

**DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL**

**MASTERS OF ARTS-ENGLISH**

**SEMESTER -IV**

**INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**SOFT CORE 402**

**BLOCK-2**

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## UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

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## **FOREWORD**

The Self Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavours.

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# INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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## **BLOCK-1**

UNIT-1: Raja Rao- Kanthapura- 1

UNIT-2: Raja Rao- Kanthapura - 2

UNIT-3: Raja Rao- Kanthapura - 3

UNIT-4: Amitav Ghosh - The Shadow Lines - 1

UNIT-5: Amitav Ghosh - The Shadow Lines - 2

UNIT-6: Modern Indian English Poetry – Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Robin S Ngangom - 1

UNIT-7: Modern Indian English Poetry – Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Robin S Ngangom - 2

## **BLOCK-2**

**Unit-8 Modern Indian English Poetry – Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Robin S Ngangom - 3 .....6**

**Unit-9 Karnad-The Fire And The Rain -1 .....34**

**Unit-10 Karnad-The Fire And The Rain -2 .....76**

**Unit-11 Manjula Padmanabhan- Lights Out – 1.....100**

**Unit-12 Manjula Padmanabhan- Lights Out – 2.....122**

**Unit-13 Amit Chaudhuri – “Notes On The Novel After Globalization” And “ Huge Baggy Monster : Mimetic Theories Of The Indian Novel After Rushdie” From His Book Clearing The Space-1.....147**

**Unit-14 Amit Chaudhuri – “Notes On The Novel After Globalization” And “ Huge Baggy Monster : Mimetic Theories Of The Indian Novel After Rushdie” From His Book Clearing The Space-2.....169**

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# **BLOCK-2 INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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## **INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK - 2**

**UNIT 8:** Nissim Ezekiel's Poems like The Professor, Marriage, The Worm, Sotto Voce, Midmonsoon Madness and Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.; Robin S Ngangom's life and his Poems like The Ignominy Of Geometry, My Invented Land, Primary Schools, After 'Jashn-E-Azadi' and Hill.

**UNIT 9:** Girish Karnad's life and his poem "The Fire and The Rain".

**UNIT 10:** Myths And Mythopoeia And Analysis Of "The Fire And The Rain" By Girish Karnad.

**UNIT 11:** Manjula Padmanabhan's life and her poem "Lights Out.

**UNIT 12:** Marxist Analysis, Character Analysis and Implication Of Insensitivity In Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out.

**UNIT 13:** Regional Sensibility and the Mapping Cultural Sensibility in the Novels of Amit Chaudhuri.

**UNIT 14:** Craft of the Artist in Amit Chaudhuri's novel.

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# **UNIT-8 MODERN INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY – JAYANTA MAHAPATRA, NISSIM EZEKIEL, ROBIN S NGANGOM - 3**

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## **STRUCTURE**

8.0 Objectives

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Nissim Ezekiel's Poems

8.2.1 The Professor

8.2.2 Marriage

8.2.3 The Worm

8.2.4 Sotto Voce

8.2.5 Midmonsoon Madness

8.2.6 Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.

8.3 About Robin S Ngangom

8.4 Robin S Ngangom's Poems

8.5 Let us sum up

8.6 Keywords

8.7 Questions for Review

8.8 Suggested Reading and References

8.9 Answers to Check your Progress

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## **8.0 OBJECTIVES**

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Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about Nissim Ezekiel's Poems like The Professor, Marriage, The Worm, Sotto Voce, Midmonsoon Madness and Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.;

- you would also go through Robin S Ngangom's life and;
- further, you would also go through Robin S Ngangom's Poems like The Ignominy Of Geometry, My Invented Land, Primary Schools, After 'Jashn-E-Azadi' and Hill.

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## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this chapter you would be learning about various poems written by Nissim Ezekiel's like The Professor, Marriage, The Worm, Sotto Voce, Midmonsoon Madness and Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.

Robin S Ngangom is the Indian poet who writes in English as well as in Manipuri. He has written a lot of poems like The Ignominy Of Geometry, My Invented Land, Primary Schools, After 'Jashn-E-Azadi' and Hill.

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## 8.2 NISSIM EZEKIEL'S POEMS

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### 8.2.1 THE PROFESSOR

The Professor by Nissim Ezekiel is a satire on Indian English used by the teachers of other department men who instead of a background in vernacular try to carry it on somehow to show off their post and ranking. Some after learning turn into copycats and some fumble and slip behind. Similar is the case with this geography department professor. A retiree, he introduces us in the likewise manner. By God's grace, his children are well-settled in their life. One is a Sales Manager another a Bank Manager and both of them cars. The youngest too is trying his best to do well, but has not been able to. His daughters, Sarala and Tarala are married and their husbands are nice guys. Apart from that, he has eleven grandchildren. Again he enquires his ex-student meeting him by chance how many issues he has. The student says it three. Hearing it, he starts telling about the family planning, check of population growth and the scope for developmental economics. He is not against it, but to keep pace with the changing times one needs to step with it. The whole world wants it. Old values are giving away. New values are making a room for. Had

## Notes

he been a professor of English, he would have quoted Tennyson with,  
The old order changeth yielding place to new.

Sheth Sahib goes on talking, conversing with the old student of his met by chance, the old student and the old professor, both of them enjoying and carrying on the conversation. His health is o.k. somehow. The sixty-ninth year has been completed and he is yet to score a century. Instead of there is no health problem, free from diabetes, blood pressure and heart attack, which are so common among modern men, he is going on normally. This is but God's grace. Another thing is that the pure foods offered by the parents during childhood. Now-a-days people take it adulterated goods. The professor says to his student that he has now become bulky in comparison to his early days. Whenever he passes through his humble villa, he may visit to add to his pleasure.

Sheth Sahib's English Nissim Ezekiel hears it and after coming home, tries to caricature it. We do not know it how the written English of the professor is, but he is definitely weak in spoken English which is but Hindustani English. Somehow tagging the words he is speaking in English. Simple present tense or present continuous English is predominant over his expression.

There is nothing but Nissim's jokes, humour, comics, satire and sting in it with which he regales and caricatures. Here he may even fail R.K.Laxaman the cartoonist.

Remember me? I am Professor Sheth.

Once I taught you geography. Now

I am retired, though my health is good.

My wife died some years back.

By God's grace, all my children

Are well settled in life.

One is Sales Manager,

One is Bank Manager,

Both have cars.



Other also doing well, though not so well.

Every family must have black sheep.

Sarala and Tarala are married,

Their husbands are very nice boys.

You won't believe but I have eleven grandchildren.

How many issues you have? Three?

That is good. These are days of family planning.

I am not against. We have to change with times.

Whole world is changing. In India also

We are keeping up. Our progress is progressing.

Old values are going, new values are coming.

Everything is happening with leaps and bounds.

I am going out rarely, now and then

Only, this is price of old age

But my health is O.K. Usual aches and pains.

No diabetes, no blood pressure, no heart attack.

This is because of sound habits in youth.

How is your health keeping?

Nicely? I am happy for that.

This year I am sixty-nine

and hope to score a century.

You were so thin, like stick,

Now you are man of weight and consequence.

That is good joke.

If you are coming again this side by chance,

Visit please my humble residence also.

I am living just on opposite house's backside.

To crack jokes with Pushpa and with the geography department retiree professor is the job of the poet Nissim Ezekiel who likes to be a

## Notes

commentator and critic of man and his manners rather than taking a humanist stand. Even the Gandhian patriot he regales and caricatures duplicating the figure with the dhoti, kurta, turban and lathi speaking in half-English, half-Hindi.

If Daruwalla's professor is a master of tragedy then Nissim's professor a master of Hindustani English. After marking the sentence-construction of the English of the geography department colleague, he smiles within himself and tries to recreate humour.

### 8.2.2 MARRIAGE

Lovers, when they marry, face

Eternity with touching grace.

Complacent at being fated

Never to be separated.

The bride is always pretty, the groom

A lucky man. The darkened room

Roars out the joy of flesh and blood.

The use of nakedness is good.

I went through this, believing all,

Our love denied the Primal Fall.

Wordless, we walked among the trees,

And felt immortal as the breeze.

However many times we came

Apart, we came together. The same

Thing over and over again.

Then suddenly the mark of Cain

Began to show on her and me.

Why should I rain the mystery

By harping on the suffering rest,

Myself a frequent wedding guest?

Lovers when they marry, take it for granted that they are the right pair, the right couple to have been blessed with, made by God and that they will never separate from each other. A pair made from the paradise, transfixed and made it happen, things will remain benedictory to them. Hence, the resultant complacency and peace is to be marked on their face. They feel it within that the things will keep going as thus, full of love, peace and happiness. There is nothing to be sad and morose. The grace of Eternity will definitely overshadow them in sun and shower. Will pleasure be short-lived? They doubt not even a fig for it.

The bride as ever held remains the pretty one to be viewed by the congregation gathered there and the groom a lucky man to have got her, such a beautiful better half is always the thing of deliberation. She looks like a fairy; a celestial damsel. Later on, the scenes and sites shift to the dark room full of man-woman relationship, laying it bare the story of attraction and repulsion met in love, flesh and blood contact, sensual pleasure and the fulfillment of carnal desires. The story revolving round man's temptation does the rounds.

Madly after love, he forgets it the Primal Fall as they walk over a tract held in love, sympathy and bonding, forsaking disbelief and negativism casting aspersions with regard to its permanence where everything is but fragile. They take the things in their own way, grappling with in the likewise manner thinking themselves immortal. The trees lie in all around and the breeze refreshes up. But the domain of life is not exactly so. Many a time things take a turn otherwise and they settle it too amicably leaving no scope for untidiness. But a time comes when the things appear to be beyond repair. Frictions and fissures creep in and cracks figure on the surface of relationship.

The poet himself a wedding guest, why should he delve deep into the mystery? As a groom he too one day married a girl. This is the as usual course of life and there is nothing as to change it.

### 8.2.3 The Worm

#### Summary

In this poem, the speaker recalls an event in which he found a worm on the ground after it had rained. The worm was moving with "astounding strength" . Even though worms are blind, the worm's intuition, or "inner eye," was helping it move where it wanted to go . The fact that the worm follows a straight trajectory causes the speaker to exclaim to God: "It moved so straight! Oh God!" . The speaker then compares himself to the worm by noting that, in contrast to the worm, he gets where he's going through "absurd and devious routes" .

Following this, the speaker moves into a rhetorical question in which he asks where he can find a worm that is blinder than himself, who is both blind and "monstrously incapable" of being blind . The speaker characterizes this worm, which is paradoxically blinder than and not as blind as the speaker, as existing by itself, moving according to its instincts, and completely "free" .

Out of contempt for the worm, the speaker crushes it in an attempt to disregard the worm's "victory" over him . The speaker notes that the worm is dead and mocks it, asking it where its strength has gone. He notes that the God that made the worm wiser than the speaker will understand the speaker's decision to kill the worm as "the anger of a man" . The speaker comes to the conclusion that he is most like the worm through his anger. He ends the poem with a repetition of his action: "I've killed the worm" .

#### Analysis

Ezekiel's "The Worm" is ruled by oppositions and paradoxes, beginning with the character of the speaker himself. The speaker, who wishes so badly to emulate the worm, can only do so through anger and destruction, which is the opposite of the worm's own indifferent directness. Thus, even though he believes himself to be similar to the worm at the end of the poem, he also reveals himself to be inherently different, as he is not "free" from outside influences . The speaker and the worm are thus paradoxically both the same and different. Ezekiel

emphasizes this paradox through the rhetorical question at the middle of the poem: "Is there anywhere / A worm blinder than I have been or proved / So monstrously incapable of being" . In these lines, the speaker sees himself as both blind and "monstrously incapable" of being blind. Thus, the speaker's act of defining himself in opposition to the worm does not lead to a stable definition—they are inherently different and alike at the same time. The speaker, who starts the poem praising the worm, ends up killing it as a result of his own egotism. Finally, the speaker reveals his intense guilt after the act of killing the worm, which reveals a further split in his consciousness, between the desire to kill and the desire not to kill the insect.

An opposition found in "The Worm" is the opposing forces of creation and destruction. When considering the worm, the speaker meditates on the god that created it: "The god who made you to be wiser than / The cunning subtleties within my brain / Shall know by this the anger of a man" . The speaker blames the natural endowments that were given to the worm and himself during creation for his own act of destruction: "Only in anger can I emulate / The worm's directness. I've killed the worm" . Thus, according to the logic set up within the poem, it is the creation of both the speaker and the worm that results in this moment of destruction.

The internal contradictions of religion are also at issue in "The Worm." When mulling over the worm's directness, the speaker makes an exclamation: "Oh God!" . The capitalized "G" in "God" signifies that the speaker is a believer in one God and therefore capitalizes his name. Even though Ezekiel himself is skeptical when it comes to religion, he often makes the decision to capitalize the "G" in "God" throughout his poetry. In contrast, however, the speaker makes the decision NOT to capitalize the "g" in "god" when musing over whoever created the worm: "The god who made you to be wiser than / The cunning subtleties within my brain / Shall know by this the anger of a man" . This displays the speaker's split, contradictory religious feeling: he at once respects a God which might acknowledge his existence, while simultaneously bringing god down grammatically as the speaker destroys the god's creation.

## Notes

All in all, this poem expresses a wish to return to the animalistic. The speaker demonstrates a wish to escape society and understand himself and his own motives. Because self-knowledge is such an important theme throughout Nissim Ezekiel's poetry, it is interesting that the speaker is so astutely aware of his own folly in this poem. In a way, the speaker uses this encounter with the worm as a momentary lapse in rational behavior or understanding. Because of this, he can understand and relate his senseless decision to kill the worm completely.

Formally, "The Worm" stands apart from Ezekiel's other early poems because it does not contain a strict meter or rhyme scheme. Instead, the entire poem is clumped into one stanza that relates the entire encounter with the worm over the course of 20 lines. Ezekiel also uses enjambment, which is characteristic of his later poems, in this early work to create visual and sonic tension within the poem. For example, at the climax of the poem, the speaker reveals that the worm is dead with a line break in the middle: "So now / It's dead" . There is a beautiful pause for ambiguity in between those lines. Additionally, the words themselves are stretched out over the page, which brings the reader's attention to that moment.

The themes of self-knowledge and self-awareness, which extend throughout the Collected Works, are introduced in this poem. Even though the speaker has just killed the worm, he forgives himself in the eyes of God: "The god who made you to be wiser than / The cunning subtleties within my brain / Shall know by this the anger of a man" . Ultimately, the worm can be read as a symbol of fear and self-doubt. However, once it's gone, only the hollow repetition of what he has done remains: "I've killed the worm" .

### **8.2.4 SOTTO VOCE**

#### **Summary**

"Sotto Voce" begins with an admission from the speaker: "I often think of death / But cannot think the thought out to the end, / For that would be the end of thought" . Even though the speaker is unsure about thinking the thought of death to the end, he believes it will bring him "death or

perfect peace," when what he really wants is life, which he sees as "imperfection" .

The speaker moves on to say that he feels as if his life is "only partly lived" . He repeats that he thinks often about death. The speaker then moves into a self-aware stanza, in which he reveals to the reader that "these are fragments of a poem" . The speaker sees the lines of poetry as "broken limbs" which are "scattered" by a god who doesn't know how to create.

Following the first two stanzas, the speaker laments that he does not have as much control over language as he would like to: "I cannot mould the language as desired" . He then reveals that he only half-feels emotions such as desire. The final three lines are repeated lines from earlier in the poem: "I often think of death, / Death or perfect peace, / And life is imperfection" .

### **Analysis**

"Sotto Voce" plays with paradoxes, a common trope in Ezekiel's early poems. The first few lines of the poem present us with an impossible situation: the speaker wishes to contemplate death but believes that thinking of death will result in "the end of thought," or physical death. Thus, the speaker sees himself thinking about something that essentially cannot exist. It is an impossible situation. In the same vein, life can be seen as a triumph over death and yet it is meaningless without it. Death acts as a fence around this poem that the speaker can look over but is afraid to look for long.

The tone of this poem is one of longing—the reader is left unsure if that longing is for death or "perfect peace" in the face of life's imperfections. The title of the poem adds to the tone: "sotto voce" means in a quiet voice, as if not to be overheard. This implies a certain level of blatant honesty and intimacy with the reader. "Sotto voce" is also a musical term in Western music, which places this poem within a Western musical tradition.

After the first two stanzas, there is a shift in tone and voice in which the speaker adopts the voice of the poet. The speaker compares himself to a

## Notes

god: "Lines of poetry like broken limbs / Scattered by a god who cannot make a man. / I cannot think the thought out to the end" . In these lines, the speaker laments being unable to think of death, since all of his descriptions about death come up half-empty.

Finally, the speaker endows himself with the power of a god in this poem, which introduces questions about the relation between poetic creation and the godlike power to create life. The poet compares his imperfect creation—this poem, "Sotto Voce"—to God's imperfect creation, life. This theme also links up to questions of skepticism and religion, which are also prominent in Ezekiel's early work.

### 8.2.5 Midmonsoon Madness

#### Summary

At the beginning of "Midmonsoon Madness," the speaker expresses a desire to leave his current circumstances and go anywhere. However, he also knows that his wish to go "anywhere" is too broad for action, which means he probably will end up going "nowhere" .

The speaker goes on to muse that it feels like it is raining upon the past. In this state, it is only the monotonous repetitions of daily life that he can be sure of, since he knows they will extend into the future. In this way, the future is clearer than the past is: "I shall see nothing clearly / except the future stuff of dreams / repeating what has always been" .

In the next stanza, the speaker reveals that those things that, in the past, he feared would occur indeed "have come to pass" . He wonders if they happened because he dreaded them. He then says that when it rains overnight, he can hear his own madness. It urges him to destroy everything and start a new life.

In the final stanza, the speaker reveals that what he wishes to destroy is his familial responsibilities, as the feeling of his wife and children surrounding him in the sleeping house "add[s] to the chill" .

#### Analysis



This poem, which was written in Ezekiel's middle age, explores the relationship between nature and the individual. The speaker of this poem is clearly very influenced by the rain outside; so much so that he is prompted to consider changing his entire life. Nature and mental state become one within this poem because of this. This is not surprising to careful readers of the *Collected Poems*, since the collection that "Midmonsoon Madness" was published in is much more interested in the natural world than Ezekiel's earlier poetry.

This poem represents a shift in Ezekiel's poetry—before the publication of *The Third* and this poem in particular, the natural world always stood for a force of harmony and good in Ezekiel's poetry. In contrast, the rains in this poem are causing hostility and madness in the speaker as they unhinge him. In the case of this poem, the rain can almost be seen as a symbol for disaster. The results of this disaster are as psychological as they are physical.

Ezekiel attempts to emulate the rain through his language in "Midmonsoon Madness." The stanzas at the beginning of the poem do not contain a single pronoun and the lack of specificity in prepositions adds to a sense of haziness/confusion: it is very hard to find concrete language to hold onto when the first few stanzas contain indistinct words such as "here," "anywhere," and "nowhere."

"Midmonsoon Madness" is one of Ezekiel's more evocative poems, and this can be traced to the poem's tone. The first three stanzas are so slow and almost stagnant that the reader experiences the overwhelming feeling of stuckness that the speaker is enduring mid-disaster and mid-Monsoon. The reader sympathizes with the speaker until she realizes that he is considering leaving his family. Either way, he comes off as a sympathetic figure

Finally, Ezekiel purposefully waits to reveal the family to us in the final stanza in order for it to be a surprise. Rereading the poem once you have read the ending makes for a very different experience. The way that Ezekiel refrains from revealing the source of the stuckness until the last few lines has a jarring emotional effect. It forces the reader to re-evaluate what they think about the speaker. The language in the final stanza is

## Notes

succinct and direct—Ezekiel does not mask the speaker's feeling with poetic devices or allusive speech. Instead, he is bracingly honest—one of the most characteristic aspects of Ezekiel's poetry.

### 8.2.6 Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.

#### Summary

In "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.," a friend of Miss Pushpa gives a speech at her going away party to a group of people. The speaker begins by addressing the crowd and tells them that Miss Pushpa is "departing for foreign / in two three days" . He also reminds the party why they are gathered together: "we are meeting today / to wish her bon voyage" .

The speaker moves to remind the crowd of Miss Pushpa's "sweetness" and says that she is sweet internally as well as externally . He recalls how often Miss Pushpa smiles, "even for no reason," but just because she feels like it .

