS

“Tara”, a play by Mahesh Dattani is satire on the patriarchal values and beliefs of the Indian society and on the self-sufficient Indian male. The play moves back and forth with no linear development. The title “Tara” is symbolic of a shooting star which is a temporary guest which appears only for a small fraction of time just like the protagonist of the play. The title may also refer to the binary star system which is a star system consisting of two stars moving around each other in stable orbits. Just like these stars, the twins, Chandan and Tara are spiritually and emotionally inseparable and that is why Chandan faces an identity crisis with Tara’s death. Chandan and Tara also reminds us of Esther and Rahel in Arundhathi Roy’s “God of Small Things”. The twins
are ‘inseparably fused’ and this shows their emotional coherence. They are like two sides of the same coin, the same self and not two separate entities. In “Tara”, the deformity of the woman is caused by ‘man’, in order to complete the ‘man’. Tara is murdered by gender stereotypes and she is repeatedly referred to as “freak”. Now the term ‘freak’ literally means “a person with an unusual physical abnormality” which is often caused by a genetic disorder however in “Tara”, Tara is not a natural freak, that is to say she was surgically made abnormal. Tara is treated as the subaltern; she, however, has higher aspirations and dreams but is restricted due to her physical condition. She is also discouraged despite being more intelligent, sharp and witty. The play is about the gendered self trying to accept one’s feminine self in a world that favours the “male”. Tara also symbolizes modern society which claims to be liberal and advanced and yet has a crippled mentality where gender is concerned. All statements of equality between male and female (in all areas of life) prove to be false. There is a reference in the play to the Lady of Shallots who is imprisoned in a building built with four gray walls and four gray towers. Just as the lady of Shallots predicts her impending doom in the mirror, Tara too senses her end in the mirror represented by the expressions of her closest relatives. Tara in fact faces double marginalization as she is marginalized even in the story in Dan’s play as he turns it into his own tragedy. In the play, we find Tara discriminated against both openly and directly on one hand and indirectly (or undercover) on the other hand which sort of legitimizes the discourse of gender discrimination. She is a victim of a collective
social system. Tara suffers physically and socially before she dies.

Dan (or Chandan) is probably writing the play to rediscover himself or the neglected part of himself. Chandan and Tara share a unique affection and bond with each other which is expressed in the play when Chandan says he would wish for the ‘stars’ if he spotted a shooting star and on his refusal to join college without her. It is most evident in the scene where Roopa tries seducing Chandan and then plays a trick on him. Here, Tara doesn't even question Chandan about what happened or whether he actually raped her. She instinctively understands that he is innocent and sides with him. Her rude treatment of Roopa after that is proof of the love and care Tara and Chandan have for each other. The trick that Roopa plays takes an even darker colour when she suggests that a mentally retarded person would suit him better as if he had no right to love or make love with a normal, ordinary girl who was not handicapped like him. Such rude, insensitive, insulting behaviour from the part of the society is depicted throughout the play.

Dr. Thakkar is a character who enjoys a God like stance in the play. Throughout the play he is present offering his comments here and there but never taking part in the main action of the play. Falling for the bribe offered by Bharathi’s father, he forgoes his medical ethics and values. Dr. Thakkar is a symbol of how medical science may also be abused for monetary gains instead of actually being a tool that improves human welfare.
Dattani thus uses literature as a weapon against illogical, superstitious and unequal activities of the Indian society. “Tara” also highlights the sufferings of the disabled; the way people make fun of them and emotionally hurt them and also the indispensability of medical science in the lives of the physically challenged.
AMARTYA SEN

Amartya Sen is the 1998 Nobel Prize winner in Economic Sciences. Born in 1933, he is a well-known economic theorist. He received his Ph.D from Cambridge and went on to teach economics at various universities both in India and abroad. He devoted himself to welfare economics, inequality, poverty, famine etc. He is the one who invented methods of measuring poverty which yielded useful information that helped in improving economic conditions of the poor. As a young boy in Bengal in 1934, he witnessed the Bengal famine that year in which around three million people died. His book “Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation” (1981) is born out of this personal experience during his childhood. In this book, he reveals that in many famine cases, food supplies were not depleted but rather it was the unequal distribution and other social and economic factors that led to it. He believed that for economic growth to be possible, social reforms must be made first. Some of his major works are “Development as Freedom” (1999), “Rationality and Freedom” (2002), AIDS Sutra: Untold Stories from India (2008) and “The Idea of Justice” (2009).