The speaker also takes the opportunity to remind the party that Miss Pushpa comes "from a very high family" . He informs them that her father was a diplomat in Bulsar or Surat, though he cannot remember which one.

The speaker then goes on a tangent about Surat: "Surat? Ah, yes, / once only I stayed in Surat / with family members" .

The speaker then returns to the topic of Miss Pushpa and says that she is popular with women as well as men. He praises her for doing everything he asks of her, saying that her response is always "Just now only / I will do it" . The speaker believes this is indicative of a "good spirit." Additionally, Miss Pushpa never says no: "Whatever I or anybody is asking / she is always saying yes" .

In the final stanza, the speaker informs his listeners that it is time for him to let others speak, and then "afterwards Miss Pushpa / will do summing up" .

## Analysis

This is one of Ezekiel's most famous poems, both because of its subject matter and the way in which it was written. There are two abundant sources of humor in this poem: Ezekiel's use of Indian English and the character of the speaker, who seems to be lacking certain public speaking skills. Ezekiel uses a type of register and style of speaking that many people in India use when speaking English, particularly when English is their second language. This type of English deviates from standard English, but it is spoken by a large number of Indians, the number of which is still on the rise. Ezekiel's use of this English demonstrates his commitment to the everyday as a poet—he relays a relatively ordinary bit of speech, exactly as he imagines it would sound. Additionally, this realism adds a bit of humor to the overall message of the poem, since the ability to speak English is a huge marker of status in India and the characters in this poem struggle with the language without even seeming to notice. For those with a keen eye, the ability to speak English indicates social status faster than many other markers, such as material wealth, titles, or names. The speaker makes several mistakes that are humorous for a speaker more familiar with standard English, including calling Miss Puspa "sweet" on the inside and outside, and saying that she is popular among the men and the women.

The character of the speaker himself also strives for humor. From these short few stanzas alone, it is evident that he is a jovial character who uplifts the poem into something positive and humorous. Additionally, his apparent lack of public speaking skills—his tangent about Surat in which he gets too involved in himself and his note at the end of the speech of who will talk next—allow for humor as the reader imagines what it would be like to be in attendance. The speaker's narrative style is also representative of the everyday—he is not given a lofty or magical ability to speak and instead speaks like someone the reader might have heard in person. Furthermore, English does communicate a certain social superiority which the narrator is attempting to flaunt through his usage of "bon voyage," his tangent about his travels, and his mention of Miss Pushpa's social class. Thus, readers come to realize that the speaker is

## Notes

flaunting a certain social superiority during his speech, which is discordant with the way he speaks.

Ezekiel uses both of these elements—the use of Indian English and the speaker—to wryly comment on postcolonial India's fascination with going abroad. Irshad Gulam Ahmed expands on this idea in "Nissim Ezekiel's Critical Nationalism and the Question of Indian English": "This is the yet-to-be decolonized Indian psyche that the poet seeks to foreground. Thus Ezekiel's critical nationalism manifests itself in the expression of a new kind of outlook on the very notion of colonialism which consists not so much in the use of the English language in its unaltered or undistorted form but in the perpetuation of a colonized psyche, a colonial mindset still persisting in the colonial era." In other words, Ezekiel uses this poem to parody the Indian fixation on going abroad in the hopes that it will "improve [their] prospect" .

Ezekiel's commitment to the everyday and the ordinary is, ironically, a bit risky in the poetic sense. For example, the speaker's tangent about Surat runs the risk of being boring or off-putting for the reader. However, Ezekiel's careful modulation of the speaker's voice prevents it from becoming either truly boring or overly parodic, masterfully conveying a complex and ultimately sympathetic portrait of the speaker's character.

Formally, "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." is in line with a lot of Ezekiel's later work. It is in free verse, which means that it does not have a specific rhyme scheme or meter. However, Ezekiel does endow the poem with musicality through line breaks and punctuation. Ezekiel also is unafraid of colloquial language in this poem, as is the case for many of his poems in which he satirizes Indian culture. Colloquial language allows for humor in a way that stuffy or obviously written language would struggle. Finally, there is a lack of capitals at the beginning of every line, which shows a conscious decision on Ezekiel's part to keep this poem colloquial and easy to read.

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## **8.3 ABOUT ROBIN S NGANGOM**

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Robin Singh Ngangom was born in Imphal, Manipur of North Eastern India. He is a bilingual poet who writes in English and Manipuri. He studied literature at St Edmund's College and the North Eastern Hill University Shillong, and serves as a Lecturer in the Dept. of English at NEHU. He is the Editor of *New Frontiers*, journal of the Northeast Writers' Forum, Guwahati, and is Nominating Editor for Manipuri for Katha Translation Awards, New Delhi.

He was conferred with Katha Award for Translation in 1999, was invited to the UK for the UK Year of Literature and Writing, 1995, and the Udaya Bharati National Award for Poetry, 1994.

His significant publications are *Words and the Silence*, Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1988, *An Anthology of New Indian English Poetry*, Rupa & Co., New Delhi, 1993, *Time's Crossroads*, Disha Books, Orient Longman Ltd., Hyderabad, 1994, *Khasia in Gwalia*, Alun Books, Wales, 1995, *A New Book of Indian Poems in English*, Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 2000, *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast*, NEHU Publications, Shillong, 2003, *Confronting Love: Poems*, Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2005, *The Desire of Roots*, Chandrabh'g!, Cuttack, 200

His work has been featured in *The Telegraph Colour Magazine*, Calcutta; *Debonair*, Bombay; *Chandrabh'g'*, Cuttack; *Kavya Bharati*, American College, Madurai; *Poetry Chronicle*, Bombay; *Poiesis*, Bombay; *Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi; *The Brown Critique*, Maharashtra; *The New Welsh Review*, Wales; *Kunapipi*, University of Aarhus, Denmark; *SWAG Magazine*, Swansea, Wales; *New Statesman & Society*, London; *Planet: The Welsh Internationalist*, Aberystwyth, Wales; *Verse*, University of Georgia, Athens, US.

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## **8.4 ROBIN S NGANGOM'S POEMS**

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### **THE IGNOMINY OF GEOMETRY**

The ignominy of geometry,  
the inability to evade angles and parallels.

## Notes

Living, we have to suffer that mortification  
which robs the sacrifice of joy  
much of its sheen.

One minute of patronizing certainty  
and the boring man is a 'square'  
but when our understanding's poor  
someone's off on a tangent,  
and that dark excitement we all secretly envy  
is an eternal triangle,  
or, when two people cannot agree  
they are diametrically opposed,  
bowing again to geometry,  
a language of precision  
to measure our imprecise lives.

We were given a white emptiness  
and left to our devices. Wanting more from life than  
mere life  
we tried to fill that emptiness with lush pigments,  
beauty, purpose, a finishing touch of children.  
We went looking for subjects in time and space  
creating moments under cherry-trees, lifting glasses  
to youth,  
but merely fulfilled the oracle of repetition  
and then we speak of a wheel coming full circle.  
The ignominy of geometry,  
the inability to see beyond centres and triangles.  
Even my love was flesh and blood  
because I had put my mouth on her lips  
but good fortune abandoned us  
and we became two tiny points of light

on that white emptiness  
drawing unhappy parallel lines.

### MY INVENTED LAND

My home is a gun pressed  
against both temples  
a knock on a night that has not ended  
a torch lit long after the theft  
a sonnet about body counts  
undoubtedly raped  
definitely abandoned  
in a tryst with destiny.

These few lines from the poem, “My Invented Land” sums up the gory picture of Manipur. Manipuri poets have articulated the changing concepts, moods and emotions of “homeland” since the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. The moods are more of nostalgia, protestation, resentment and protection of “homeland” intertwined heavily with the rise of India as a nation. The poets felt the threatening onslaught of the outside forces attempting to uproot indigenous culture and identity. Amidst dramatic political upheavals, the poets have reflected different moods and changes in diction concerning “homeland” and “homelessness”. The construction and de-construction of “homeland” has spawned various ethnic clashes / conflicts in the past six or so decades since Independence. The “cry for homeland” is also one of the various reasons for the spurt in the number of different insurgencies operating in the country – especially in the northeast. The map of India figures as an almost negligible dot in the northeastern part of its geographical location called Manipur. The location itself suggests a relative isolation geographically, ethnically, linguistically, economically and politically from the rest of India except the other states of northeast India.

The coming of the new modern Manipuri poets after Independence kept alive the image of “homeland” within the discourse of the outside world

## Notes

as well as within the collective psyche of the people. In the poem titled “Manipur”, E. Nilakanta arguably, the first modern poet of Manipur sadly visualizes “Mother Manipur” as a crumbling state having lost its freedom and now subsumed under the hegemony of a larger, overarching “Indian culture”. Thereafter, we find poets concerned more with the themes of “homeland”; defending homeland, redefining homeland and articulating images of violence, bitterness and suffering of the people. They wrote on the themes of ethnic cleansing and militant nationalism and critiqued them as disappointing movements in the name of homeland and identity.

These poets are also romanticists who love to write about the intrinsic beauties of their land, their hills and valley. They too are nostalgic about their presumed happy “pasts”. In the poem, “Homeland I left”, Robin S. Ngangom loves to remember “the colourful festivals / and catching fish from stagnant pools... / how he flew kites, planted flowers and tended chicken” . But these memories are obstructed by the dark violent images of present Manipur. The next moment, he realizes his native place, “Manipur”, is “in a state of anarchy” and he quickly moves to the wicked war which is waged “on our soil, and gory bodies / dragged unceremoniously / through our rice fields” . The people’s past history and the forged “Indian identity” still haunts many poets and their works, though most writers have accepted the dominant Indian identity.

This identity crisis when “at cockcrow one morning we found / ourselves belonging to a nation” is also highlighted by the renowned poet, Y. Ibomcha , when he commented that nationality for him is uncertain because he was born as a Manipuri and remained so for fifty-six days after which he became an Indian when Manipur joined India in 1949. As an Indian writing in Manipuri, the dual identity of being a Manipuri and an Indian has always occupied Y. Ibomcha like many other writers from this state. The dilemma over the dual identity of the Manipuri people is confirmed by Robin S. Ngangom when he stated that the people of the region have to prove on many occasions to the rest of the country that they are Indians too. At the peak of the insurgency movements in the 1970s, with a “cry for homeland” demanding complete secession from the Indian Union, the poet wrote about Manipur giving “testimonies” of a



troubled period articulating the anxieties of a large, dispossessed population.

The nationalist and socialist movements in Manipur became militant in the 1970s and 1980s demanding complete secession from the Indian Union. The Indian state on the principle of “rule of law” asserted its right on the people of Manipur. In order to make the Indian national possible and to protect the democratic values of the constitution, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act was imposed in Manipur in the 1980s. . This right is challenged by all the people of the state, including the militants. This struggle for power has compelled Robin S. Ngangom to define his “home” as “My home is a gun / pressed against both temples / a knock on a night that has not ended... / a sonnet about body counts / undoubtedly raped / definitely abandoned / in a tryst with destiny”.

In the post-colonial era, the idea of a nation is more politically motivated although territory and demographic definitions still largely hold sway. Within its territory, Manipur manifests diverse communities and cultures, each asserting its ethnic identity. Manipur is home to three major groups – Kuki, Naga and Meiteis . The unclear territorial boundaries have resulted in a general feeling of lack of security and the last few decades have seen thousands of people being killed and displaced in various ethnic conflicts. Inter-ethnic conflicts are often backed by the respective insurgency groups. Manipur has been witness to continuous struggle by organizations claiming their right to self-determination; armed insurgent groups fighting for an independent homeland, or an ethnic group fighting for more autonomy or power. The fight no longer draws on romanticism and idealism. The fighters have turned on each other and on the people. In fact, it has been rightly commented that war between states seems to be on the decline whereas ethnic conflict within states is on the rise. In his poem “Poem for Joseph”, Robin S. Ngangom examines this assertion of identity based on ethnicity and delves into issues of exclusivity, governance and territory that have resulted in deadly violence.

It is never too late to come home.

But I need a homeland

where I can recognize myself,

## Notes

just a map or even a tree or a stone,  
to mark a spot, I could return to  
like a pissing animal  
even when there's nothing to return for.  
Although it's true  
that in my native land,  
children have crawled out of burrows  
they had gouged under hard beds,  
long after the grownups had fled  
and roofs came apart  
like charred heads.  
You said, you didn't regret  
how ethnic cleansers had palmed  
your newly-built home off on a people  
well on their trail back to pure blood,  
you didn't mind leaving behind  
objects of desire  
you had collected over twenty-five years,  
or, how you came to live in a rented room  
with your wife and your children  
in dog-eat-dog Imphal,  
among the callous tribe  
I call my own....

Ethnic violence from 1992-1997 between the Nagas and the Kukis has resulted in many deaths, destruction of homes and displacement of thousands of people.

While British colonial policies of governance in northeast India and the rise of ethnic nationalism among Kukis and Nagas in the postIndependence period have been identified as major root causes of the Kuki-Naga conflict; competing claims and perceived threats regarding land and territory appear to be the major cause of the continuing tensions. The violence and destruction have left nothing for the survivors; "there's nothing to return for" as Ngangom writes in "Poem for Joseph", quoted above. Children who have been bundled underneath

into “burrows” for safety roam in emptiness, homeless and orphaned. Those who “had fled” their abode “leaving behind objects of desire / collected over twenty-five years” at the mercy of those “ethnic cleansers” have now squeezed themselves into “rented rooms” among “callous tribes” in “Imphal”, the capital of Manipur. In yet another poem, “Flight”, Ngangom examines a range of emotions/events from terror to indifference which has become a way of life bogged down by an unrelenting series of violence and ethnic strife. Some lines in the poem present a picture of mass exodus – “and when they left... / they left chickens running in the yard”. Images of people running away from their violence-struck homes are quite common. Many a times they have to move in a flash with no destination and in such circumstances “only once did they wish for wings”. Many in India may not be aware of the ongoing conflict in this part of India and the Indian press hardly covers news and developments from here unless and until there are large scale and devastating natural disasters or particularly heavy violence. These poems are a testimony to the events of our hard times. It tells of ordinary men and women and their endurance for mere survival. The complexities of the contemporary situation in Manipur where we find deep divisions along tribal and ethnic lines often resulting in mindless killings is further delved into by Robin S. Ngangom in his poem “Native Land”:

First came the scream of the dying  
 in a bad dream, then the radio report,  
 and a newspaper: six shot dead, twenty-five  
 houses razed, sixteen beheaded with hands tied  
 behind their backs inside a church...  
 As the days crumbled, and the victors  
 and their victims grew in number,  
 I hardened inside my thickening hide,  
 until I lost my tenuous humanity.  
 I ceased thinking  
 of abandoned children inside blazing huts  
 still waiting for their parents...

## Notes

The inhabitants of Manipur with conflicting identities are insecure about their land, culture, language and people. In Manipur, often ethnic differences are used to identify one opposing group from another. These groups then become powerful mobilizing weapons often engaged in ethnic conflicts. There is a clash of interests over rights to land, political representation and preservation of ethnic identity which slowly takes the form of militant nationalism.

### PRIMARY SCHOOLS

I remember only the detritus of schools  
which taught fear,  
where only nuns seemed to believe  
in the power of the written word and punishment.  
There was a boy in the middle of it all  
who once forged his father's signature  
in order to dodge a maths test  
and spent the whole day in a World War II cemetery  
sleeping between roses and epitaphs.  
The intimidation of books from Glasgow  
made him steal small notes and coins from his father  
which admitted him to a mystic circle  
of titbits, cannabis, and adult tales  
far away from pink rooms and uniform handwriting  
or 'eena meena maina mo' by rote  
after clambering walls that grow glass-creepers  
to the freedom of cork trees and frogs and egrets,  
a stinking marshy world of catapults and running noses  
which grappled with black polished shoes  
and moral science, to return home  
on cloudy evenings brewing storm-fuelled nights  
exiled on a reed mat and only a hurricane lamp

with slate, chalk, and as the years grew up  
inkwell and bamboo-pulp paper  
were the keepsakes of his childhood.  
There were mosquito storms and  
cool dirt floors polished with cowdung and clay,  
ruined walls and lizard myrtles and moss  
which reminded elders of neglect  
near a big water tank left behind by British soldiers  
where vipers came to drink, and  
gaudy walls of goddesses.

I can see the naïve boy  
who couldn't read the dirty word  
spelt on the ground by his older friends  
in the calligraphy of randy boyhood,  
and, later, obsessed with that moist idea  
explored his girl cousins fervently.

There were long delightful, convalescent afternoons  
of illustrated classics without  
the stress of the school bus when he heard  
only the sleepy clang of hammers  
in the nearby smithy, when life burnt slowly  
like calories even when he was sleeping,  
without the solemnity of anyone's life  
coming to an end.

#### **AFTER 'JASHN-E-AZADI'**

The kite transforming into smoke lacing  
The chinars is not a symbol.  
The rose has migrated from the garden of paradise.

## Notes

Freedom will never come  
Poured into goblets waiting to be raised,  
Martyrdom is a handout from god the hagiographer.  
Only poetry of ruins is real.  
The incoherent rose still blooms  
From some beloved breast torn open.

### HILL

Hill, you and I have seen  
only upheaval since our birth.  
When I was torn from the universal womb  
I echoed your silent cry.

You have been carved by time as I am.  
From your forests grow flutes  
oracular drums and nymphs.  
The ancient ones still speak of the time  
when the gods, tired of the heavens  
descended to earth, and with sensual fingers  
and primeval clay, moulded your torso and breasts.  
They also scooped the clouds  
and poured them over cliffs  
to fashion your silver hair.

With subterranean instincts  
you have seen habitations, and  
generations of children come and go.  
When you descend in green bends to the townfolk  
you bring garments of fog, rural baskets  
of mushrooms, wildflowers and birds.  
Until one day I died and took new birth  
in your legendary woods.

During the festive season  
when the cold gathers holly leaves, and  
lips of boys and girls meet again in benison  
I was lonely with you but heard your voices:  
horns in the distance and maidens  
and wild horses whinnying.

Hill, you have preserved from decay  
hearts like mine,  
faltering forward in absurd death.  
And it should be.  
Clouds come home when they find you.

**Check your Progress-1**

1. Who wrote the poem “The Ignominy Of Geometry”?

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2. Who wrote the poem “ After ‘Jashn-E-Azadi’”?

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3. Who wrote the poem “ Primary Schools”?

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4. Where was Robin Singh Ngangom born?

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## 8.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we learned about Nissim Ezekiel's Poems like The Professor, Marriage, The Worm, Sotto Voce, Midmonsoon Madness and Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S. You also learned about Robin S Ngangom's life and his Poems like The Ignominy Of Geometry, My Invented Land, Primary Schools, After 'Jashn-E-Azadi' and Hill.

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## 8.6 KEYWORDS

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- Bhikshuks: Religious mendicants.
- Burkha: Garment worn by orthodox Muslim women which covers them completely from head to foot, hiding the face.
- Chapati: Small round of unleavened bread, baked on a griddle.
- Paan: Astringent mixture of areca-nut, lime, tobacco, etc. wrapped in betel leaf for chewing.
- Padma Shri: The fourth highest civilian award in the Republic of India. It is awarded by the Government of India, every year on India's Republic Day.

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## 8.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

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- Analyze the poem " After 'Jashn-E-Azadi'" by Robin Singh Ngangom.
- Write the summary of "The Ignominy Of Geometry" by Robin Singh Ngangom.
- Analyze the poem " Primary Schools" by Robin Singh Ngangom.
- Summarize the poem Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." by Nissim Ezekiel

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## 8.8 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

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## 8.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRES

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- “The Ignominy Of Geometry” was written by Robin Singh Ngangom.
- “ After ‘Jashn-E-Azadi’” was written by Robin Singh Ngangom.
- “ Primary Schools” was written by Robin Singh Ngangom.
- Robin Singh Ngangom was born in Manipur, India.

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# UNIT-9 KARNAD-THE FIRE AND THE RAIN -1

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## STRUCTURE

9.0 Objectives

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Life

9.3 The Fire and The Rain

9.4 Let us sum up

9.5 Keywords

9.6 Questions for Review

9.7 Suggested Reading and References

9.8 Answers to Check your Progress

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## 9.0 OBJECTIVES

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Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about Girish Karnad's life and;
- you would also learn about "The Fire and The Rain" by Girish Karnad.

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## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

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Girish Karnad was an Indian actor, film director, Kannada writer, playwright and a Rhodes Scholar, who predominantly worked in South Indian cinema and Bollywood. His rise as a playwright in the 1960s, marked the coming of age of modern Indian playwriting in Kannada, just as Badal Sarkar did in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, and Mohan Rakesh in Hindi. He was a recipient of the 1998 Jnanpith Award, the highest literary honour conferred in India.

For four decades Karnad composed plays, often using history and mythology to tackle contemporary issues. He translated his plays into English and received acclaim. His plays have been translated into some Indian languages and directed by directors like Ebrahim Alkazi, B. V. Karanth, Alyque Padamsee, Prasanna, Arvind Gaur, Satyadev Dubey, Vijaya Mehta, Shyamanand Jalan, Amal Allana and Zafer Mohiuddin. He was active in the world of Indian cinema working as an actor, director and screenwriter, in Hindi and Kannada cinema, and has earned awards. He was conferred Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan by the Government of India and won four Filmfare Awards, of which three are Filmfare Award for Best Director – Kannada and the fourth a Filmfare Best Screenplay Award. He was a presenter for a weekly science magazine programme called "Turning Point" that aired on Doordarshan in 1991.

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## 9.2 LIFE

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### Early Life and Education

Girish Karnad was born in Matheran, in present-day Maharashtra, in 1938. His mother Krishnabai née Mankikar was a young widow with a son who belonged to a poor Brahmin family. Since it was necessary for her to earn a living, she began working as a nurse and cook for the bedridden wife of a certain Dr. Raghunath Karnad, a doctor in the Bombay Medical Services. Some five years later, and while the first wife was still alive, Krishnabai and Dr. Raghunath Karnad were married in a private ceremony. The marriage was controversial not because of bigamy but because of the then prevailing social prejudice against widow remarriage. Therefore, the wedding was held privately, and under the dispensation of the Arya Samaj, a reform organization which condones widow remarriage. Girish was the third of the four children born thereafter.[6]

Karnad's initial schooling was in Marathi. Later, after his father was transferred to Sirsi in the Kannada-speaking regions of Bombay Presidency, Karnad was exposed to travelling theatre groups and

## Notes

natak mandalis , which were experience a period of efflorescne during the iconic Balgandharva era .[7] As a youngster, he was an ardent admirer of Yakshagana and the theater in his village.[8] His family moved to Dharwad in Karnataka when he was fourteen, where he grew up with his two sisters and a niece.[9]

He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics and statistics from Karnatak Arts College, Dharwad , in 1958. After graduation, he went to England and studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Magdalen in Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar , earning his Master of Arts degree in philosophy, political science and economics.[5] Karnad was elected the President of the Oxford Union in 1962–63.[10]

### Career

After working with the Oxford University Press, Chennai for seven years , he resigned to take to writing full-time.[5] While in Madras he got involved with local amateur theatre group, The Madras Players.[11]

During 1987–88, he was at the University of Chicago as visiting professor and Fulbright playwright-in-residence.[5] During his tenure at Chicago Nagamandala had its world premiere at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis based on Karnad's English translation of the Kannada original.[12]

He served as director of the Film and Television Institute of India and chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the national academy of the performing arts . He served as director of the Nehru Centre and as Minister of Culture, in the Indian High Commission, London .

### Literature

Karnad is known as a playwright. His plays, written in Kannada, have been translated into English and some Indian languages. Kannada is his language of choice.

When Karnad started writing plays, Kannada literature was highly influenced by the renaissance in Western literature. Writers would

choose a subject that looked entirely alien to manifestation of native soil. C. Rajagopalachari's version of the Mahabharata published in 1951, left a deep impact on him[13] and soon, sometime in the mid-1950s, one day he experienced a rush of dialogues by characters from the Mahabharata in Kannada. "I could actually hear the dialogues being spoken into my ears ... I was just the scribe," said Karnad in a later interview. Yayati was published in 1961, when he was 23 years old. It is based on the story of King Yayati, one of the ancestors of the Pandavas, who was cursed into premature old age by his preceptor, Shukracharya, who was incensed at Yayati's infidelity. Yayati in turn asks his sons to sacrifice their youth for him, and one of them agrees. It ridicules the ironies of life through characters in Mahabharata. The play in Hindi was adapted by Satyadev Dubey and Amrish Puri was lead actor for the play. It became an instant success, immediately translated and staged in several other Indian languages.[12]

Karnad found a new approach of drawing historical and mythological sources to tackle contemporary themes and existentialist crisis of modern man through characters locked in psychological and philosophical conflicts. His next was Tughlaq , about a rashly idealist 14th-century Sultan of Delhi, Muhammad bin Tughluq, and allegory on the Nehruvian era which started with ambitious idealism and ended up in disillusionment.[13] This established Karnad, now 26 years old, as a promising playwright in the country. It was staged by the National School of Drama Repertory under the direction of Ebrahim Alkazi, with the actor Manohar Singh, playing the visionary king who later becomes disillusioned and turns bitter, amidst the historic Purana Qila in Delhi. It was staged in London by the National School of Drama for the Festival of India in 1982.

Hayavadana was based on a theme drawn from The Transposed Heads, a 1940 novella by Thomas Mann, which is originally found in the 11th-century Sanskrit text Kathasaritsagara. Herein he employed the folk theatre form of Yakshagana. A German version of the play

## Notes

was directed by Vijaya Mehta as part of the repertoire of the Deutsches National Theatre, Weimar.

Naga-Mandala was based on a folk tale related to him by A. K. Ramanujam, brought him the Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award for the Most Creative Work of 1989. It was directed by J. Garland Wright, as part of the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis. The theatre subsequently commissioned him to write the play, Agni Mattu Male . Though before it came Taledanda which used the backdrop, the rise of Veerashaivism, a radical protest and reform movement in 12th century Karnataka to bring out current issues.

## Movies

- Karnad made his acting as well as screenwriting debut in a Kannada movie, Samskara , based on a novel by U.R. Ananthamurthy and directed by Pattabhirama Reddy. That movie won the first President's Golden Lotus Award for Kannada cinema.
- In television, he played the role of Swami's father in the TV series Malgudi Days , based on R. K. Narayan's books, directed by Kannada actor and director Shankar Nag. He also hosted the science magazine Turning Point on Doordarshan, in the early 1990s.
- He made his directorial debut with Vamsha Vriksha , based on a Kannada novel by S. L. Bhyrappa. It won him National Film Award for Best Direction along with B. V. Karanth, who co-directed the film. Later, Karnad directed several movies in Kannada and Hindi, including Godhuli and Utsav . Karnad has made number of documentaries, like one on the Kannada poet D. R. Bendre , Kanaka-Purandara on two medieval Bhakti poets of Karnataka, Kanaka Dasa and Purandara Dasa, and The Lamp in the Niche on Sufism and the Bhakti movement. Many of his films and documentaries have won several national and international awards.

- Some of his famous Kannada movies include Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane, Ondanonda Kaladalli, Cheluvu and Kaadu and most recent film Kanooru Heggaditi , based on a novel by Kannada writer Kuvempu.
- His Hindi movies include Nishaant , Manthan , Swami and Pukar . He has acted in a number of Nagesh Kukunoor films, starting with Iqbal , where Karnad's role of the ruthless cricket coach got him critical acclaim. This was followed by Dor , 8 x 10 Tasveer and Aashayein . He played a key role in movies "Ek Tha Tiger" and its sequel "Tiger Zinda Hai" produced by Yash Raj Films.
- Karnad has acted in the Kannada gangster movie Aa Dinagalu.

### Other works

He provided the voice of A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, former President of India, in the audiobook of Kalam's autobiography by Charkha Audiobooks, Wings of Fire.

### Awards and honours

#### For literature

- Sangeet Natak Akademi award and Varthur navya Award – 1972
- Padma Shri – 1974[15]
- Padma Bhushan – 1992[15]
- Kannada Sahitya Parishat Award – 1992
- Sahitya Academy award – 1994
- Jnanapith Award – 1998
- Kalidas Samman – 1998
- Rajyotsava Award
- Honorary degree by University of Southern California, Los Angeles – 2011[16]

#### For Cinema

### National Film Awards

- 1971: Best Direction: Vamsha Vriksha
- 1971: Best Feature Film in Kannada: Vamsha Vriksha
- 1973: Second Best Feature Film: Kaadu
- 1977: Best Feature Film in Kannada: Tabbaliyu Neenade Magane[17][18]
- 1978: Best Screenplay: Bhumika
- 1978: Best Feature Film in Kannada: Ondanondu Kaladalli
- 1989: Best Non-Feature Film: Kanaka Purandara
- 1990: Best Non-feature Film on Social Issues: The Lamp in the Niche
- 1992: Best Film on Environment Conservation: Cheluvi
- 1999: Best Feature Film in Kannada: Kaanuru Heggadathi[19]

### Filmfare Awards South

- 1972: Filmfare Award for Best Director - Kannada - Vamsha Vriksha
- 1974: Filmfare Award for Best Director - Kannada - Kaadu
- 1978: Filmfare Award for Best Director - Kannada - Ondanondu Kaladalli
- 1983: Filmfare Award for Best Actor - Kannada - Ananda Bhairavi

### Filmfare Awards Hindi

- 1980: Filmfare Best Screenplay Award: Godhuli
- 1980: Filmfare Best Supporting Actor Award: Aasha: Nominated
- 1982: Filmfare Best Supporting Actor Award: Teri Kasam : Nominated

### Karnataka State Film Awards

- 1971-72 First Best Film - Vamsha Vriksha
- 1971-72 Best Dialogue Writer - Vamsha Vriksha
- 1973-74 Second Best Film - Kaadu



- 1989-90 Best Supporting Actor – Santha Shishunala Sharifa
- 1995-96 Best Supporting Actor – Sangeetha Sagara Ganayogi Panchakshara Gavai
- 1999-00 Second Best Film – Kanooru Heggadithi

**Others**

- Gubbi Veeranna Award for his services to theatre
- Karnad served as the director of the Film and Television Institute of India from 1974 to 1975, the Indian co-chairman for the Joint Media Committee of the Indo-US Sub-Commission on Education and Culture from 1984 to 1993, chairman of the Sangeet Natak Academy from 1988 to 1993, and president of Karnataka Nataka Academy from 1976 to 1978.
- Honorary Doctorate from University of Southern California, Los Angeles – 2011[20]
- 1996 -Dr.T.M.A.Pai Konkani Distinguished Achievement Award for Performing Arts

**Controversies**

At the Tata Literary Festival held in Mumbai in 2012, Karnad was invited to speak about "his life in theater" in an hour-long session. Instead of talking about the subject, he took the opportunity to lash out at V. S. Naipaul for his "antipathy towards Indian Muslims". V. S. Naipaul had earlier been conferred the Lifetime achievement award by the festival's organisers. Karnad also criticized the organizers for having honored Naipaul.

The audience, which had gathered to hear Karnad speak, had mixed reactions to the speech. Some, like organizer Anil Dharker, tried ineffectually to steer the speech toward less controversial waters. Others were amused by the episode, and some commented on the research and logic that had gone into the speech.[21]

## Notes

Just a few weeks after this, Karnad again created controversy by claiming that Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote India's national anthem, was a great poet but a second-rate playwright.[22][23]

In November 2015, during celebrations marking the anniversary of 18th-century Muslim ruler Tipu Sultan's birth, Karnad stated that Bangalore International Airport should have been named after Tipu Sultan instead of Kempe Gowda. This created a furore among many people. Karnad apologised the following day.[24][25]

He was accused by Some Hindus of white washing historical violence and atrocities done on them by Muslim invaders and rulers[26][27].

### **Personal life**

While working in Madras for Oxford University Press on his return from England, he met his future wife Saraswathi Ganapathy at a party. They decided to marry but the marriage was only formalised ten years later, when Karnad was 42 years old. Saraswathi was born to a Parsi mother, Nurgesh Mugaseth, and a Kodava Hindu father, Kodandera Ganapathy.[28] The couple had two children. They lived in Bangalore.

### **Activism**

He was a proponent of multi-culturalism and freedom of expression. He was a critic of religious fundamentalism. He had publicly condemned the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 and later spoke against the attempts to create controversy about the Idgah Maidan in Hubli.[5] He had opposed RSS, BJP and other organizations on several occasions. He opposed Narendra Modi for the Prime Minister's post in the 2014 parliament elections[29]. He was one of the 200 writers who put out an open letter against hate politics and for "diverse and equal India" during the 2019 general elections. With a tube in his nose, he wore a placard saying "Me Too Urban Naxal"[30] at the first

death anniversary of slain journalist Gauri Lankesh. Due to his views against Hindutva, His name was on the hit list of a right-wing group which allegedly shot Gauri Lankesh.[29] Karnad claimed that Tipu Sultan was the greatest king Karnataka had in 500 years, on a religious controversy about the king.[29] Karnad was a supporter of the Forum for Communal Harmony.[31]

### Death

Karnad died on 10 June 2019 at Bengaluru at the age of 81 due to multiple organ failure following prolonged illness.

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- "Yayati" [34]
- "Tughlaq" .
- "Hayavadana"
- "Anjumallige"
- "Hittina Hunja" aka "Bali"
- "Nagamandala" , based on the script of this play, Nagamandala, A movie in Kannada language was released in 1997, starring Prakash Raj and Vijayalakshmi.
- "Taledanda" , in Hindi it is known as Rakt-Kalyan translated by Ram Gopal Bajaj, first directed by Ebrahim Alkazi for NSD rep., then by Arvind Gaur for Asmita Theater Group, New Delhi.[35]
- "Agni mattu Male" , first directed by Prasanna for NSD Rep.
- "Tipu Sultan Kanda Kanasu"
- "Odakalu Bimba"
- "Maduve Album"
- "Flowers"
- "Benda Kaalu on Toast"
- "Rakshasa Tangadi"

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- Crossing to Talikota, Oxford University Press, 2019.
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### Filmography

#### Movies

Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
1970	Samskara	Praneshacharya	Kannada	
1971	Vamsha Vriksha	Raju	Kannada	
1974	Jadu Shankh	Ka	Hindi	
1975	Nishaant	Schoolmaster	Hindi	
1976	Manthan	Dr. Rao	Hindi	

Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
1977	Swami	Ghanshyam	Hindi	
1977	Jeevan Mukta	Amarjeet	Hindi	
1978	Sandharbha	Psychiatrist	Kannada	Special Appearance in climax
1979	Sampark	Heera	Hindi	
1979	Ratnadeep	Madan	Hindi	
1980	Beqasoor	Dr. Anand Bhatnagar		
1980	Aasha	Deepak		
1980	Man Pasand	Kashinath		
1980	Apne Paraye	Harish	Hindi	
1981	Shama	Nawab Yusuf Khan		
1982	Umbartha	Advocate Subhash Mahajan	Marathi	

## Notes

Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
1982	Aparoopaa	Mr. Khanna	Assamese	
1982	Teri Kasam	Rakesh	Hindi	
1983	Ananda Bhairavi	Narayana Sarma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kannada</li> <li>• Telugu</li> </ul>	Bilingual Film
1983	Ek Baar Chale Aao	Din Dayal	Hindi	
1983	Anveshane	Rotti	Kannada	
1984	Tarang	Dinesh	Hindi	
1984	Divorce			
1985	Nee Thanda Kanike	Rao Bahadur Raja Ram Mohan Rao	Kannada	
1986	Nenapina Doni		Kannada	
1985	Zamana	Satish Kumar	Hindi	
1985	Meri Jung	Deepak Verma	Hindi	

Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
1985	Sur Sangam	Pandit Shivshankar Shastri		Hindi
1986	Neela Kurinji Poothappol	Appu Menon	Malayalam	
1986	Naan Adimai Illai	Rajasekhar	Tamil	
1987	Sutradhar	Zamindar	Hindi	
1988	Kaadina Benki		Kannada	
1988	Akarshan			
1989	Prathama Ushakirana	Doctor	Kannada	
1989	Mil Gayee Manzil Mujhe			
1990	Santha Shishunala Sharifa	Govindabhatta	Kannada	
1990	Nehru: The			

## Notes

Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
	Jewel of India			
1991	Mysore Mallige	Padma's Father	Kannada	
1991	Chaitanya	Retired Major Harischandra Prasad	Telugu	
1991	Brahma			
1991	Antarnaad		Hindi	
1991	Gunaa	Dr. Ganesh	Tamil	
1992	Cheluvi	Village Headman	Kannada	
1993	Praana Daata			
1994	Poorna Sathya		Kannada	
1994	Kadhalan	Kakarla Satyanarayana Murthi (Governor of Tamil Nadu)	Tamil	



Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
1994	Aagatha	Psychiatrist	Kannada	
1995	Sangeetha Sagara Ganayogi Panchakshara Gavai	Hanagal Kumaraswamiji	Kannada	
1996	Dharma Chakram	Mahendra	Telugu	
1996	Aatank	Inspector Khan	Hindi	
1996	The Prince	Vishwanath	Malayalam	
1997	Ratchagan	Sriram	Tamil	
1997	Minsaara Kanavu	Amal Raj	Tamil	
1998	China Gate	Sunder Rajan	Hindi	
1998	Kadhal Mannan	Rudran	Tamil	
1998	April Fool		Kannada	

## Notes

Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
1998	Aakrosh: Cyclone of Anger	Rajwansh Shashtri	Hindi	
1999	Kanooru Heggadithi	Chandregowda	Kannada	Director also
1999	AK-47	Jagannath Rao	Kannada	
1999	Janumadatha	Dr. Akbar Ali	Kannada	
1999	Prathyartha	Sheshanag Dixit (Home Minister of India)	Kannada	
2000	Pukar	Mr. Rajvansh	Hindi	
2000	Hey Ram	Uppilli Iyengar	Tamil	
2001	Vande Matharam	Mr. Ballal	Kannada	
2004	Chellamae	Rajasekhar	Tamil	
2004	Shankar Dada MBBS	Satya Prasad	Telugu	

Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
2005	Iqbal	Guruji	Hindi	
2006	Dor	Randhir Singh	Hindi	
2006	Tananam Tananam	Shastry	Kannada	
2007	Aa Dinagalu	Girish Nayak	Kannada	Screenplay Writer also
2007	Lava Kusha	Protagonists' father	Kannada	
2008	Chilipili Hakkigalu	School Master	Kannada	
2008	Sangaathi		Kannada	
2008	Dhanam		Tamil	
2009	8 x 10 Tasveer	Anil Sharma	Hindi	
2009	Aashayein	Parthasarathi	Hindi	
2009	Life Goes On	Sanjay		

## Notes

Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
2010	Komaram Puli	Narasimha Rao	Telugu	
2011	Narthagi		Tamil	
2011	Kempe Gowda	Mahadev Gowda	Kannada	
2012	Ek Tha Tiger	Dr. Shenoy (RAW Chief)	Hindi	
2012	Mugamoodi	Lee's Grandfather	Tamil	
2012	Yaare Koogadali	Doctor	Kannada	
2013	Sweety Nanna Jodi	Priya's Father	Kannada	
2014	Samrat & Co.	Mahendra Pratap Singh	Hindi	
2014	Savaari 2	Vishwanath	Kannada	
2015	Rudra Tandava	Shivaraj's Father	Kannada	

Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
2015	Rana Vikrama	K. V. Anand Rao	Kannada	
2015	Chandrika		Kannada	
2016	24	Sathya's Grandfather	Tamil	
2016	Shivaay	Anushka's father	Hindi	
2016	Chalk n Duster	Manohar Sawant	Hindi	
2017	Tiger Zinda Hai	Dr. Shenoy	Hindi	
2018	Neenillada Male		Kannada	
2019	Pora		Kannada	Release on - 28 December 2019
2019	Sketch For Love		Telugu	Release on - 9 December

## Notes

Year	Title	Role	Language	Notes
				2019
2019	Vidura		Kannada	Release on - December 2019

### TV Series

- Malgudi Days as Swami's Father
- Indradhanush as Appu and Bala's Father
- Khandaan
- Apna Apna Aasman

### Movies Directed

- Vamsha Vriksha
- D.R. Bendre
- Tabaliyu Neenade Magane in
- Godhuli
- Ondanondu Kaladalli
- Kanooru Heggadithi
- Kaadu
- Durga in Mahendar
- Utsav
- Woh Ghar , based on Kirtinath Kurtakoti's Kannada play Aa Mani
- The Lamp in the Niche
- Cheluvi )
- Chidambara Rahasya

### Production

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- Kusuma Bale

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- Cheluvi Translation Utpal Datta

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Aadaadtha Aayushya. Manohara Grantha Mala, 2011

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## 9.3 THE FIRE AND THE RAIN

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Girish Karnad's English version of his fifth Kannada play, Agni Mattu Male was published when the prestigious Tyron Guthrie Theatre commissioned him to write a play for them. He gave a final shape to the myth of Yavakri that he had read during his college days. The myth stayed and it was taking the shape of a play in his mind for nearly thirty seven years. He presented the myth in English under the title The Fire and the Rain in a workshop at Minneapolis, U. S. A. in October 1994.