THE ARGUMENTATIVE INDIAN: WRITINGS ON INDIAN HISTORY, CULTURE & IDENTITY

“The Argumentative Indian : Writings on Indian History, Culture & Identity” by Amartya Sen is a collection of essays on Indian Culture and identity. He tries to
establish two main points through this work, first, that Indian culture is actually richer than Hindu culture and secondly, that Indian culture has a long and rich argumentative tradition. He believes in the importance of argument, as it gives rise to skepticism, reason and thus overturns fundamentalism. In order to make his arguments valid, he uses quotes from the Ramayana, Rig Veda etc.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Amartya Sen’s “The Argumentative Indian” is divided into four parts and ‘Reason and Identity’ is the fourth and final part of the book. The section ‘Reason and Identity’ has been further subdivided into four:

1. The Reach of Reason
2. Secularism and its Discontents
3. Indian through its Calendars
4. The Indian Identity

Let us now take a look at the main ideas conveyed in each section.

□ The Reach of Reason:

The author begins this section wondering if Nietzsche’s sceptical view of the world is right after all. This section is again subdivided into six:

1. Instinct and Humanity:
Here, the author talks of an Oxford philosopher, Jonathan Glover’s ‘moral history of the twentieth century’ and of the challenging questions he asks in it. Amartya Sen points out the devastating events he describes and how it did not receive as much appreciation as it should have. Glover believes many of the horrors of the 20th Century may be attributed to the influence of the Enlightenment. Sen finds it weird that Glover has joined the bandwagon of attacking the Enlightenment. The argument Sen finds useful in Glover’s discussion is his stress on the need to depend on our instincts when we are not able to think logically and clearly.

2. Reason and Enlightenment:

The author believes that the very possibility of reasoning is good as it instills hope in an otherwise dark world. In fact, we must reason about things around us, for example, about other people, other cultures, about respect and tolerance etc. One must also engage in intellectual reasoning that discusses things like how famines could be avoided or about environmental deterioration. He further emphasizes the need for instinctive reactions against atrocities. Sen then goes on to talk of Adam Smith’s contribution to human psychology. Sen points out that Glover may have been influenced by Enlightenment literature after all, especially that of Adam Smiths.
3. Cultural Contentions:

The author points out the difference between Western and non-Western ways of approaching social issues. In this section, he states that it is often assumed that the non-Western way is less tolerant when compared with the Western. He explains terms like ‘cultural boundary’ and ‘cultural disharmony’ here.

4. Walls in Theory:

In this section, Sen talks of communication between cultures, the reasoning of members within each culture etc. He further points out that Glover’s remedy for ill-treatment of groups towards each other is moral imagination. He says that elements of tolerance and freedom may be found in non-Western authors too, like how we can find it in the works of the emperor Ashoke in India. He mocks the stupidity of comparing “Asian values” and “Western values”. Basically, Sen tries to point out that many ideas that have been commonly believed to belong to the West have been residing in other civilizations as well.

5. Tolerance and Reason:

Sen states that many secular beliefs or Indian secularism which was championed by great people like Gandhi, Nehru, Tagore etc actually took root from early Indian writings and from the ideas of the great Muslim emperor, Akbar. Sen points out that
Akbar is the one who vouched for religious neutrality four hundred years ago. Akbar believed in a tolerant multiculturalism. He also believed firmly in the power of reasoning as opposed to traditionalism and even arranged discussions with people belonging to different religions. Orthodox Muslims revolted against this as people thought religious belief was based on faith and not on reasoning as Akbar believed it to be. Akbar is believed to have even unsuccessfully attempted to start a new religion called Din-ilahi which meant God’s religion. He was against most religious rituals and child marriages. He strongly believed that virtue must be practiced simply because it’s good and not out of expectation of a reward from God or a better life after death. Sen points out that all these ideas that Akbar had are not significant in current debates even in the West. Sen believed a moderate approach should be taken while approaching the issue of learning the great Western books, they shouldn’t be shunned completely neither should they be the only books that are learnt and read. People need to be given the freedom to reason and choose. Sen argues against the concept of one’s identity being discovered (or detected) rather than built on choice and reason. The author finds this idea of detecting one’s identity as limiting and instead believed that we must take responsibility for the choices we make. Sen ends this section by pointing out that sometimes instinct works better than reason, but that does not negate the power of reasoning in any way.
6. Millennial Insights:

Akbar insisted that the occasion of a millennial was to be taken as an opportunity to seriously think and reflect on the joys and horrors of the world we live in. When an intellectual tourist (named Alberuni) visited Indian once he argued that it was important for people in a nation to know and enquire about people living in other places in order to understand how they or what they think. A lack of familiarity with other people could cause evil and inconsiderate behaviours. Sen ends this section by stating that reason plays a significant role in cultivating one’s moral imagination and it is needed to face everything in the world today.