Karnad read the myth of Yavakri and Parvasu in the Mahabharata written by C. Rajagopalchari. The myth occurs in chapters 135-138 of the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata. The myth is related by the sage Lomasha to the Pandavas when they wandered during their exile. Lomasha told them that the whole story took place on the banks of the river Madhuvila in which Indra had bathed to clean himself of the sin of killing Vritra, a demon. The myth inspired Karnad to intertwine the Indra-Vrita episode to the Parvasu-Arvasu story.

Karnad, in the Notes to the play, explains the inadequacy of the translated version. About the title of the play he says that 'Agni' is a Sanskrit word for fire; which symbolizes sacredness, ceremonial ritual status. 'Agni' also stands for the sacrificial fire and acts as a witness at wedding ceremonies. It is also the name of a god known by that name. Kannada word 'benki' for fire does not carry the same connotation. 'Benki' signifies flame of a gas burner, or when a matchstick is lit, or 238 when a house catches fire. Thus, to Karnad, the English word 'fire' is inadequate to convey what the Sanskrit word 'Agni' stands for. 'Male,' a Kannada word which simply means rain and purity. It doesn't convey the idea of romance, mystery and grandeur that is conveyed through a Sanskrit word 'Parvarush or Varsha' for rain.

Karnad doesn't follow the myth as it is in the Mahabharata. He has shown Bharadwaja and Raibhya as brothers. They are friends in the Mahabharata. Shanta Gokhale, a journalist, in her article Playing With Multiple Meanings has a special interpretation on this modification of the myth :



He makes Bhardwaja and Raibhya brothers instead of friends to continue the same theme of treachery between brothers.

Nittilai is Karnad's own creation. In the Mahabharata, Yavakrida molested Vishakha. He was attracted by her beautiful figure. Karnad has moulded the episode and shown Yavakri and Vishakha as old lovers meeting after a gap of ten years. In the Mahabharata, when Raibhya knew Yavakri's molestation of Vishakha, he created a beautiful woman through an oblation, who looked exactly like Vishakha. That magical Vishakha poured Yavakri's consecrated water and made him helpless and unguarded. In the present play it is Vishakha herself who pours the sanctified water and causes Yavakri's destruction. Vishakha's father-in-law, Raibhya, had no incestuous relation with her. When she was molested by Yavakrida forcibly, Raibhya felt sorry for her pitiable condition. He showed sympathy towards her. Karnad shows the incestuous relation that exists between Raibhya and Vishakha. Karnad's Raibhya is a very cruel and ruthless sage in the play.

Parvasu in the Mahabharata, mistook his father for an animal in the dark night and killed him unintentionally. But in the present play Parvasu at the instigation of his wife, Vishakha, intentionally kills his father. He resorts to a lie. In the Mahabharata, Bharadwaja himself cremated Yavakri and feeling the futility of life, died by throwing himself on the funeral pyre. In Karnad's, play Arvasu cremates Yavakri. Karnad has introduced the Rigvedic myth of Indra's killing of Vishwarupa and Vritra. Vishwarupa is the son of Twashta and an asura woman. When Indra killed Vishwarupa, Twashta created Vritra from an oblation, in the great sacrificial fire, to kill Indra. Indra killed Vritra in a deceitful and ignoble manner. They were not brothers. In the Mahabharata Vritra was an arch enemy of Indra. He secured victory over Vritra by such a deceitful manner that he hid himself for his shameful act. Nahusha, then, became the king of the gods in his absence. Shanta Gokhale also supports that in Karnad's play they are presented as brothers to highlight the treachery involved in fratricide. With this special comment on the central strand of the play it becomes interesting to evaluate the play in the light of the tendency of betraying in human beings under the following heads :

## Notes

- Betrayal in Filial Relationship
- The Duped

### **Betrayal in Filial Relationship:**

Yavakri burns with the humiliation of his father. His father, Bhardawaja is a learned sage and as respectable as Raibhya. A minute inspection of the myth will show that the Raibhyas are not at all responsible for the new appointment of the Chief Priest at the sacrificial rite. The King appoints Parvasu instead of Raibhya. Yavakri wept in the midst of his austerity when he heard the appointment.

Yavakri is a sincere lover. He loves Vishakha wholeheartedly. He is faithful and loyal to himself. He keeps his oath strictly but unfortunately Vishakha cannot keep her promise and marries Parvasu. Yavakri is thus betrayed by her. He is shocked and embittered at the news of her marriage. He knows that it's not his fault.

He does a rigorous penance for ten years. He compels Indra to bless him with universal knowledge. Lord Indra appears before him when Yavakri is about to sacrifice his heart in the fire. Yavakri does not believe that knowledge comes with experience, time and space. He doesn't follow the way of diligently obtaining knowledge from a guru. He wants the ascetic power directly from the gods. Moreover, knowledge involves all kinds of restraint, control of passion, serenity and objectivity. He really aspires for omnipotent power and wants to use it for vicious and destructive purposes. He, therefore, successfully acquires it through austerity. He suffers a hellish torture because the ants, beetles, leeches, scorpions, vipers, chameleons and mosquitoes trouble him.

He is renewed with the power. He wants to destroy Raibhya's family. Accordingly, he calls upon Arvasu exactly at the same time when he molests Vishakha. Yavakri uses sweet words to lead Vishakha astray. He reminds her of their old love affair. He persuades her by telling her that he is still possessed with the smell of her breast, he had experienced ten years ago. He emotionally blackmails her. In addition to this, he judges Vishakha's pent-up desires. He takes full advantage of her destitute

condition. He weaves a plot and catches his prey and succeeds in making Vishakha to submit her.

She then willingly yields. Yavakri doesn't want to enjoy just sexual pleasure with Vishakha. He wants to challenge the Chief Priest, Parvasu. He makes Vishakha a tool to avenge her husband, Parvasu. His illicit action is, really, directed towards Peirvasu's priesthood. He desires to create obstacles in the fire sacrificial rite. He wants to take revenge on the Raibhays for humiliating his father. Internally he feels hatred for Vishakha as she has betrayed his sincere love. All these causes lead Yavakri to pollute Parvasu's wife openly. He does not have copulation with Vishakha secretly. He makes Arvasu an eyewitness to the happening. Yavakri tells Vishakha :

Do you think all this happened accidentally? ...How do you think Arvasu happened to arrive at the river-bank at the right moment ? Who called your father-in-law back?

It shows that he becomes mad with revenge. He wants nothing but destruction of his uncle's family. He even relates to Vishakha that it was fortunate that she had submitted herself to him, otherwise he would have had her by force. Nittilai calls him a 'treacherous viper'.

His treacherous and adulterous acts cost him his life. He doesn't run away but accepts the challenge raised by Raibhya. He has the consecrated water with him. He can overcome any danger with the water. He is true and faithful to his vicious ways. Therefore, he does not bother about any consequences. He has his revenge on the Raibhyas. Everything has worked out according to his plan. He is stubborn and firm. But when Vishakha pours out the consecrated water, he is shaken. He desperately runs about to protect his life. After all everybody loves his life. Under such critical situation, he digs for water but in vain. All that he requires now is a drop of water. He can't enter in his father's hermitage and the Brahma Rakshasha kills Yavakri with his trident. In spite of his father's advice Yavakri transgresses the limits of good conduct. Bharadwaja in the Mahabharata warned Yavakri :

## Notes

Be not ruined by vanity. Cultivate self-restraint. Do not transgress the limits of good conduct and do not be disrespectful to the great Raibhya.

Yavakri is ruined by his conceited behaviour. Bharadwaja curses Raibhya that he would meet his death at the hands of his eldest son.

Another instance of betrayal in filial relationship is found at a different level in the case of Vishakha. Vishakha reminds us of Karnad's Padmini in Hayavadana and of Rani in Naga-Mandala. She is a pathetic figure. She loves Yavakri, but her love cannot be fulfilled as he goes to the jungle for ten years. Meanwhile, she marries Parvasu who cannot provide her marital happiness for seven years. A year after her marriage he has been appointed as the Chief Priest of the sacrificial rite. She is neglected by both men : her lover and her husband.

Her love affair with Yavakri is disclosed to us when he returns from the long rigorous penance. In spite of Yavakri's persuasion she tries her best to avoid meeting him. But she becomes a prey to his plot. As soon as she realizes Yavakri's desire, she replies :

I'll give you the knowledge Indra couldn't give you. My body—

Her utterance proves that a woman possesses more power even than a god. It can be interpreted in various ways to prove a woman's strength. She is the fountain of the ultimate pleasure. She provides a celestial happiness to man and much more.

Vishakha behaves like an adulteress. Her husband left her seven years ago. A young married woman is left alone. She has become dry like tinder. When her earlier lover meets her, her suppressed emotions and passions burst out. She becomes very happy to see Yavakri and she offers her breasts to him. She fails to understand his evil intention. She enjoys intercourse with him. She does an obscene act behind the back of her husband. She, thus betrays her husband, who is busy with the noble and pious fire sacrificial rite for the village.

But when she realises that she is betrayed emotionally and physically, she turns the table on Yavakri in a more treacherous way. Till then she

naively tries her level best to protect his life from the Brahma Rakshasa. Vishakha's father-in-law decides to teach Yavakri a decisive lesson. He invokes the 'Kriya' and sends the Brahma Rakshasa to kill Yavakri who has molested Vishakha. Vishakha is presented as a sincere beloved who tries her best to persuade Yavakri to run away and save his life. She advises him to go to his father's hermitage where the spirit can do no harm to him. She considers herself responsible for Yavakri's pitiable condition. But when she smells his vicious purpose behind molesting her, she becomes his destroyer. A protector turns into a destroyer. No one could be saved by such an injured woman. Vishaka asks :

Why life is so contrary, Yavakri ?

She picks up the kamandalu up and pours out the consecrated water. The only resort to protect Yavakri's life has gone. Yavakri curses Vishakha and cries out :

The water—the sanctified water! My life ! What are you doing?...Only a drop... You devil. I trusted you...

She makes him helpless and hopeless. A sincere beloved turns into a sincere killer. If Yavakri had that sanctified water, no Brahma Rakshasa or any spirit could have harmed him. Vishakha makes Yavakri's death easy. He runs hither and thither for a drop of water but in vain and is killed by the spirit. It shows that a betrayer has to pay the penalty for his vicious action.

Like Rani in Naga-Mandala, Vishakha suffers from loneliness. It is said 'an idle mind is a devil's house'. How long a young woman of twenty-six can suppress her passion. Her brother-in-law is always out of the hermitage. Vishakha and her

old father-in-law stay alone in the hermitage. The father-in-law Raibhya is a very intelligent sage. But he is a human being after all. Vishakha relates her incestuous relation thus :

On the other, there's lust...An old man's curdled lust. And there's no one else here to take his rage out on but me...At least Yavakri was warm,

## Notes

gentle. For a few minutes, he made me forget the winzed body, the scratchy claws, and the blood, cold as ice.

She boldly relates all this to her husband Paravasu, who sneaks secretly to meet his wife in the dark night. Vishakha's utterance clearly shows that Raibhya uses her to satisfy his lust. Vishakha reluctantly yields to the cold body. Truly speaking, she and her father-in-law are related to each other by a very pious tie. If we omit the legal terms 'in-law' from their relation we have only the relation between a daughter and a father. The daughter-in-law and the father-in-law live together in a secluded hermitage. Moreover, one can control one's passion for a day or a fortnight or even for a month, but seven years in the life of a young married lady is not a short period to control and tolerate the hunger. They live like stags in the forest. They cannot control the natural attraction. Thus they both betray their pious relationship. At the same time Raibhay betrays his son and Vishakha her husband. Vishakha, thus, like Rani, gets her suppressed desire quenched by another man.

But she is not very innocent like Rani. She hates the old man and when the opportunity arises she takes revenge.

When Paravasu comes to meet her, she fearlessly relates everything to her husband. She calls her father-in-law 'the crab'. She literally instigates him to kill her father-in-law. A son

is motivated to kill his father. Accordingly, Parvasu shoots an arrow in the direction of Raibhya. The Chief Priest Parvasu thus kills his father. Vishakha is a revengeful lady. Her victorious utterance proves it when she tells her husband :  
Now you'll never know if I told you a lie.

A big question arises before us : what can be the truth? A woman can be such a revengeful lady, Vishakha is a bold woman. She tells boldly her husband and her father-in-law about her immoral relationship with Yavakri. She is ever ready to face the drastic consequences of her action. She has her revenge on her exploiters : Raibhya and Yavakri. Under such a critical situation, she is righteous. She earnestly suggests Arvasu, her brother-in-law not to atone for her husband's crime of parricide. She betrays and is betrayed. After her revenge is completed she disappears from the scene. Even at the end of the play when every dead soul comes alive, there is no trace of Vishakha.

Parvasu plays a double standard role in the play.

Apparently, he seems to be a respectable personality. He has been assigned the great responsibility of the Chief Priest of the sacred sacrificial fire rite. A seven-year long sacrificial rite is being arranged to propitiate Lord Indra, the god of rain. His father is embittered as he desires to be the priest. The King

## Notes

considers the young a suitable person to look after the sacred fire. Raibhya's claim is squashed on the doubt that he may not survive till the completion of the sacred fire rite. But it all depends on destiny and Raibhya is alive still. He naturally develops malice towards his son Parvasu.

The fire sacrifice is about to be completed. Parvasu, the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice sneaks out at night to meet his wife, Vishakha. It is an act of impudence on his part. The priest is not supposed to leave the sacrificial place till the completion of the rite. Parvasu is not loyal to himself. He betrays the sacredness of the fire. He transgresses the rules. Like a thief, he arrives in a black rug to his hermitage in the dark. His father scolds and blames him for his secret act. Raibhya might have felt that Parvasu might do some untoward act toward him, therefore, he sarcastically comments :

It's not the wild beasts one has to watch out  
for—it's human beings—

The utterance comes out to be true in his own case. Though Parvasu comes home for the first time in seven years, still it is against the rule. He wants to ask Vishakha about the Yavakri episode. Parvasu is indignant that his father has created Brahma Rakshasa to disturb the sacrificial rite. Moreover, when his wife tells him about Raibhya's incestuous relation with her,



Parvasu at once decides to take revenge on his father. In the night Parvasu hears Raibhya's cough. With the instigation of his wife Parvasu intentionally shoots an arrow to hit his father. Parvasu asserts his act of parricide :

He deserved to die.

Thus BhEiradwaja's curse that Raibhya would be killed at the hands of his eldest son turns out to be true. With his stained hands, Parvasu wants to resume his stately duties. It is against the rule to attend such a sacred rite with the mind of an offender. He is scared that nobody should see him out of the precinct.

Parvasu, the Chief Priest, lies to Aravasu :

In the dark, I—/ mistook him for a wild animal—{ P. 34 )

He takes full advantage of Aravasu's innocent nature . He easily shifts his responsibility of the offence of parricide on Aravasu's shoulders. On his way back to the precinct the Brahma Rakshasa meets him. The Brahma Rakshasa aptly calls Parvasu his brother, for Raibhya has created him. The Brahma Rakshasa knows that the Chief Priest is an offender of parricide. The Brahma Rakshasa kills Yavakri and Parvasu kills his father Raibhya. The Brahma Rakshasa is the second self of Parvasu. Therefore, just as the Brahma Rakshasa is not allowed to enter the sacrificial place, Parvasu also should not

## Notes

be allowed to resume his stately duties. Arvasu rightly estimates his brother :

But if such an evil man continues as the Chief Priest of the sacrifice, it'll rain blood at the end—

A human being is a liar, hypocrite, cheat and betrayer. He uses masks in order to pretend that he is a gentleman. He is able to hide his evil, vicious intentions. Nobody can recognize and judge the human mind. Parvasu is such a faithless priest who denies even to recognize his younger brother Arvasu in the precinct. On the contrary, in front of all the people he blames and accuses Arvasu of patricide. He orders his attendants to throw Arvasu out. He calls his innocent brother an evil spirit. Actually Parvasu should be grateful to Arvasu. But he shows meanness of human nature . How detestable a brother can be !

Lomasha, a sage in the Mahabharata, rightly differentiates learning and virtuosity :

But learning is one thing and virtue is quite another. It is true that one should know the difference between good and evil, if one is to seek good and shun evil—Then indeed knowledge becomes virtue. The knowledge, that is merely so much undigested information crammed into the mind, cannot

instill virtue. It is just an outward show like

our clothes and is no real part of us.

Parvasu is highly learned priest but is not virtuous person. He exploits Arvasu and humiliates him. He shows his double standard and ungrateful nature. He is just a self-centred creature and nothing more. For the sake of worldly publicity he disrespects his kith and kin. He kills his father deliberately. He is ungrateful towards his brother. Truly speaking, he is faithless to his own self.

His faithlessness is made open through a performance of a play 'The Triumph of Lord Indra'. In the play Lord Indra betrays his stepbrother Vishwarupa and kills him treacherously. Arvasu plays the role of Vritra, a demon brother of Lord Indra and Vishwarupa. Lord Indra stands for Parvasu.

When Vishwarupa is attacked he cries :

You Brother ? Why ? I trusted you—

Brother, why this treachery ?

It resonates Arvasu's crying when he is thrown out of the precincts. The play affects Parvasu and he walks into the blazing enclosure. His tortured mind is unable to see the projection of his own treacherous nature. It becomes unbearable for him to watch the cruel and treacherous treatment he had given to his own father and brother.

The Duped:

## Notes

Arvasu is a virtuous young man of eighteen years. He possesses godly qualities of tolerance and forgiveness. He is docile having unlimited power of compassion for others. He is a true Brahmin. He has sympathy for all the people irrespective of their caste and creed. He pays respect to Andhaka, a blind shudra, who guards Bharadwaja's hermit. It is Andhaka who suggests Arvasu :

You're old enough to know that the world  
can be cruel and ruthless.

The words come out true in Arvasu's life. In spite of all his sincerity he is betrayed, duped by his own people in whom he puts trust and confidence. First of all, his elder brother Parvasu uses Arvasu's naive nature for his selfish end. Arvasu considers him as his, ' mother, father, brother, nurse, teacher everything rolled into one.' He has a deep regard for his elder brother. Therefore, he alone gives sacred cremation to his father, whom Parvasu deliberately kills. Arvasu atones for his brother's evil act of parricide. When Parvasu calls him a demon and throws out of the sanctified fire precincts, Arvasu doesn't disclose his brother's crime. He just pathetically cries :  
I worshipped my brother. And he betrayed  
me.

Earlier he cremated his cousin, Yavakri, who had molested Arvasu's sister-in-law, Vishakha. He, therefore, reaches late to his engagement with his beloved, Nittilai, a hunter girl. He loves Nittilai sincerely. He is ready to leave his relatives, caste and everything for Nittilai. No one understands their sacred love.

Nittilai also loves him immensely. But she is forcibly engaged to a tribal boy by her parents. After her engagement she gives a terrible blow to Arvasu. Now she wants to be with him not as his beloved or wife but as a sister. She urges him to elope but Arvasu is such a noble and large-hearted young man that he does not object to Nittilai's proposal. It seems that both of them transcend the physical union. They just want to be in the company of each other.

Arvasu realizes that everybody is trying to dodge him at every corner. He realizes the importance of the proverb 'tit for tat.' He decides to avenge his evil brother. He realizes that his brother is not a proper person as the Chief Priest.

Nittilai also states that there is a chain of betrayal, conspiracy, revenge and killing. She tells Arvasu :

Look at your family. Yavakri avenges his father's shame by attacking your sister-in-law. Your father avenges her by killing

Yavakri. Your brother kills your father. And now in your turn want vengeance—where will it all end ?