Secularism and Its Discontents:

Sen talks of Indian secularism in this section. Many of the criticisms against Indian secularism came from activists of this Hindutva movement and political parties like the BJP. But Sen says that the actual criticisms are not only from Hindu nationalism or the BJP and it is not simply the politics of Hindu sectarianism.
**Incompleteness and the Need for Supplementation**

The author states that secularism is against any religion being given special priority in the activities of a state or nation. A neutral and indiscriminatory position is needed here. Religious communities and religions should consider things beyond conventional notions of ‘secularism’. In trying to study or understand the role of secularism in India, one must take into account the ‘incompleteness’ within it and the problems that arise out of it as well as the opportunities that it gives us.

**Critical Arguments**

Sen points out six different lines of arguments against Indian Secularism: -

1. The ‘Non - existence’ Critique
2. The ‘Favouritism’ Critique
3. The ‘Prior Identity’ Critique
4. The ‘Muslim Sectarianism’ Critique
5. The ‘Anti-modernist’ Critique
6. The ‘Cultural’ Critique

**India through Its Calendars:**

Sen states that the calendar has been an indispensable need of civilized life since quite a long
Within a country or a particular culture itself there may be many different calendars and these calendars relate to the different preoccupations that different people have and how they exist together in a nation.

- **Calendars as Clues to Society and Culture:**

  The author believes that by studying the calendars, their history, how they’re used and the social associations can shed light on the significant aspects of a particular country as well as its cultures. The associations, the nature, form and usage of calendars by a specific society could teach us many things about its politics, culture, science, mathematics and religion. This is why Sen is attempting to understand India through its calendars.

- **Millennial Occasions and Akbar’s Concerns:**

  The division of time in any calendar is always arbitrary in nature. Therefore, the great Emperor Akbar not only studied different religions but also attempted to understand the different calendars being used in India. Just as he proposed an amalgamated religion (‘Din-ilahi’), he also put forward the idea of a synthetic calendar for the entire country as whole known as the ‘Tarikh-ilahi’. Although neither of these inventions by Akbar survived, it is the motivation behind it that draws appreciation and is relevant even today.
The Indian Calendars:

The official Calendar Reform Committee (appointed in 1952) identified more than thirty well-developed calendars in systematic use in India. These calendars are proof of the diverse, yet connected histories of the communities, traditions and religions in India. The “Whitaker’s Almanack” has reduced the list of calendars to seven principle ‘Indian eras’:

1. Year 6001 in the Kaliyuga calendar
2. Year 2544 in the Buddha Nirvana calendar
3. Year 2057 in the Vikram Samvat calendar
4. Year 1922 in the Saka calendar
5. Year 1921 of the Vedanga Jyotisa calendar
6. Year 1407 in the Bengali San calendar
7. Year 1176 in the Kollam calendar

Ancient India and Its Calendars:

Here Sen questions the authenticity and reliability of the dating of Kaliyuga in “Whitaker’s Almanak” like for example the numbering convention used in it and whether the zero point of the Kaliyuga is clear enough. There is no reference to the use of Kaliyuga in either the Vedas, or the Ramayana or Mahabharata. Sen points out that even the Buddha Nirvana calendar could actually
have been older than the Kaliyuga calendar. The establishment of Kaliyuga as an old Indian calendar could also be to perpetuate the notions of India as a ‘Hindu country’. Sen also brings in issues of Hindu chauvinism and national chauvinism here.

● Variations and Solidarity:

The huge variety of calendars in India also shed light on the fact that there are immense variations in culture and region as well. But this fact is against the notion of Indian unity. But the author here argues that there are strong resemblances between these calendars like the months and the beginning of the year. However, South Indian calendars and lunar calendars do follow different rules.

● Interaction and Integration:

One of the main differences between the Indian calendars is due to their respective religious associations. Sen points out that even before Islam arrived in India, India was already a multi-religious country where religions like Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism, Judaism etc. were present. Akbar had a ‘House of Worship’ (Ibadat Khana) where he encouraged people from different religions to attend including even the atheistic Carvaka school. The Bengali San calendar was clearly influenced by Akbar’s ‘Tarikh-ilahi’ calendar and therefore carries evidence of an integrating tendency. Sen feels that it is good to recollect traditions of multiculturalism in India now when India’s secularism is being challenged by others. Thus, the author proves that
the calendars reveal a lot more than mere months and years.

- **The Indian Identity:**
  - Colonialism and Identity:

    This section is based on Amartya Sen’s Dorab Tata Memorial Lectures given in India in February, 2001. Sen mentions that this occasion has provided a chance to examine the relationship between India and the world.

    He praises the achievements and developments of the Tata group of enterprises. He wonders why British invested so readily in tea, coffee, railways etc while ignoring much more established fields of British industrial enlightenment like cotton textile, iron and steel. Sen suggests that probably a general sense of social identity and priorities exerted its influence on the pattern of British investments in India and he quotes Sir John Strachey, the English administrator here as an example.

    - Identity, Nationalism and Investment:

      The author argues that Jamsetji Tata understood ‘the full significance of the industrial revolution in the West & its potentialities for his own country’. Sen finds a nationalistic connection in Jamsetji Tata’s economic decisions. The Tatas were determined to establish a major iron and steel industry in India despite adversities and barriers in the way. One major part of the Tata motivation can be connected with the Indian identity and nationalism.
• Nationalism and Global Connections:

The author sheds light on the importance role played by identities and values in economic behaviour and that this fact needs to gain more attention in mainstream economic analysis than it does now. He further explains how Tata industries dream of building a modern iron and steel industry would have failed without technical know-how from abroad. In short, Western science and technology was important in India’s industrial and economic development. He puts forward the idea that the shift from the import substitution phase to one of active export promotion was a perfect strategy which went in line with the promotion of a powerful national identity.

• Sharing of Global Opportunities:

The author discusses the advantages and disadvantages of globalization here. He points out that despite the big contributions a global economy could bring to the world; there are a lot of issues of global inequality and injustice which crop up. Sen suggests global initiatives for a more just and transparent system that protects basic human rights and human security across the globe.

• Domestic Policies for Global Strength:

Amartya Sen believes that appropriate domestic policies are essential for healthy global economic relations. He points out that infrastructural handicap is still a central issue even in today’s Indian economy just as it was during the time of Jamsetji. Jamsetji identified
that one of the factors behind this was the lack of education and this was one of the reasons behind starting the Tata Institute of Science. The Tatas and Nehru recognized the importance of developing technical and higher education. But Sen points out that while higher education grew and blossomed, schooling was neglected. And this resulted in a lot of underdeveloped Indian school systems. If a worthy student doesn’t receive the basic education or facilities he requires to ensure quality education, it is a big waste of talent and this neglect of basic education plays a huge role in our being unable to seize economic opportunities like countries like Korea, Japan and China.

- Global Relations and History:

  Sen states that Globalization is a complex phenomenon, but rather than shun it one must attempt to learn it. He declares that globalization is neither a folly nor new in form. It is globalization that enabled the spread of all forms of high technology in the world like paper and printing. He says Europe would have poorer if not for the globalization of Mathematics, Science and technology. Sen further states that India has taken an interactive role in the process of globalization which has benefited both India and the world.

- Pluralism and Receptivity:

  The author talks of Indian identity in this section and argues against the concept of a homogenous Indian identity which emerged during the Independence
movement. Sen advocates a sort of pluralist India where members of different communities are involved and their diversity is celebrated. He sheds light on the need to discuss the idea of Indian identity now.

- **Identities and Decisions:**

  Sen begins the session by quoting Tagore’s claim that the ‘idea of India’ itself mitigates ‘against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one’s own people from others.’ He says that this statement argues against the idea that India is a mix of separated and different cultures as well as communities. And it also rejects the idea of viewing Indian culture as weak and fragile. So, Tagore’s claim advocates an inclusive form for the concept of Indian identity. Sen argues that it is false to assume that one’s identity is a result of discovery rather than choice. He puts forward the idea that one may have various identities at the same time and one must have the freedom to choose over these identities and give priority or importance accordingly. He concludes this section by stating the importance of reason over recognition.