Arvasu plays the role of Vritra, a demon brother of Indra. Accordingly, he wears the mask of a demon. Karnad has used a Shakespearean device : 'a play within the play'. D. Maya in her article 'Karnad's The Fire and The Rain': A

## Notes

Return to Indigenous Tradition, has a very special observation to make about the technique :

The play is a complex framework with a central myth assuming the form of a dramatic performance within the large frame of the story of Arvasu's betrayal of his brother Paravasu, the Chief Priest performing a Yajna to bring rains to the drought stricken land. Karnad uses the technique of iteration reinforcing three parallel stories each being an echo of series of betrayal from time immemorial.

The Epilogue to the play 'The Triumph of Lord Indra' is arranged to entertain the King and the priests. Indra's father, Irvord Brahma, fell in love with a woman and had a son, Vishwarupa. Indra is afraid of Vishwarupa's popularity. He becomes jealous of his step-brother and wants to get rid of him. Brahma had another son Vritra from a woman of the nether world. Brahma told Vritra to protect Vishwarupa even at the cost of his life because Brahma knew that Indra would harm Vishwarupa. According to his plot, Indra invites Vishwarupa to the fire sacrifice arranged in memory of his father. He refuses Vritra to enter the precinct as he is born to a demon. Vritra warns his brother :

This Indra is treacherous...They say gods

should never be trusted,

Vritra's warning proves to be true. When Vishwarupa is pouring oblations in the fire, Indra smiles maliciously and stabs his step brother in the back with his weapon, thunderbolt. Vishwarupa gives a loud pathetic cry. Vritra realizing the treachery enters the precinct and chases Indra. He creates havoc in the temple and cries :

Another treachery ! Another filthy death !

How long will this go on ?...! must put an end to this conspiracy—

Vritra thus attacks Indra and makes him run. He becomes uncontrollable. The play severely affects Parvasu who calmly walks into the sacrificial fire. Thus Arvasu in Vritra's role teaches a decisive lesson to the exploiter and betrayer. Initially, Arvasu has no potentials to avenge but he comes under the influence of the mask and punishes Indra in the stage show.

About the use of mask in the play Farley P. Richmond says:

As in Ras Lila and Ram Lila the putting on of the head dress or mask is a ceremonial and sacred act, which changes the performer from an ordinary person into a living incarnation of the deity.

## Notes

Arvasu under the spell of the mask s warns Indra that he can't escape from the consequences of his treacherous and ignoble deeds. He becomes so violent that no one controls him. It shows that there is a limit to tolerating injustice and a duped man can be dangerous. Nittilai calms Arvasu.

Nittilai's brother and husband come on the scene and beat Arvasu. Nittilai is killed by her husband. The world appears to be a big dark valley for Arvasu. He realizes that his sincerity is of no use in this world of wolves. He finds himself

alien in the world without Nittiali. He poignantly utters :

... I am an outsider...Everywhere.

His virtues have no value in the world. He finds himself unfit to live in. He helplessly asks the dead Nittilai, who had asked her to meddle with this world. Nobody has time to wait and wail for her death. Real Lxjrd Indra, pleased with Arvasu's role of Vritra and grants everything to his heart's satisfaction. The village gets rain and the people become happy and dance with ecstasy. While commenting on Karnad's skill of using the Rigvedic tale on the parallel line of the Paravasu-Arvasu story,

D. Maya rightly states :

Karnad casts the betrayed brother Arvasu in the role of Vritra, the betrayed brother of Indira in the play within the play—The two myths get intertwined when Arvasu donning



the mask of Vritra for the play, is carried away by his own emotions and pursues Indra setting fire to the sacrificial enclosure.

Thus the main plot and the subplot carry only one motif of betrayal in the filial relationship. The betrayal appears before us in the different shapes viz religious, spiritual, social, inter-personal, emotional and physical. It presents a complexity of human motives. Thus it is evident that the play's thematic concerns have a universal significance.

The playwright has structured the play into three acts with a Prologue and an Epilogue. The epilogue contains a Shakespearean device : a play within the play to heighten the dramatic effect of the central theme of betrayal. Shanta Gokhale asserts that "Act Two is the betrayal of Arvasu by Paravasu. "She has brilliantly explained the dramatic structure of the play.

About the central theme of the play, the Publisher, O. U. P.

says :

The narrative is taut and the play fraught with unremitting tension, as betrayal, murder and seduction enmesh the characters who live out their destinies in a tumult of elemental passions. With its philosophical underpinnings, the play illuminates universal themes of love, jealousy and loneliness as it

## Notes

sweeps towards an unexpected denouement.

### Check your Progress-1

1. When did Girish Karnad receive Jnanpith Award?

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2. From where did Girish Karnad receive his Bachelor's degree?"?

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3. Where was Girish Karnad born?

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4. When was Girish Karnad born?

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## 9.4 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we learned about Girish Karnad's life and also about his poem "The Fire and The Rain".

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## 9.5 KEYWORDS

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- "bomb happy" — crazy
- "do us" — kill us
- "give him a fourpenny one" — hit him in the jaw

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## 9.6 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

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- Write a note on Girish Karnad's life.

- Write a brief note on “The Fire and The Rain” by Girish Karnad.

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## 9.7 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

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- "Girish Karnad passes away, end of an era in Indian theatre and cinema". The News Minute. 10 June 2019. Archived from the original on 10 June 2019. Retrieved 10 June 2019.
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- AWARDS: The multi-faceted playwright Frontline, Vol. 16, No. 3, 30 Jan.–12 Feb 1999.
- "How a Brahmin woman broke into the twentieth century". Archived from the original on 8 August 2018. Retrieved 8 August 2018.
- Kumar, p.115

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## 9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRES

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- Girish Karnad received Jnanpith Award in 1998.
- Girish Karnad earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics and statistics from Karnatak Arts College, Dharwad .
- Girish Karnad was born in Matheran.
- Girish Karnad was born in 1938.

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# UNIT-10 KARNAD-THE FIRE AND THE RAIN -2

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## STRUCTURE

10.0 Objectives

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Myths and Mythopoeia

10.3 Analysis of The Fire and The Rain

10.4 Let us sum up

10.5 Keywords

10.6 Questions for Review

10.7 Suggested Reading and References

10.8 Answers to Check your Progress

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## 10.0 OBJECTIVES

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Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about myths and mythopoeia of “The Fire and The Rain” by Girish Karnad,
- and you would also go through the analysis of ““The Fire and The Rain” by Girish Karnad.

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## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

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The Fire and the Rain is a play by the reputed Indian playwright Girish Karnad. The play is based on the myths of Raivya, Paravasu, Arvasu as well as Yavakri which is described in the Vanaparva of the Mahabharata and narrated by the sage Lomash. However, Karnad has disrupted the original myth and further, created a thoroughly stage-worthy version. Phoenix, the experimental theatre group, has adapted the play in Bengali, and related it to the spiritual crises of The Wasteland .

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## 10.2 MYTHS AND MYTHOPOEIA

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The multi-talented contemporary Indian playwright Girish Raghunath Karnad is famous for making extensive use of myth, history, and folk-tales in his plays. The play *The Fire and the Rain* is also based on a myth taken from the Mahabharata, that is, the myth of Yavakri. The recurrent use of myth in several of his plays suggests the enormous amount of significance Karnad attaches to the stories of the past. However what is striking in this play is Karnad's mythopoeic method through which he appropriates and remakes the existing myths in order to fulfil his dramatic purposes and to make the play at once relevant to our modern contemporary society. Here Karnad does not use the myths in their primitive form rather he makes significant changes here and there. He moulds and remoulds, trims and polishes them and ultimately presents a moving tale, deeply embedded in our present modern times. Hence this paper attempts to bring to the fore Karnad's superb mythopoeic method in his handling of the myths in this play.

The word "myth" comes from the Greek „mythos“, meaning „anything uttered by the word of the mouth.“ J. A. Cuddon defines „myth“ in these words: “In general a myth is a story which is not „true“ and which involves supernatural beings—or at any rate suprahuman beings. Myth is always concerned with creation. Myth explains how something came to exist . . .” . In a myth, the outer shell of the narrative is not important rather the kernel of the story is important. It is the kernel of the story which explains certain archetypal human behaviors, feelings and emotions and hence myths retain their universality and timelessness. About myth, K. Raghavendra Rao in his article “Myth as Modes of Human Experience: Bhyrappa's Kannada Novel, ‘Parva’” writes:

The function of the myth is to serve as an imaginative and symbolic structure yielding normative sustenance to a society. As it were, it offers the moral paradigms which the individuals and groups within the community try to decode as answers to their own pressing, existential moral needs. They acquire the status of being exemplary, emulative and heuristic. People tend to understand their situations in terms of the myths

## Notes

and use them to validate or condemn their as well as people's actions. Thus they are heavily charged with didactic implications.

A myth connects past and present. Through the use of myths, a writer shows the continuity

and universality of human feelings and emotions, their deeds and misdeeds. The use of myths

in literature affirms the fact that the stories of the past are not passé, and that "past" itself is not something ineffectual and profitless.

The use of myth in his plays is a distinctive feature of Girish Karnad , one of the foremost contemporary dramatists of India. In Indian dramas in English, his is a name to be reckoned with. Karnad played an important role in changing the post-Independence theatre scenario. To Karnad, Indian mythology, history and folklore have always provided raw material for his plays. He started using myth with his first play *Yayati* , continued in *Hittina Hunja*

and *The Fire and the Rain* . He uses myths to show how the stories of the ancient past

are still relevant in our present modern context. However in *The Fire and the Rain*, Karnad does not use merely a "myth" rather he uses "myths", namely, the myth of Yavakri, the myth of Indra-Vritra, and the myth of Yajna. The play is primarily based on the myth of Yavakri which occurs in Chapters 135-38 of the Vana Parva of the Mahabharata. It is narrated by the ascetic Lomasha to the Pandavas as they wander across the land during their exile. According to this myth, Raibhya and Bharadwaja, two learned sages, were good friends. Raibhya lived with his two sons Paravasu and Aravasu who learnt Vedas and became famous scholars while Bharadwaja's son Yavakri held a grudge against the world, and especially Raibhya's family, for he felt his father did not receive the recognition which he deserved because Raibhya grabbed all the attention. He, therefore, went to the forest and started practising hard penance in order to obtain the knowledge of the Vedas directly from the gods. Ultimately after ten years of austerities, Lord Indra granted him the "Universal Knowledge" and this made him arrogant. He molested

Raibhya's daughter-in-law, believing that neither Raibhya nor Parvasu would be able to challenge him. But Raibhya invoked the "kriya" spirit and created a lookalike of his daughter-in-law and a rakshasa. While the former stole Yavakri's kamandalu which contained the sanctified water which would save him from any attack, the latter chased him and when Yavakri tried to enter his father's hermitage, he was held by the blind Sudra gate-keeper of the hermitage. At that moment the rakshasa killed him with a trident. When Bharadwaja learnt how his son died, he cursed that Raibhya would die at the hands of his own son. But soon realizing the extremity of what he had said about his friend, Bharadwaja felt remorse and immolated himself. On the other hand, after some time, his curse turned out to be true. Raibhya's sons were conducting a fire sacrifice for the king. One night when Parvasu was visiting home, in the dark he mistook the deerskin which his father was wearing to be a wild animal and thus killed him. Coming back to the sacrifice, Parvasu asked Aravasu to go back to the hermitage and perform the penitential rites for their father since he did not have a natural death. Aravasu obeyed but when he returned to the sacrificial enclosure, Parvasu put the blame of his own sin, that is, of patricide and Brahminicide, on Aravasu and had him thrown out. Aravasu went to the jungle and in lieu of his prayers, gods granted him what he sought, that is, restored life back to Yavakri, Bharadwaja, Raibhya, and made Parvasu forget his evil deeds. Also, the gods reprimanded Yavakri and advised him to pursue knowledge in the correct manner and not to use shortcuts.

Notably, Karnad does not use this myth simply as it is rather he kneads and sifts it according to the demands of his dramatic and creative self, and to enrich the play with various pertinent issues. Karnad employs his mythopoeic method. Mythopoeia means the reworking of an existing myth or the creation of a myth, and here in Karnad's case, it is the former. The first major change he has made is to present Raibhya and Bharadwaja as two brothers and not as two friends. In this way, the estrangement between their families brings to the fore the very common issue of the estrangement between brothers and the themes of "brother hating brother" and fratricidal horrors are highlighted. Hence, in the play, we see different layers of estrangement between brothers—between

## Notes

Bharadwaja and Raibhya, between Arvasu, Parvasu and their cousin, Yavakri, and eventually between Arvasu and Parvasu. The friction found here between these brothers at different levels is at once relevant to the Indian society in any age. The same significance is carried by the myth of Indra-Vritra used in the play-within-the-play in the Epilogue of the play. Here, too, using his mythopoeic method, Karnad makes alterations and compresses two different versions of the Indra-Vritra myth—one found in the Rigveda and the other, with some variations, found in the Mahabharata--and ultimately what he presents is his own version of the Indra-Vritra myth. By using this myth, Karnad shows the reiteration of the same jealousy, betrayal, rivalry and fratricidal horrors between brothers by the superhuman creatures in the realm of the divine too. Here Indra, the King of Gods, being jealous of the popularity and gentle nature of his younger brother Vishwarupa, the King of Men, treacherously kills him just as Parvasu, being jealous of Arvasu's simplicity and innocence, has him treacherously excommunicated. A strong parallelism runs between the Arvasu-Parvasu plot and the plot of the play-within-the-play. Actually the events of the play-within-the-play throws light on the events of the main plot and reinforces the theme of "brother hating brother". Vritra's heart-wrenched outcry, "Why, Brother? Why, why, why? Brother, why? Why?" at Indra's betrayal is an echo of Arvasu's outcry earlier in Act Two at Parvasu's betrayal. Actually we can say, throughout the play, there is a strong resonance of Vritra's this dialogue as is suggested by the fast-paced chain of events of the play.

Another significant departure from the original myth is the elaborate character sketch of Parvasu's wife, that is, Vishakha. From the scanty details of Parvasu's wife in the original myth, Karnad takes his raw material and develops Vishakha's character as an important female character of the play. By making this change, he brings to the light the issue of the suffering of women in Indian society. Through Vishakha's portrayal, the playwright shows the pathetic condition, oppression, subjugation, repeated victimization, and physical, emotional and psychological exploitation of women in a male-dominated society, and how their lives are strongly fettered with patriarchal bonds. In the original myth, Vishakha is not even named and we just get to know that



Yavakri molested “Parvasu’s wife.” But here Karnad interestingly weaves different relationships around Vishakha and makes her as important as any male character of the play. She is never on the periphery of the action. Actually she is the only character who is related with both the Bharadwaja and the Raibhya family. In the play, Karnad presents her as the adolescent lover of Yavakri. They have a passionate relationship but Yavakri abandons her and goes to the jungle to fulfil his ambition of revenge and to gain “Universal Knowledge” from the gods. As a result, her father marries her off to Yavakri’s cousin Parvasu against her wishes as she says: “I didn’t want to, but that didn’t matter” . At her father’s home, she has no voice in her life’s decision. Unfortunately the patriarchal domination in her life continues even after marriage. After marriage, she leads a thoroughly sensual life with her husband because that is all her husband is capable of giving her in a loveless marriage. Parvasu uses her body and his own “like an experimenter, an explorer. As instruments in a search” . Even worse, Vishakha does not know what this search is all about since they never talk because to Parvasu, verbal and emotional communication with his wife is not important. With him she lives in a universe of endlessly repeated silences. Parvasu does not bother to answer her questions. There is no emotional, tender attachment between the husband and the wife. Their married relationship is reduced to mere mating and coupling. And, like Yavakri, Parvasu, too, abandons her in order to fulfil his own ambition. He goes away to be the Chief Priest of the fire sacrifice and in seven years never tries to see his wife. Vishakha is abandoned both at the hands of her lover and her husband, making her “parched and wordless, like a she-devil” . Nevertheless, her suffering at the hands of male does not stop here. After Parvasu goes away, she is left behind at the hermitage with her father-in-law, Raibhya and brother-in-law, Arvasu. While the latter is never at home, the former exploits her mentally and sexually. Raibhya uses her for his “old man’s curdled lust” , beats her and even abuses in harshest language. Vishakha is a victim of betrayal also at the hands of her ex-flame, Yavakri who uses her in his game of deep-seated malice. He comes back to her after ten years of penance, rekindles her emotionally and sexually, and uses her body in order to

## Notes

challenge her in-laws. Her body becomes a mere pawn in Yavakri's game, just a „thing“ to be used. While she thoroughly enjoys her time with Yavakri, she is totally shattered to find out that Yavakri did all these to avenge her in-laws. Ultimately she is so tortured and frustrated with her life that she begs Parvasu to do her “a favour” , that is, to kill her. Thus Vishakha stands for any typical Indian woman who suffers in a patriarchal world, both pre- and postmarriage. Hers is a prototypical story of prolonged suffering caused by male species. Yet Karnad presents her as a strong woman who despite being shackled from all sides ceaselessly struggles to gain her freedom, her rights as a human being and as a woman. When she meets Yavakri after ten years, she herself offers her body to him and thus asserts her right to her sexuality and her sexual choice. By taking a lover outside marriage, she challenges centuries of patriarchal norms which try to regulate woman's sexual decorum. Not only this, she even boldly declares in front of her infuriated father-in-law that Yavakri had come to see her alone, even when she expects the worst reaction from him. Eventually, taking responsibility of her own life, she leaves the hermitage and goes away to live life on her own terms as is suggested by the stage direction: “The hermitage is empty. In a corner he sees the water pot, covered with cobwebs” . Ultimately Karnad empowers her and hints at her emancipation and thus pleads for emancipation of all such subjugated women. A myth connects past and present and what Karnad here suggests is that the oppression of women has occurred in all the ages--it happened in the past and it happens in the present too. Nittilai does not appear in the original myth but his mythopoeia allows Karnad to include her in the play. This deviation from the original myth also carries weighty significance. Nittilai belongs to a tribe of hunters; she is a „low caste“ girl and thus it helps Karnad append the theme of caste system in Indian society, along with other themes of the play. Arvasu, the Brahmin boy, loves Nittilai and intends to marry her but both his and her castes have their own strict dictates regarding marrying outside their respective castes. While Arvasu will have to lose his badge of Brahminhood , Nittilai's whole tribe must be wooed by Arvasu before they consent to their marriage. Through Nittilai, Karnad presents a strong critique of

„high-caste“ Brahmins because her good nature makes their vicious nature even more glaring and exposes their false sense of pride. By putting her in stark contrast to them, he debunks the mythical grandeur generally associated with the high-caste people. While the whole world is going berserk over Yavakri’s gain of “Universal Knowledge”, she questions it because according to her Yavakri should have asked Indra for rain when everyone is suffering from drought instead of something so abstract and personal like “Universal Knowledge.” If Yavakri cannot make it rain and “save dying children” with the help of his boon, then such a boon is useless to her. She also subscribes to her father’s views that the “high-caste men are glad enough to bed [their] women but not to wed them” and thus exposes the hypocrisy and lustfulness of the Brahmins. It is Nittilai, the so-called low-caste tribal girl, who always acts and loves others selflessly compared to the so-called high-caste Brahmins who are at loggerheads with each other and are hurting and killing each other for their personal gain. In stark contrast to the malicious learned Brahmins like Parvasu, Yavakri, and Raibhya, Nittilai stands for virtue, humanity, simplicity, selflessness and gentle nature. But Karnad does not criticise the Brahmins only rather through the inclusion of Nittilai, he shows the insensitivity and brutality of the tribals as well. Arvasu loses Nittilai for ever when he reaches the tribal’s elders’ meeting only half an hour late because his late arrival humiliates their sense of honour and pride and when Arvasu raises his voice against this injustice, Nittilai’s brother is quick to be violent with him. Nittilai’s tribe also believes in honour-killing as she is murdered callously by her husband because she defies the established norms of her tribe. Hence Karnad highlights how inveterate they are as a tribe in the matters of their traditions and customs just as Brahmins are inveterate in their own way. Thus the caste problems Karnad shows here is a very pertinent and burning issue of our society. These problems at once relate with our caste-ridden Indian society and including the subplot of Arvasu-Nittilai in the myth of Yavakri only enriches the texture of the play. With regard to the characterisation of Brahma Rakshasa also, Karnad employs his mythopoeic method to make him serve some important dramatic functions, unlike the original myth where his only job was to kill

## Notes

Yavakri. Of course, Karnad takes his staple from the myth of Yavakri but then moulds it in a new way. In the myth, Brahma Rakshasa gets his birth when Raibhya invokes „kriya spirit“ and creates two demons— one, the lookalike of his daughter-in-law and the other, a rakshasa. This rakshasa becomes „Brahma Rakshasa“ in the play. He is a Brahmin soul trapped in limbo. Here, too, he kills Yavakri but towards the end of the play, he plays an instrumental role in the purification of Arvasu and the resultant rain. At a crucial juncture, Brahma Rakshasa puts Arvasu in an ethical and humanitarian dilemma and thus helps in Arvasu’s evolvment as a human being. Apart from this, through his dialogues when he reminds Arvasu of the beautiful nature of Nittilai and of the superiority of human beings compared to either spirits or gods, “I don’t forgive. I can’t. But you are a human being. You are capable of mercy. You can understand pain and suffering as the gods can’t—“ , Karnad teaches the readers simple moral lessons which is his primary concern in the play. One of the chief concerns of the myth of Yavakri was the dichotomy between knowledge and wisdom. In the myth, Yavakri, through shortcuts, attained “Universal Knowledge” but failed to evolve himself, to rise above his evil desires and thus had a tragic end. He gained knowledge but not wisdom. In the play, Karnad retains this aspect of Yavakri because this dichotomy between knowledge and wisdom is as relevant today as it was in the past. The applicability of this motif was never more apt than in our modern, materialistic, commercial, technologically advanced age where anyone can stuff their heads with knowledge through shortest means but remain devoid of wisdom. Here Karnad also uses the myth of Yajna . The myth of Yajna seamlessly fits in with the myth of Yavakri, providing an appropriate background to the action of the play where a majority of characters burn in their own fire of passion and desires. About the myth of Yajna, Karand says in the Notes appended in the play: “The duration of a fire sacrifice varied and some stretched over years. The Mahabharata opens with a sacrifice that was to go on for twelve years” . In the original myth, we only hear that Parvasu and Arvasu were conducting fire sacrifice when the former went his home and mistakenly killed his father. The reason for this sacrifice is not mentioned but in the play Karnad states the reason in the very first lines

of the play. He presents the land as ravaged by drought and hence a seven-year long fire sacrifice is being held at the king's palace, presided by Parvasu as the Chief Priest. As with other changes which have made the play more enriched and engrossing, this change, too, adds to the action of the play in various important ways, like, Parvasu's becoming the Chief Priest creates frictions in his own family—Vishakha is abandoned, Raibhya is humiliated and jealous, and Yavakri gets one more reason to hate him. Apart from these, it also gives Karnada chance to include Indra-Vritra myth. As per the custom of the Yajna, the Actor-Manager's troupe comes to stage its play during one of the breaks of the fire sacrifice, and thus leading to Parvasu's remorse. Then by making the land struck by drought, Yavakri is made to meet his end when he does not get any drop of water after Vishakha throws away his sanctified water. Above all, the fire sacrifice is the central action of the play. The play starts and ends at the sacrificial enclosure. But Karnad ends the play differently than the original myth. The play ends with the arrival of the much-awaited rain but Karnad suggests that it does not arrive because of the seven-year long ritualistic sacrifice rather because of Arvasu's altruism, that is, asking Indra for the release of the Brahma Rakshasa instead of the resurrection of his dead love, Nittilai. Thus, by opting for this end, Karnad upholds humanity and selfless love and care for others. Amzed Hossein comments: “. . . Girish Karnad has ended his play in a completely different way from how the Mahabharata myth of Yavakri ended. The transformation of the conclusion of the myth in his play is commensurate with his own weltanschauung” . Hence, we can say that using his mythopoeic method, Karnad, in *The Fire and the Rain*, deals with different myths sensitively and sensibly, without tampering their original essence. Though he makes several alterations, none of the alterations and additions can be called the arbitrary whim of the playwright rather they are more like the fittings in the holes and gaps of the mythical tales which make the play immediately congruent and apposite to our contemporary society and its various issues. About Karnad, AparnaDharwadker writes: “The majority of his plays employ the narratives of myth, history, and folklore to evoke an ancient or

premodern world that resonates in contemporary contexts because of his uncanny ability to remake past in the image of present” .

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### 10.3 ANALYSIS OF THE FIRE AND THE RAIN

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The Natyashastra<sup>1</sup> specifies that drama has a role of integration of the three worlds - the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual. Abhinavagupta elaborates it and states that drama should direct one’s mind toward the realization of the Purushartha<sup>2</sup>- dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Similarly, Girish Karnad manifests a unifying purpose - integrating time and space, that contributes to the author’s aim – interpreting the past in order to reform the present which is suffering from social evils like casteism, ages-old and unequal attitude to women, vain knowledge of priestly class with their possessiveness, jealousy, malice, mistrust, competition, treachery, revenge, power-conflict, adultery and their meaningless sacrifice without social concern.

Girish Karnad is a writer who has been deeply influenced by the modern concepts of the West but he also possesses a strong sensibility of being an Indian, which implies consciousness of a rich heritage of cultural tradition, ancient history, the Vedas, etc. While writing *The Fire And The Rain* he was constantly reminded of parallels with that of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*;

he writes,

”There are of course only external similarities but the shape of a myth cannot be isolated from its meaning and once I saw the parallel, I was irresistibly drawn to delve deeper into the *Oresteia* and then the rest of Aeschylus. A deeper appreciation of that joyous genius has been one of the major benefits I have personally derived from writing *The Fire And The Rain*.”<sup>3</sup>

Dramatic expanse is a space created by the playwright. It runs through minds and distances are calculated in terms of time, which perhaps does not exist, because man can act or anything can happen only in space not

in time. Space is larger than what appears physically. Destiny is nothing but space only understood as sequence. The dramatist imagines one large space in which he builds an imaginary centre and ideational bodies around it. The main theme in *The Fire And The Rain* along with playwright's avowed notions and objectives serve as the overall space; intervening situations and incidents are ideational bodies. The interrelationship among these creates multiple meanings depending upon the space covered and to the extent of ideational lingering – game of power, caste-consciousness, status of women. As all activity takes place in the space, whatever is on the surface is obvious, but whatever is not, causes confusion; such space is mental or notional, which further interferes with situational contexts and produces multiple meanings. If the dramatic expanse includes uncalculated time, it can lead to construction of a space within space which is joined by a streak of playwright's objective.

However, the centre and the theme remain one and the same as it is in *The Fire and The Rain*. It is Vishakha, who occupies the largest space. She is on the mind of all important characters. She is instrumental in Yavakri's destruction, Parvasu's disturbance and willful defilement of the rules of the sacrifice, Raibhya's murder, Arvasu's delay in reaching Nittilai's village on account of performing funeral rites for Yavakri, who is destroyed by Raibhya only because of Vishakha. Revenge, jealousy, casteism, egoism, religious orthodoxy or pretensions cover the space in the form of Vishakha. Karnad here builds up a notional body based on modern viewpoint, which interferes with most aspects of the myth and also extends the theme to explore the contemporary social problems, nature of drama and the significance of fire sacrifice- all combined through a stage play- a mythic line interfered with imaginative cast of the dramatist, which is done to unify his purpose as well as integrate space and time.

Karnad has chosen his space; he is fond of using and also appropriating ancient myths as cultural messages as well as flaws of the given society. In *The Fire And The Rain* he employs mythical, historical and folk theme as a frame of this play in which he fits in the universal theme of love, jealousy and isolation and conveys a message to the contemporary

## Notes

world. He explores the universality of emotions and sentiments just to achieve his unifying purpose on the one hand and conform to the classical specification of integrating the three worlds on the other. For Karnad drama seems to be a means of self experience as well as production of meaning. He draws from the Mahabharata the myth of Yavakri as setting followed by the scheme of illustrating the Natyashastric tradition of dramatic performance as a striking parallel with Yajna symbolizing entertainment as well as theatre but he makes certain structural changes in the myth in order to achieve his purpose of making the past relevant to the present.

Obviously, Karnad is influenced by modernism and his approach comes closer to modernity than Enlightenment, which, in fact, was responsible for shaping the modernity point of view that rejected both, the ideology of realism and the lingering 'certainty' of the Enlightenment thinking as well as the idea of compassionate all-powerful Creator of the universe. He imbibes modernism as a socially progressive trend of thought that affirms the power of human beings to create, improve and reshape their environment. As modernism encouraged the re-examination of every aspect of existence with the goal of finding that which was 'holding back' progress, and replacing it with new ways of reaching the same end, Karnad concentrated on Indian cultural tradition and used myths as elements of culture for revitalizing culture by infusing into them the progressive elements on rational ground, which, finally becomes the dramatic expanse.

The growth of modernity symbolizes rise of specially capitalism, industrialization, secularization, Marxism, existentialism and new values arising from wide-ranging changes in traditional social structure of the Western society reflecting a concern that if the tradition has become outdated, it has to be refreshed or made new. As such it is a process of realizing the need for change- change in action, opinions, beliefs, conventions, modes of thinking, social behaviour, social structure and other values just to wash away the stigma and eradicate virtual backwardness and social evils. As it is a course of social change, it evolves as a way of life that elevates human dignity and achievement.



With a background of such formative elements Girish Karnad deploys the Yavakri myth with precision and expands it through time to the desired destiny, which is different from the source of origin.

The play begins with the description of the dreadful reality of the absence of rain for nearly ten years. This resulted in the loss of the fertility of the land. The people are dying of starvation and fleeing away from the famished province. The dharma-conscious King is performing the fire sacrifice in order to please the god of rain, Indra for sending rains. Here Karnad seems to question the practice- the fire sacrifice requires all kinds of material and the King instead of giving them to the starving subjects, is offering all to fire.

Karnad sharply criticizes the notions of Vedic society, particularly of the priestly and the tribal classes. Paravasu, the eldest son of Raibhya has been appointed as the Chief Priest of fire sacrifice by the King instead of his father, Raibhya, who claimed himself to be superior in intellectual and cultural calibre to his son. The father becomes jealous of his son's growing prestige, therefore, Raibhya is restless and perhaps he is looking for an opportunity to disturb and disgrace his own son, Paravasu. Jealousy between father and son for earthly power and prestige shows that there was no healthy relation between them. Jealousy and revenge overtake Paravasu and he kills him:

“He deserved to die. He killed Yavakri to disturb me in the last stages of the sacrifice. Not to punish Yavakri, but to be even with me. I had to attend to him before he went any farther.”<sup>4</sup>

Vishakha's infidelity compels Paravasu to return home secretly by defying the sanctity of ritual. Paravasu is neither ideal nor virtuous though he is a highly learned Vedic scholar and a representative of Aryan community, yet he is self-centred, hypocrite and nurtures ambition for power. Irony lies in Paravasu being regarded as one sanctified and possessing true knowledge, yet like Yavakri he is not free from vices. He treats his wife as an object of experiment and completely neglects his duty towards home and personal needs of his young wife. As a matter of fact, he is responsible for Vishakha's moral degradation. He knows his

## Notes

weakness as a man and out of frustration and perhaps enraged by his father's outburst:

“Tell the King, I shall outlive my sons....the swarm of dogs sniffing around my daughter-in-law's bottom keeps me in good shape”...you and that bitch of yours...”5,

he is led to suspecting his father having some design towards Vishakha.

Later Vishakha tells Paravasu about Raibhya:

”on the one hand, there's his sense of being humiliated by you. On the other, there's lust. It consumes him. An old man's curdled lust. There's no one else here to take his rage out on but me.....At least Yavakri was warm, gentle. For a few minutes he made me forget the wizened body, the scratchy claws and the blood, cold as ice.... Here it comes. The crab! Scuttling back to make sure I don't defile the Chief Priest as I did Yavakri. Grant me this favour, please, kill me. For all your experiments you haven't yet tried the ultimate. Human sacrifice! You could now.”

And Paravasu replies, as if he were convinced:

“You're right. I must...You are still my guru.” 6

Paravasu thinks that his father 'deserved to die' because he nurtured lust for Vishakha and who killed Yavakri to disturb him in the last stages of the sacrifice. Hence, Raibhya is killed deliberately; human sacrifice is made to be understood as a penance for defecating the sacrifice. This also reveals the level of sexual morality. Vishakha without remorse or shame accepts what she did with Yavakri. Extra-marital sex was perhaps no offence during that time.

Later, having killed his father Paravasu, as if some demon had possessed him, asks his younger brother – Arvasu – to perform the funeral rites and expiation of his father. After performing funeral rights, Arvasu goes to the site of fire-sacrifice, then Paravasu calls him a demon, accuses him of patricide. He asks the King to throw him out of the sanctified precincts. Thus Arvasu becomes a victim of his brother's heartless and sinister design.

Yavakri, the son of Sage Bharadwaja, being jealous of the reputation of Raibhya's family, undertook 'tapasya' for revenge and to destroy the happiness of Raibhya's family by attaining knowledge of the Vedas or getting Universal Knowledge from Lord Indra directly. He gets divine knowledge without studying at the feet of guru. There are also other reasons for his jealousy. First, he thinks that his father, Andhaka did not get as much respect and social recognition for Brahma Vidya<sup>7</sup>. Secondly, Raibhya's family enjoyed social prestige and priestly honours. And thirdly, his youthful love, Vishakha was married with Parvasu, who was appointed as the chief Priest of the fire sacrifice instead of his father, Andhaka. It implies that his Universal Knowledge did not absolve him of his evil nature rather he continued to live in the world passion, cruelty, hatred, jealousy and revenge. So the first thing he planned after his return from penance was to molest Vishakha, Parvasu's wife, as part of an organized scheme of revenge, intended to disrupt the fire sacrifice. He avenges his jealousy by seducing Vishakha. Seven years of separation from her husband and secluded atmosphere lures Vishakha to fall an easy prey to Yavakri's vile design. She allows all reason, moral sense to drown in her wish for fulfillment. Craving for satisfaction because of demands of body rather than love, she submits to Yavakri willingly. Indeed she is starved for a drop of love and speech. She had become a parched tree due to absence of a drop of love and communication. Silence surrounds her life

She says, "I live in the hermitage, parched and wordless, like a she-devil".<sup>8</sup>

Karnad exposes the male hypocrisy. Her destiny has an ironical setting - relationship with Parvasu is only a compromise and she tries to erase the memories of her former lover, Yavakri, but fails and it is revived as she confronts him after his return from 'tapasya'. Both Yavakri and Parvasu abandoned her in their quest for knowledge or prestige and she became the victim of lust of the two men. When Raibhya learns Vishakha's adultery, he beats and abuses her, which is against the cultural norms. From the power gained from 'tapasya' Raibhya creates a Brahma Rakshsa<sup>9</sup> and orders him to kill Yavakri. Thus Yavakri meets a miserable death despite possessing Universal Knowledge. An ironical

## Notes

space has been created. He is said to have got knowledge but it was no true knowledge for he never gained it at the feet of his Guru, who alone could purify his character from malicious elements like falsehood, pride, hatred for others, jealousy, lack of control of passions, desire for revenge. As such any amount of superficial knowledge cannot become a sustainable force for life.

On the contrary unlike Vishakha Nittilai covers a small space but she along with Arvasu represents the playwright's point of view. She thinks that sacrifice and penance are empty words; they are hollow, meaningless, marks of vanity.

She asks Adhanka,

“But, What I want to know is, why the Brahmins are so secretive about everything?..... You know, their fire sacrifices are conducted in covered enclosures. They mortify themselves in the dark of the jungle. Even their gods appear so secretly. Why? What are they afraid of? Look at my people. Everything is done in public view there. The priest announces that he'll invoke the deity at such and such a time and such a day. And then there, right in front of the whole tribe, he gets possessed. And the spirit answers your questions. You can feel it come and go. You know it's their. Not mere hearsay.”<sup>10</sup>

Nittilai compares between the practices of the priestly class and her tribal class. She further asks Adhanka, “What is the use of all these powers?”<sup>11</sup> if they cannot solve day-to-day problems. She thinks that if the acquired knowledge cannot save the dying children, then it is useless. Indeed Nittilai's reasonable doubts are the 'modern' doubts about religious, traditional rituals, customs and beliefs. Truly speaking, it is always unjust on the part of present generation to judge the past on their grounds and apply such yardsticks as could never be thought of then. Whether it is done by an author or by a critic, it only remains a narrow, sectarian approach.

The play criticizes the hypocrisy entrenched in the life-style of priestly class and underlines the plain, straight forward and simple life of tribal class. But this is a modern sensibility. Nobody could think like this in

those days. Human weakness apart the Vedic rituals and life-style have revealed tremendous knowledge. If all was hypocrisy, perhaps we would never have any reason to be proud of our culture- the Vedic culture. However, it is true that the individual attainment of knowledge acquires value when it is conjoined with human concern.

The game of Power is an ideational space revolving round the centric space involving knowledgeable persons, which is an all- time reality of human nature; the ancients were no exception but their sensibilities, set-up and life-style were very different even far from our imagination. Raibhya, Parvasu and Yavakri are such people who have high ambitions to get power, prestige and social recognition by following even unethical means as Parvasu does. He aspires to become equal with Indra and he removes all hurdles and people who come in his way, including his own father, brother or wife.

The power game is a significant ideational space that depends upon activity of jealousy, rivalry and competition and ultimately results in the death of all the three characters. The playwright highlights the state of Vedic community in general and the Brahmin of the period in particular. But as said in the preceding pages any reevaluation of the past from the yardstick of the present is totally unjustified. Of course, it can be said or portrayed that if such thing were an affair of the present, the dramatist would see it in this or that way.

Class consciousness is another ideational space- a perpetual problem of Indian society. Girish Karnad conveys his concern to the reader about the false notions of caste-system in this play. Arvasu and Nittilai are the victims of this rigid and cruel system. Both belonged to two different communities- the priestly and the tribal class. They loved each-other but social customs and conventions did not permit them to be united as husband and wife. As a Brahmin, Arvasu's love for a tribal girl, his passion for performing as an actor in a play, acting and dancing were considered irreligious activities and below the dignity of the Brahmin community. Once he decided to fulfill his desire he was declared an outcaste.

## Notes

The class consciousness was very strong in the Vedic society because the classes had been categorized on the basis of occupational /professional skills. The low-caste people were not allowed to enter the holy places like temples or sacrificial enclosures because they would not be able to maintain the sanctity of rituals or follow a practice properly for want of knowledge or understanding of the significance of any act. There were examples when anyone belonging to a lower caste had attained sufficient knowledge, he would be included in the upper class like rishi Vishwamitra.

Girish Karnad gives an account of the birth of drama which includes the category of actors. Brahma, the Lord of All Creation, created drama as the fifth Veda, and handed it to Indra, who in turn, passed it on to Bharata, a human being. The sons of Bharata were the first actors in the history of theatre. They were Brahmins, but lost their caste because of their failure to perform as per Vedic sanction. Parts of Natyaveda were taken from other Vedas, hence, it was the fifth Veda, therefore it was required that things should have gone accordingly. But it did not happen so the Brahmins were offended and they declared the actors as outcastes. The profession required such activities as were not in conformity with brahmanic traditions. Therefore, if one valued one's high birth, one should not enter this profession. Thus, Vedic society considered acting an irreligious activity and actors outcastes.

The Epilogue represents the space within space; it is related to stage-acting. That the world of gods, too, was not free from caste-consciousness is evident from the account of the birth of drama as given in the Natyashastra. Lord Indra, the king of gods arranged a Yajna in the honour of his father Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe. Indra invited Vishwarupa, the King of Men to perform the ritual. Infact, Indra wanted to kill Vishwarupa, who had become a challenge to his sovereignty by his wisdom and gentleness. He allowed Vishwarupa to enter the sacrificial enclosure but never allowed Vritra, his brother from the nether world. It was in the name of sanctity of rituals and prescription of Shastras that Indra barred Vritra's entry to a sacrificial precincts mainly because Vritra would foil Indra's plot to kill Vishwarupa. Despite Vritra's warnings, the innocent Vishwarupa accepts

Indra's invitation saying that "one must obey one's brother" and ultimately gets killed by Indra treacherously when he was offering oblations to gods. Such fratricidal violence is similar to the betrayal story of Arvasu and Parvasu. Infact, Parvasu kills his own father but imposes the act of patricide on his innocent brother, Arvasu and destroys his life. Both Vishwarupa and Arvasu are good, gentle and kind. Their goodness is feared most by those who enjoy higher social status but harbour evil designs in heart. Hence, first they are declared as belonging to lower caste and then they are destroyed. Apparently it symbolizes hatred for the lower caste but, in fact, it is a case of jealousy and rivalry. The Epilogue very significantly presents the myth of slaying of the demon Vritra by Indra. The dramatization of Arvasu's love for a tribal girl of hunting community exposes the caste system on the one hand and the fear of a brother destroying the brother on the other. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana do illustrate this mythological space very clearly. Karnad condemns and ridicules this social stigma- caste system.