- **Religions, Heterodoxy and Reason:**

  The author points out that Tagore’s idea of Indian identity was a less conventional view of his Hindu identity than Gandhi’s. Gandhi, on the other hand, was more assertive of his Hindu identity. Sen argues that Indian identity need not bloom out of a Hindu identity neither should the Hindu identity be more privileged over others. In short, the points Sen makes clear is that 1.
Identity is not a matter of discovery, 2. Religions like Buddhism and Jainism too have an equal claim just like Hinduism and 3. Indian identity is not dependent on Hindu identity.

- A Concluding Remark:

The author talks of the role of religion in moulding the Indian identity. Amartya Sen believes that people are free to decide if their cultural or religious identity is important to them or not. He defends the inclusionary view of Indian identity where he states Jamsetji Tata’s comment as an example. Jamsetji Tata (who is a Parsee) once commented that Indian students ‘can not only hold their own against the best rivals in Europe on the latter’s ground, but can beat them hollow’. This comment, Sen states, comes out of a certain pride and maybe even arrogance in being Indian and is not born out of the fact that he is a Parsee.
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime minister of independent India was born to a family of Kashmiri Brahmans. He graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge and went on to become a barrister. After seven years in England, he returns back to India. He meets Gandhi for the first time in 1916 at the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress. It was late in 1921 that Nehru was taken into prison for the first time. He went on to spend nearly nine years in jail altogether.

His literary works are a combination of literature, history and science. The communicative style of his writing also reveals his scholarship. He could be described as an imaginative writer with a deep intellect. He stands out among the Indian English writers as someone who excelled in writing prose.

“What is Culture?”

SUMMARY

This essay was written on the 9 April, 1950. Nehru begins the essay on an optimistic note hoping that the formation of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations would lead to a better understanding between people of India and the people of other countries. He then goes on to frankly express the confusions that are there in his mind. Although everybody talks of understanding one another and to learn from one another, Nehru says that his reading of history and current events has revealed that it is the people who know one another who fight the
most especially neighboring countries. So, he argues that knowledge about one another alone cannot give birth to friendship or cooperation.

Then he asks readers what exactly is this ‘culture’ that we talk so much about. He states that he isn't competent enough to define it yet. He goes on to say that each nation and each civilization develops its own culture and all cultures are affected or influenced by other cultures resulting in mixtures and changes. In fact, culture is bound to get a bit mixed up. It is when a culture feels their own culture is being dominated by another culture that they start developing a sense of fear. This leads them to close up into a shell which prevents their thoughts and ideas from being shared and Nehru states such a state as an unhealthy situation. He believes that cultures should be dynamic. Each culture is determined by the geography, climate, literature, architecture etc. Therefore, Nehru considers the purposeful shutting up and isolation of the mind to influences as opposed to all ideas of culture. He states that we can easily judge India’s growth periods and decline periods when it is compared along with those periods when India had either opened up to the world or closed up. Life becomes static when a nation closes up its culture and therefore dynamic growth is needed.

Nehru finds religion as promoting this static state of society. He emphasizes the need for having one’s roots in the past yet not live in roots alone. After all, roots also need the sun and sir in order to provide sustenance. He emphasizes on the need to sustain the roots first before
focusing on the leaves or flowers as it is the roots which provide sustenance. He further lays stress on the fact that a cultured mind should be open and receptive.

The author then goes on to explain what a scientific approach is and how it may be used to solve others problems. In short, that one must try to understand through trial and error or experiment if something is so rather than merely stating it is so before accepting it. It also includes having an open mind that is not resistant to change. Jawaharlal Nehru says that the nations of the East firmly believe in their own ideas and therefore harbor a sense of superiority. However, they have also been debased and exploited by other nations and hence brought a sense of reality to them.

Nehru states that when nationalism does succeed, it spreads rapidly and becomes an international danger. While culture is essentially good, it becomes aggressive and also instills feelings of hatred and conflict when it becomes static. The author points out that it is futile to talk of culture before considering economics. And just because people who understand each other quarrel more, does not mean you should not try to understand each other. He emphasizes the importance of understanding one another in the right way or in a friendly manner. Nehru firmly believes that if our approach is good, then the response will also be good and vice versa. He further states that often we are so overwhelmed with our experiences and knowledge that it becomes almost impossible to identify where you stand. He also says that all this knowledge is not necessarily beneficial and rather
it is the people who do not have access to all the advantages of modern life and science who are actually wiser. Nehru wonders if we shall ever be able to combine all this knowledge with true wisdom. He concludes the speech by quoting a famous and wise Greek poet.