Status of women in the Vedic society is yet another space in the play. According to Karnad the Vedic society granted only secondary status to women for they were considered inferior to men. This unequal treatment in patriarchal set-up expected that women should follow all moral codes of conduct without expecting any kind of freedom and any right. Vishakha and Nittilai are such examples. Though they belonged to two different social groups, castes and systems, yet both were equally ill-treated and exploited. Karnad attacks on double standards, hypocrisy, snobbery and egoism of the male dominated society where exploitation of women was the central norm of society.

Vishakha belongs to an upper-caste Brahmin family. But she has to live under the watchful eyes of her husband and father-in-law. Freedom and separate identity in the society or her hermitage are foreign to her thought. Vishakha suffers from Brahminical patriarch. She is exploited not only by her husband but also by her former lover and her father-in-law looks on her with lust. The deplorable condition of Vishakha finds several parallels in India today. Infact, she lived a miserable life and she disappeared as secretly as she lived her life in silence.

## Notes

Nittilai, a hunter girl, a 'noble savage' and Karnad's own creation is persecuted in her community for demanding the right to choose her spouse. She loved Arvasu, who was treacherously treated by his brother Parvasu, who called him a demon and falsely accused him of patricide and got him mercilessly beaten out of sheer selfishness. Perhaps there is no obvious reason; if there is any, it is Arvasu's goodness and innocence. Being hurt Arvasu swears to take revenge on his brother but Nittilai calms down Arvasu's feeling for revenge and explains the reality of Parvasu, Raibhya and Yavakri who were themselves the cause and invited their own destruction just for worldly power, prestige and revenge. On the contrary Nittilai is noble, principled and humane "a lamp into hurricane", but she is murdered by her husband and brother who did not tolerate her relationship with Arvasu. Thus, she becomes a victim of tribal patriarch. In the play she bears the finest mark of goodness, humanity sacrifice and true love. But the forces of darkness and ignorance destroy innocence and goodness.

Thus, *The Fire And The Rain* nearly, if not completely, vindicates the playwright's unifying purpose. The Fire stands for the burning rage, hatred, and Jealousy, that never end, it also stands for the fire sacrifice. The rain stands for the quietude, passion controlled, appeasement of the gods and reward. Vishakha is in the centre of all kinds of fire- physical and emotional. Conversation between Parvasu and Vishakha in Act Two is ample evidence how she fumes with indignation, hatred and revenge. She also symbolizes the parched land and craving for water. Arvasu represents rain, quietude and the source of soothing effect and smoothening of elements.

As far as the integration of the three worlds- the physical, the emotional and the spiritual- is concerned, Karnad's modernist attitude does not help him achieve the perfect end. Vishakha and the famished land represent the physical, Parvasu's willing and silent walking into the blazing enclosure symbolize the spiritual and Arvasu-Nittilai's emotional struggle culminating in release from attachment specifically move towards integration, however, they fall short of the desired level. But the modernity point of view to make something new, the existential drive of characters and secularization of traditional practices get fairly illustrated.



The destiny has its own course; it is sequential and dependent on the dramatist's technique of unifying purpose. The largest and the smallest spaces are eternally lost much in the same way they are created. Nothing goes 'nowhere', they become virtual space but Karnad succeeds in creating his space.

### Check your Progress-1

1. Which caste does Vishakha belong to?

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2. What does the growth of modernity symbolize?

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3. What is Karnad influenced by?

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4. The play The Fire and the Rain is based out of which myth?

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## 10.4 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we learned about the myths and mythopoeia and analysis of "The Fire and The Rain" by Girish Karnad.

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## 10.5 KEYWORDS

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- Mucking about: Wasting time
- One for his nob: Blow to his head

- Round the bend: Crazy

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### 10.6 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

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- Analyze “The Fire and The Rain” by Girish Karnad.
- Write a note on myths and mythopoeia of “The Fire and The Rain” by Girish Karnad.

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### 10.7 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

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### 10.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- Vishakha belongs to an upper-caste Brahmin family.

- The growth of modernity symbolizes rise of specially capitalism, industrialization, secularization, Marxism, existentialism and new values.
- Karnad is influenced by modernism.
- The play The Fire and the Rain is based on a myth taken from the Mahabharata.

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# **UNIT-11 MANJULA PADMANABHAN- LIGHTS OUT – 1**

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## **STRUCTURE**

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 About Manjula Padmanabhan
- 11.3 Lights Out
- 11.4 Let us sum up
- 11.5 Keywords
- 11.6 Questions for Review
- 11.7 Suggested Reading and References
- 11.8 Answers to Check your Progress

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## **11.0 OBJECTIVES**

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Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about Manjula Padmanabhan’s life;
- further, you would also go through Manjula Padmanabhan’s poem “Lights Out.

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## **11.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Manjula Padmanabhan is a playwright, journalist, comic strip artist, and children's book author.

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## **11.2 ABOUT MANJULA PADMANABHAN**

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**Early life**

Born in Delhi to a diplomat family in 1953, she went to boarding school in her teenage years. After college, her determination to make her own way in life led to works in publishing and media-related fields.

**Career & Works**

She won the Greek Onassis Award for her play Harvest. An award-winning film Deham was made by Govind Nihalani based on the play.

She has written one more powerful play, Lights Out! , Hidden Fires is a series of monologues. The Artist's Model and Sextet are her other works..

She has also authored a collection of short stories, called Kleptomania. Her most recent book, published in 2008, is Escape.

Apart from writing newspaper columns she created comic strips. She created Suki, an Indian comic character, which was serialized as a strip in the Sunday Observer.[2] Before 1997 she was better known as cartoonist and had a daily cartoon strip in The Pioneer newspaper.

**As playwright**

- 1984 - "Lights Out"
- 2003. Harvest. London: Aurora Metro Press.

**As Author and Illustrator**

- 2013. Three Virgins and Other Stories New Delhi, India: Zubaan Books.
- 2015. Island of Lost Girls. Hachette.
- 2011. I am different! Can you find me? Watertown, Mass: Charlesbridge Pub.
- 2008. Escape. Hachette.
- 2005. Unprincess! New Delhi: Puffin Books.
- 1986. A Visit to the City Market New Delhi: National Book Trust
- 2003. Mouse Attack

**As Illustrator**

- Baig, Tara Ali, and Manjula Padmanabhan. 1979. Indrani and the enchanted jungle. New Delhi: Thomson Press Ltd.

## Notes

- Maithily Jagannathan and Manjula Padmanabhan. 1984. Droopy dragon. New Delhi: Thomson Press.

### Comic Strips

- 2005. Double talk. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

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## 11.3 LIGHTS OUT

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A sensitive writer of any age or country never avoids the serious issues of his or her age. In Indian writing in English, Manjula Padmanabhan emerges as a sensitive writer who aims at presenting the realistic problems instead of portraying the romantic, fanciful notions. The contemporary Indian English playwrights are preoccupied with the notion of projecting the social and political realities of the times. Manjula Padmanabhan is among these fewest contemporary dramatists who have made a fruitful contribution to the theatrical development in the country. As Vinod Bala Sharma, in the essay “Indian English Drama: An Overview” remarks, Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan must be studied as two outstanding playwrights who belong to another category.”<sup>1</sup> Women writers have contributed to the development of Indian writing in English and taken it to the respectable position. The credit for the progress of Indian English literature goes to a good number of women writers. Dr. M. F. Patel writes:

Women writers in India are moving forward with their strong and sure strides, matching the pace of the world. We see them bursting out in full bloom spreading their own individual fragrances. They are considered for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavor of the soil that they bring to their work. Yes, they are our women writers. Writers first, I must insist. Gender is only incidental...but one must admit, it does spice up their work.

The focal point of the women writers is largely the prevailing conditions and the problems of women. They aim at bringing out the plight of women in the present time. Thus, feminism is the major concern of the present era. Emancipation of women from the long established cycle of

oppression of patriarchy is the most debatable topic in Indian English literature. Efforts are made on political as well as socio-cultural levels to protect the rights of women and to check their exploitation in the name of male hegemony. In spite of all these efforts, women suffer incessantly under the existing social code of conduct. They are raped, murdered, assaulted physically mainly for no fault of their own. The women writers intend to highlight the causes behind the violence against women. Manjula Padmanabhan is one of these women dramatists who expose the ugly picture of the society and its indifference towards the sufferings of women.

The play *Lights Out* by Manjula Padmanabhan exposes the violence against women. It is based on an eyewitness account; the incident took place in Santa Cruze, Mumbai in 1982. A group of urban middle class people watches brutalization of a woman in a neighboring compound but fails to perform any meaningful action. About this play, R. N. Rai, in his essay *Perspectives and Challenges in Indian English Drama*, remarks:

In her another play *Lights Out*, she draws our attention to the heart rendering screams of a woman, Leela which destroy the fabric of domesticity of a middle class couple. Women face violence in many aspects of their daily life. This violence is multi-faceted. It is not merely physical but more often mental and emotional. It is deeply complex, subtle and indirect, hard to recognize and much more difficult to overcome.

The play opens, revealing the drawing-dinning area of a sixth floor apartment of a building in Bombay, inhabited by a middle class family. The focal point of the space is a large window suggesting the roof top of the neighboring building. The building is under construction with walls still not distempered and windows without glasses. The building has a chowkidar but not the owner of the building. Some suspicious activities of gang rape have been going on at least for a week but no one takes any action to stop the crime going on in the building. The bizarre sounds of a woman is heard in the third and last scene in the play. The sound is truly ragged and unpleasant. The sound begins with distinct words: "let me go!

## Notes

Help me!” and it ends into general screaming, sobbing. The screaming makes no difference for Bhaskar and Mohan.

The dramatist’s purpose is to highlight man’s growing indifference towards his social commitments. Social apathy has become a common characteristic, especially of the newly grown rich middle class people. They remain engrossed in their life so much that they get no time to think deeply about their surroundings. Even if they think, they do not want to interfere with the incidents, taking place around them. They have become indifferent towards the events of their surroundings. Similarly in the play, the characters waste their time in discussing about the crime but do not have the courage to stop it. Manjula Padmanabhan’s purpose in the play is mainly to highlight this social apathy, especially amongst the members of middle class society.

The most famous play of Manjula is Harvest. It deals with one of the most unusual theme i.e. organ selling. M. K. Naik makes an observation on recent Indian English Drama with special reference to the plays of Manjula Padmanabhan:

Manjula Padmanabhan created history when her play Harvest won the first prize in the first Onassis International Cultural Competition. This is the first time that an Indian English dramatist has won an honor abroad. Harvest is a tautly constructed futuristic play, a frightening vision of a cannibalistic future, in which the sale of human organs has become all too common.

This screen play Harvest deals with the first and the third world countries. It is a futuristic play that throws light on the desperation and the survival of a man and his family to sell organs via an agency to someone in the first world for a paltry amount of money. The play consists of the third world donors and the first world receivers. We see the first world receiver and organ purchaser Ginny, whose body is never present on the stage, but visible only on a screen. The four Indian donors belong to the same household: Om, his wife Jaya, Om’s mother, referred to as Ma and Om’s younger brother, Jeetu. Om, the main character in the play tries to protect and provide for his family. It shows how poverty can compel a man to go to any extent to earn his livelihood. In the play, the



character Om is willing to exploit himself as well as his own people in order to live a comfortable life.

Manjula Padmanabhan has again targeted the social evils in her another play *Hidden Fires*. This play was written by Manjula on the request of Jayant Kriplani, Director of the play, who was extremely disappointed by the turbulence and violence as the result of the riots in the country. In the play, he states the reasons behind this play, “when I saw the first riots in 1992 in Bombay I felt completely helpless. However powerful you are, or well known you are, or well networked you are, you feel this sense of helplessness because no one is doing anything.”<sup>5</sup> It makes the purpose of writing this play very clear that “this is a very small way of showing my anguish at what’s happening”

Padmanabhan has made an experiment in her dramatic art that she has written *Hidden Fires* in the form of monologues. In these monologues, she brings out the disastrous results of violence and riots in the nation. Each monologue highlights different aspects of violence. She raises a number of questions regarding violence. The purpose of the dramatist is to bring out the futility of violence. Alka Saxena writes about this play:

Through *Hidden Fires*, Manjula Padmanabhan attempts to come to grips with the violence of our times. *Hidden Fires* comprises five powerful hard hitting monologues in which the playwright takes head on issues of violence, intolerance to others and narrow concepts of community and nation.

*Hidden Fires* was staged and directed by Arvind Gaur of Asmita Theatre in August 2004 in New Delhi. In response to the cause which prompted him to pick up Manjula Padmanabhan’s work for solo production, he says, “At a time when our society by and large is in flux-with a spate of sectarian violence hitting hard at its heart strings, I could not stop believing in the hard hitting monologues in *Hidden Fires*.”

As a social critic, Padmanabhan takes up the unusual and controversial issues in her plays. she focuses on every aspect of the problem and exposes the follies and response of the people towards the existing problem. Each play deals with a different issue or theme but the purpose

## Notes

of the dramatist is to present the real picture which induces the viewer to think over sincerely what is shown on the stage.

The play *Lights Out* exposes the hypocrisy of the urban middle class society and its indifferent attitude towards the crime, going on in the surroundings. Leela, wife of Bhaskar is seen complaining about the crime happening in the neighboring building. She persistently requests her husband to call the police to settle the matter but he avoids the idea by saying that they should not bother about these little offences. He reacts coldly and calls her idea of calling police „Rubbish“. Instead of fulfilling his duty as a social being, he suggests to Leela a number of ways to avoid the crime, “Leela, the thing to do is not let them disturb you like this. Pretend they Are not there...” Through indifference of Bhaskar, the dramatist exposes the neglect of duty of a social being in these miserable condition.

Bhaskar rejects the idea of calling the police because he does not „want to stick my neck out“ as „who has the time for all this.“ It shows that people have become so self centered and engrossed in their life that they do not want to pay any heed to such crimes. They intentionally want to forget their social responsibility and do not bother to complain about the immoral activities to the authorities. Instead of performing their duty, they justify their behavior by giving excuses when others are not worried regarding these problems “so why should we“. They themselves avoid their duties as social beings and blame others for not fulfilling their duties well. Bhaskar represents such people, “what about the owners of that building? Really it’s their responsibility...” Manjula believes that the growing indifferent attitude of the people is the major cause of the increasing rate of crimes in the society.

The selfish and indifferent attitude of people can also be seen in the play *Harvest*. The anthropologist Nancy Scheper Hughes notes that “wealthy but ailing patients in the first-world are increasingly turning to healthy if poverty-stricken populations of the third-world in order to procure „spare“ body parts.”<sup>11</sup> It is another example of the exploitation of the third world bodies that global capitalism gives rise to. The human organ cannot be taken as equal to the other objects produced by the third world

for the first world because the organ is not a product of the laboring third world body. The organ is not produced like other commodity by the third world but extracted from it.

In the play, the organ selling emerges as a source of making more money that the poor people can never earn through years of toil and labour. It is one of the best means of making money to overcome poverty. Om, the main character in the play, passes the medical tests at Interplanta and has been decreed an eligible, healthy candidate for selling the rights to his entire body to an anonymous buyer in the United States. Through his confused feelings about signing such a contract, Padmanabhan portrays the complex nature of despair and hope in the character. At first, he expresses intense happiness, “we’ll have more money than you and I have names for!, he says to Ma proudly. Who’d believe there’s so much money in the world?”<sup>12</sup> when his wife expresses her dissatisfaction for what he has done, he becomes defensive, “you think I did it lightly. But...we’ll be rich! very rich! Insanely rich! But you’d rather live in this one small room, I suppose! Think it’s such a fine thing-living day in, day out, like monkeys in a hot-case - lulled to sleep by our neighbors “rhythmic farting...and starving.”<sup>13</sup> When Jaya accuses him of making the wrong choice, he makes the reason clear behind taking such a serious decision which was not made of his own free will:

Om: I went because I lost my job at the company. And why did I lose it? Because I am a clerk and nobody needs clerks anymore! There are no new jobs now- there’s nothing left for people like us! Don’t you know that?

Jaya: you’re wrong, there are choices- there must be choices

Om: huh! I didn’t choose. I stood in queue and was chosen! And if not this queue, there would have been other queues...

This conversation clearly brings out the adverse effect of advanced technology as the machines have replaced the man. The large number of people are unemployed because their works are done by machines. The technology has caused the development and progress of the country on one hand and on the other, it has led to unemployment. The poverty can

## Notes

force a man to do anything to make money. Om's judgement is totally based on the desire of the unlimited wealth.

The attitude of the civilized and rich class towards the poor is absolutely indifferent. It has been shown in the play *Lights Out* also. The discussion between Bhaskar and his friend Mohan is evident of their insensitive attitude towards the plight of poor women. As they converse:

Mohan: so you'd say that the victims are, by and large, poor people?

Bhaskar: definitely! Leela:: isn't it terrible? Attacking the poor?

Mohan: well, as long as it's the poor attacking poor...you know how it is...they live their lives and we live ours.

These plays describe the grim and tragic realities of life in which everybody is ready to take advantage of the adverse circumstances of others. In the play, *Harvest*, the human body and its living parts become a tradeable and saleable thing and one for one's own well being is ready to destroy the entire family like that of Om Prakash's. He is not able to face the problems associated with poverty like food shortage and unemployment therefore he becomes an organ donor in *Interplanta* services. This is a high-tech contact organization that selects physically fit donors to donate their organs to the white first world buyers, who live in constant fear of old age, accidents or the natural signs of bodily decay. The organ receivers use the body of the donor to keep them alive and healthy for a longer period of time.

In the play, *Lights Out* also, the characters desire to see the crime out of curiosity and seek pleasure out of it which is another way of taking advantage of the adverse situation of others. Bhaskar's friend Mohan reveals his interest in watching the live crime not due to his social responsibility but only out of curiosity. He is adamant on looking at the crime while it is going to be committed in order to prove himself to be the true and a practical observer of life. Without having any intention of helping the woman or check the crime, he makes a lot of discussion to find truly the nature of the crime. When Leela quotes her friend's remark regarding man's role as a social being, "if you can stop a crime, you must- or else you're helping it to happen"<sup>15</sup>, Mohan passes a bitter

comment on the insensitivity of intellectuals, “these intellectuals always react like that, always confuse simple issues. After all what’s the harm in simply watching something? Even when there’s an accident in the street, don’t we all turn our heads to look?” It raises the notion of „male gaze“ that penetrates woman’s private space.

As a social critic, Padmanabhan criticizes the society for several evils. As the play *Hidden Fires* exposes the futility of violence as it brings no good to the society instead causes only destruction, chaos, turbulence everywhere. She professes through different characters that the killing of uncountable people for no reason is totally inhuman and there is no way to justify this violence. It spreads hatred, fret, pain, sorrow among the common masses. As Jayant Kriplani states in „A word from the director“ in the play:

We’ve come to accept violence as a normal, everyday occurrence. All kinds of violence. The violence of Hindus against Muslims and vice versa, because all fundamentalists are equally contemptible. Or the violence that’s being institutionalized by our government. Or the violence of poverty. So I’d like to adopt the term, minority community“ to describe the section to which I belong. A „minority“ that thinks secularism is good, sectarianism is bad, violence unacceptable. That peacewards is where we should be going.

In the first monologue i.e. *Hidden Fires*, a man delivers his views who joins the group of killers in order to take revenge of the assault made on him. It shows that the riots begin with the involvement of a few people but the number increases day by day as it grows on a larger scale. The man in the first monologue gives the reason of his transformation from a common man to the murderer. He justifies his action, “when your life’s in danger, you’ll do anything to defend it, won’t you? when your country’s in danger, you’ll do anything to protect it, won’t you? that’s what we did. Defended our selves. Saved our country. We saw fires and we- stamped them out.”

This is how, a victim turns out to be the murderer. The brutal treatment imposed on the innocent people who have no fault provokes them to adopt the same path of violence. As the man in the first monologue

## Notes

describes the brutal killing of his family which compelled him to become a rebel:

That's when they came to my house...they didn't even ask questions. They just began to beat me up. Then they threw me out of my house and set fire to my wife. She was not yet forty. They took away my sisters and their daughters. They strangled my son in front of me and pissed inside his dead mouth.

These monologues refer to the Bombay riots in December 1992- January 1993 in which around 900 people died. There were 275 Hindus and 575 Muslims who were killed in the riots. An investigative commission was formed under justice B.N. Shrikrishna, but the recommendations of the inquiry were not enforced. The whole city burns in the fire of rage, violence, destruction. At this crucial point of time, Manjula has highlighted an unexpected response of the politicians which is not effective in order to console the public. In fact, most of the times, the statements given by such politicians bring dissatisfaction with the government among the common mass. The dramatist has also exposed the insensitive attitude of politicians towards violence. In the second monologue „Know the Truth“, a politician issues his statement in order to console the public through a radio programme:

Telecasts and radio broadcasts from foreign news agencies MUST BE IGNORED. We ask only for little patience- after all, such disturbances are a natural part of Nation Building...so long as all our citizens avoid over-reacting when they are faced with mobs or rapist gangs, so long as they maintain patriotic silence when approached by foreign news agencies, we are certain that complete normalcy will be restored in less than half a year. JAI HIND!

It can be better understood by the dialogues of the young woman speaker of the radio programme when she introduces about the politician, “and that message was from one of our leaders, speaking from an undisclosed location somewhere in the world.”<sup>21</sup> It shows the negligence on the part of the government that when the country is going through such crucial time, the leaders have hidden themselves for their safety. It is the satire on the Indian politics. As in his message, the leader appeals to the public not

to over react while facing mobs and gang rapes and instead of opposing the wrong done to them, they must maintain silence. Such type of statements from our so called political leaders gives way to the dissatisfaction and hopelessness on the part of the system and the government.

In the play *Lights Out*, the characters do not complain about the crime to the police. The cause is not only their indifferent attitude but they are hopeless on the part of police and the system. Padmanabhan has criticized the system through the characters which suggests that they do not expect the reasonable action from the police. The people avoid their social responsibility because they do not want to interfere in the matters of police as it brings trouble to them also. Moreover, they feel that police does not take interest in such petty affairs. It is evident from the dialogues of Bhaskar who, while consoling his wife Leela, says, “No, that’s not enough, don’t you see? If the police had to worry about things like that they’d be psychiatrists, not policemen... you never know with the police these days. They may say it’s none of your business, what goes on in the next compound. After all, there’s the chowkidar...”

Through the dialogues of Bhaskar, the dramatist expresses her own views on the police and its laws. Police generally ignores the complaint and does not take a serious action immediately. Leela gives many reasons to complain to the police but according to Bhaskar, the police would not consider any one of them as the reasons are irrational. It is clear from the conversation of Bhaskar and Leela:

Leela: you’re sure we can’t call the police? Just now, just once? Bhaskar:

Leela, if we called now, what would we say?

Leela: we could tell them everything! That there’s a building under

construction next door and that every night, in the compound...

Bhaskar: wait! First they’d ask us, „what is the complaint?“ and we’d

have to say

Leela: that we’re frightened! That we’re badly disturbed!

## Notes

In their long discussion, none of them could make out one valid reason for complaining about such a heinous crime. They kept on making out the answers to give to the police. It is an example of proceedings of police which requires corrections. Though on the part of the characters, we cannot call it absolutely right as these are just the excuses of justifying themselves and the ways of getting rid of their responsibilities.

Apart from criticizing the police and the system, Padmanabhan also brings out the follies of human nature. She very well portrays the psyche of human beings in different circumstances. Their insensitive behavior towards the serious problems generates the feeling of frustration as well as the sense of pity among the viewers. In the play Harvest, Om's mother is one of the examples. When she comes to know about the job of Om, she expresses no such regret. After knowing about the unlimited wealth, Ma is mystified: "what kind of job pays a man to sit at home?" Om tries to hide his job from his mother at first because he doesn't want her to worry but later when she knows, she seems interested only in the benefits for her. she feels extremely happy and cannot believe their good fortune as she says, "tell me again.

All you have to do is sit at home and stay healthy?...and they'll pay you... even if you do nothing but pick your nose all day?"

By showing Ma's continued amazement at the fact that her son will be paid for doing nothing, Padmanabhan is able to depict the extent to which poverty can vanish the sense of understanding the gravity of the situation in a person. Being an uneducated lower middle class woman, with no means of earning a livelihood, she represents a large chunk of female population which depend financially on the man forever. This gives rise to the dual personality in such a woman. She shows excessive love for the male supporting family financially and hatred towards the other dependents. Ma's words are proof of this.

On one hand, Ma addresses Om as „my only delight“ and on the other, Jaya, her daughter in law and the younger son Jeetu are abused. „Ho-you“, „barren dog“, „pimping rascal“, „soul's disgrace“ are the words she uses for them. She does not remain at all concerned about the lives of



her sons. Even when the guards by mistake, take away Jeetu for his organs, Ma is interested only in watching Television.

In the play, Lights Out, the dramatist takes the insensitive behavior of the characters to the heights where the viewers start feeling frustrated. Mohan and Bhaskar consider the on going crime no more than a drama and begin to analyze its various parts bit by bit. They discuss about the number of people in the act involved everyday or if everyday the same people come or if their dresses are the same or to which status they belong or what kind of screams are uttered during that heinous act- are the sounds like “hysteria”, “gurgly” or “crying” or what had been their purpose after all.

The dramatist’s purpose in highlighting the long discussion is to expose the so called social concern of these two friends who, on one hand, feel proud of being a part of the civilized society and, on the other, do not bother about their social responsibility. In their baseless discussion, they make a number of guesses as these acts may be some domestic fight for some private cause. Their discussion brings irritation among the viewers as they convers:

Mohan: after all, it may be something private, a domestic fight; how can we intervene?

Bhaskar: it’s not likely to be anything domestic. I mean... they’re all roughly the same age, I’d say, no parents, no youngsters- and hardly any conversation at all -

Mohan: really? None?

Bhaskar: we hear nothing but the screaming.

Leela: if it’s domestic, we wouldn’t have to interfere, would we?

Mohan: personally, I’m against becoming entangled in other people’s private lives. Outsiders can never really be the judge of who is right and who is wrong.

## Notes

They do not discuss the gravity of the crime, rather quickly change the direction of discussion and easily convert it into the case of domestic violence. This shows that they deliberately avoid the situations in which they would be compelled to take some serious step. Through such a long discussion, the dramatist successfully tickles the sensibility of audience through these insensible characters. The time and energy which they seem to spend on the discussion of the crime, they would have made efforts to mitigate it and could easily get rid of it.

The playwright clearly expresses the hypocrisy of urban class society where people like Bhaskar and Mohan spend enough time to find out the appropriate words which may define the true nature of the crime but they do not get the time to call the police or other concerned authorities to check the crime. The discussion gradually shifts from one direction to other and the crime of gang rape has easily been converted to a religious ceremony, screams and cries of the victim are considered the painful screams during nose piercing and ear piercing. They say:

Mohan: but- don't you see? That would explain why no one goes to the help of the victims- because, of course, if it's something religious, no one can interfere, not even the police.

Bhaskar: that's true, of course. If it's religious, then there's no stopping the thing. Restriction of religious freedom and all that.

Meanwhile, one of Leela's friends Naina and her husband Surinder arrive at their home unexpectedly. They too get involved in the discussion and begin to interpret things on the basis of the available proofs. All this shows the male attitude towards the suffering of women. They are so insensitive about the problems of women. For them, the issues related to women are just the matter of discussion devoid of any sense of pity or sympathy. After such a long discussion, they show their helplessness before Leela saying, "there's nothing we can do about it. We just have to ignore it."<sup>27</sup> With the arrival of Surindar, their line of thinking changes into another direction and they begin to find out possibilities of this act of being case of „exorcism“ in which the body of a woman is possessed by some evil spirit and violence is inflicted on her to push out that spirit from her body. This far fetched explanation of the simple act of rape by

these men depicts their negligence and carelessness as social beings as well as their heartless attitude towards the sufferings of women.

On the other side, Leela and Naina oppose the idea as being females they can easily understand the condition of helpless woman therefore, they persistently request to call the police. Here, the playwright has depicted the special bond between the two women. It can also be understood in relation to the concept of lesbianism given by Alice Walker. As she understands the term not in context of the physical relation but as strong emotional bond. Only a woman can understand the feelings, suffering and pain of another woman. This mutual understanding brings them close to each other. As in the play, Leela is so much troubled by the screams and crying of the victim throughout the play. She complains to Bhaskar:

At first it was only at the time it was going on. Then, as soon as it got dark. Then around tea-time, when the children came home from school. Then in the middle of the day, whenever the door bell rang.

Then in the morning, when I sent the children off to school. And now from the moment I wake up...

She pleads to call the police to settle down the matter from the beginning to the end but Bhaskar and others avoid her request. Leela finds it difficult to keep herself as a passive observer of a woman being molested just outside her house. The rude and loud voice dreads her continuously. The fear goes to the extent that she gets frightened of getting mad. As she says to Bhaskar, "when you were away on tour, I couldn't sleep at night! And with all the windows shut, with all the curtains drawn, with cotton in my ears- the sound still came through! Even in the children's room, on the other side of the house, I could hear it!"

Through the character of Leela, the dramatist throws light on the sensitive nature of female section of the society. Woman is soft hearted, emotional and very sensitive by nature. Anything appeals to her heart first. She expresses her emotions with higher intensity. This can be seen in the play *Hidden Fires* also. The violence prevailing in the country generates so much of fear in the hearts of people that they start having

## Notes

nightmares and take a lot of time to overcome that fear. In the second monologue, “Know the Truth”, a lady complains about her nightmares on a radio show. Her feelings are expressed by the host of the show as she says:

That was a young caller complaining about some recurring nightmares she has! Poor thing-she imagines that all the young women on her street have been raped and/or murdered- now isn't that just impossible, folks? That can't happen on our country, am I right? And now she thinks there's mob at her door! Poor thing! Oh...delusions can be terrible can't they?

The play Harvest also bring out the sensitive attitude of women towards the prevailing problem. It is only jaya who realizes the gravity of the decision of Om. She is not happy with his decision of organ selling and tries her best to make him understand. She also tries to make Ma understand who sees the benefit only. But everything fails and she expresses her grief in heart rendering manner:

I'll tell you! he's sold the rights to his organs! His skin! His eyes! His arse sold them! . Oh god, oh god! What's the meaning of this nightmare! . How can I hold your hand, touch your face, knowing that any moment it might be snatched away from me and flung across the globe . If you were dead I could share my head and break my bangles but this? To be a widow by slow degrees? To mourn you piece? should I shave half my head? Break my bangles one at a time?

Jaya and Leela, both suffer in their own ways but their sufferings are not given any heed by their husbands. Neither Bhaskar calls the police on the request of Leela nor Om changes his decision for Jaya. It shows the status of women in their own families and society that her words and deires have no value for man. In the society, a woman does not hold the reputed position like a man.

Having this similarity between Jaya and Leela, both are different from each other. In the play Lights Out, Leela fails to take any sensible action. Her request remains unheard and she gradually turns hysterical but the male present there remain unaffected by it. They suggest some impractical solutions to the problem like to have a face to face fight with

the persons involved in the act of crime. But nobody cares about the plight of Leela.

On the other side, Jaya asserts herself in the final scene of the play Harvest. Om has abandoned her, having willfully chosen to give up his body to Ginny. Jaya comes to know that the actual receiver of organs is an American old man Virgil who wants Jaya's body to have his child. However, Jaya refuses to negotiate with Virgil. She is determined to lay down her own conditions. If Virgil wants her body, he must come to her in person. She says, "I know you're stronger than me, you're richer than me. But if you want me, you must risk your skin for me." Knowing that she cannot win against him, Virgil sends his Interplanta employees to break down Jaya's door. But Jaya has discovered "a new definition for winning. Winning by losing." She resists Virgil's advances and retains her own dignity, "I'm holding a piece of glass against my throat", she warns the frustrated Virgil. The play concludes on this unresolved note.

Light Out, as the title suggests, focuses on activities associated with darkness, both of the physical world as well as that of the mental. The darkness of the mental world is represented by the rape of a woman while that of the mind is reflected in the attitude of the people who are not only mute spectators to this horrific crime but also seem to enjoy watching it. Though the main theme of Harvest is about organ transplant and its abuse, the sub theme focuses on how women are treated as possessions of men who harvest future generations from their bodies but refuse to give the deserving place in life. Thus the title Harvest is ironic in nature because it suggests production of food but in the play organs are used as food produced by the human body. In relation to Jaya also, the title is symbolic as at the end we come to know that the real target of buyer is Jaya therefore she can be taken as the harvester of human body or in other words she is forced to give birth to the child of the buyer Virgil.

Moreover, the playwright brings out another outcome of organ selling in the play. By selling organs, the donor gives the control in the hands of the organ receiver. He leads his life according to the instructions of the receiver. In the play Harvest, a contact module is installed in the house of

## Notes

Om through which the receiver Ginny communicates with the donor as well as keep an eye on the daily habits of the donors in order to ensure that the organs that will one day be hers remain healthy too. For example, when she realizes that Om's family shares a toilet with forty other Families, Ginny reacts with horror: "it's wrong, it's disgusting! And i-well, I'm going to change that. I can't accept that. I mean, it's unsanitary!" The effect of poverty and patriarchy can also be seen where Jaya angrily wipes off her kum kum mark on her forehead saying, "my forehead burns, when I say the word sister", when she comes to know that Om has declared her as his sister as the company demands for an unmarried donor.

In the play Hidden fires, the playwright is upset with the prevailing condition in the nation. She expresses her dissatisfaction with the futility of this violence where the innocent people are killed in large numbers for no valid reason. The lives of people does not have any importance. It becomes almost a game in which the life and death are just a part of it and not more than that. The third monologue "Famous Last Words" is the best example of it. In this, a game of guess is played where one mistake results out the death of one person. The playwright makes a comparison between riots and a game as in both, life does not have any importance.

The same idea is again projected in another monologue i.e. the last one "Invocation" in which the dramatist expresses the idea that the people, killed in violence, are counted in numbers. The innocent people who are killed have no identity after their death. Only the number of the dead bodies is being displayed. In this last monologue, a woman calls out names of several people but the hidden idea is that she suggests:

My protest concerns the names that are missing from the public record. Do you notice how, when there's a riot, we are rarely told who died? Instead, we are given details of the property that was damaged. We are offered glimpses of who may have been responsible. But we are rarely shown the names of those who died.

The last monologue contains the message of the playwright. In a way, she summarizes her arguments in the last monologue. As she discusses

different aspects of violence and its futility along with its disastrous outcomes. The closing lines of „Invocation“ are thought provoking: “in the names of those who have already died, I make this invocation. Let us be done with violence. Let those who have indulged in violence be named and punished. Let those who have died in violence be named and remembered. With this, I end my invocation.”

Thus, the plays of Manjula Padmanabhan not only expose the evils of society but also make the people perceive its evil consequences. The plays have long discussions which deepens step by step and consequently make the audience understand its gravity. In the modern world, where on one side, there is so much of progress in every field, on the other, people are losing basic values and morals. The lives are losing its importance and money is becoming more important. The growing apathy in the society in the name of civilization has given way to the crimes and violence. The plays of Padmanabhan convey important messages and achieve successfully its aim as it certainly inspires audience not to follow the path adopted by the characters of the plays.

**Check your Progress-1**

1. Where was Manjula Padmanabhan born?

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2. Who wrote the poem “ Lights Out”?

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3. When was Manjula Padmanabhan born ?

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4. Which award did Manjula Padmanabhan won for her play Harvest?

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## 11.4 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we learned about Manjula Padmanabhan's life and her poem "Lights Out."

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## 11.5 KEYWORDS

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- **Portray:** depict in a work of art or literature.
- **Debatable:** open to discussion or argument
- **Indulged:** allow oneself to enjoy the pleasure of
- **Invocation:** the action of invoking someone or something
- **Monologue:** a long speech by one actor in a play or film, or as part of a theatrical or broadcast program

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## 11.6 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

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- Write a note on Manjula Padmanabhan's life.
- Write a summary of Manjula Padmanabhan's "Lights Out".

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## 11.7 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

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## **11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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- Manjula Padmanabhan was born in Delhi.
- The poem “ Lights Out” was written by Manjula Padmanabhan.
- Manjula Padmanabhan was born on 1953.
- Manjula Padmanabhan won the Greek Onassis Award for her play Harvest.

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# **UNIT-12 MANJULA PADMANABHAN- LIGHTS OUT – 2**

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## **STRUCTURE**

12.0 Objectives

12.1 Introduction

12.2 Marxist Analysis

12.3 Character Analysis

12.4 Implication Of Insensitivity In Manjula Padmanabhan’s Lights Out

12.5 Let us sum up

12.6 Keywords

12.7 Questions for Review

12.8 Suggested Reading and References

12.9 Answers to Check your Progress

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## **12.0 OBJECTIVES**

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Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about the Marxist Analysis of Manjula Padmanabhan’s Lights Out;
- you would also learn about Character Analysis Manjula Padmanabhan’s Lights Out;
- and further you would also learn about Implication Of Insensitivity In Manjula Padmanabhan’s Lights Out.

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## **12.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The Indian writer Manjula Padmanabhan has written the poem “Lights Out” and it throws light on the gender inequality as well as insensitivity and its consequences.

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## 12.2 MARXIST ANALYSIS

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Gita Aravamudan, an Indian author, wrote an article for *The Hindu*, *Sunday Magazine*, in May 2015 in which she asked why India is dragging its feet on criminalizing marital rape. Throughout her article, “When home turns into hell” Gita Aravamudan proposes and discusses how married women in India are often treated as sex-slave and are forced to have sex without their wish. After reading this article, I found her argument to be similar to what has been discussed in the play *Lights Out* written by Manjula Padmanabhan. The play is similar to Aravamudan’s argument of women’s treatment as a sexual object though the focus of Padmanabhan’s storyline remains on women in general and not specifically of married women. *Lights Out* by Manjula Padmanabhan asks for attention to the plight of women in this world in general, and in India in particular. She highlights that women become victims of manoeuvres of males which is an attempt by men to slight and subvert the women.

Human beings are the sum totals of the experiences they have in their life because their sensibilities are developed and shaped by what the individuals come across, observe, feel and think about the things happening around their lives. It is natural for an artist to express his/her perception of life in its varied colours through his/her art. Similarly, Padmanabhan work is also influenced by urban Indian socio-cultural patriarchal settings which she has attempted to portray through play. As life becomes meaningful only in its societal form, what its members do in their life will invite responses and reactions from their surroundings. Theatre is one of the most powerful yet very subtle forms to express, to communicate the incommunicable with the audience; it is closest to the human being because no other form brings the individual so close to his interior self, asking questions about his existence vis-à-vis his milieu.

The play, written in 1986, with a clear stamp of gender-division as focused in *The Hindu* by Geetha Aravamudan, has given a chance to discuss the books written by women writers on women. Interestingly it also shows that even after three decades how Indian women tend to face

## Notes

similar forms of gender and socio-cultural discrimination and violence. Some of these forms of violence are rape, domestic violence, honour killings, trafficking, forced marriages, stalking and sexual harassment. Recent reports by National Crime Report Bureau states that Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in India are top states in which sexual crime against women is high .

A woman is often at a socio-cultural level merely considered as weakling, body and instrumental, who cannot protect herself from any kind of physical attacks by a male without minding the relation. Manjula believes that the growing indifferent attitude of the people is the major cause of the increasing rate of crimes in the society. Lights Out clearly depicts one of the intersectional dimensions to domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault. The play also gives a scope to incorporate honour-based crime and trafficking as transcultural phenomena and oppression as is defined by Marxism .

### **The Concept Of Marxism And Its Debate**

Karl Marx was primarily a theorist and historian. After examining social organization in a scientific way; political science, he perceived human history to have consisted of a series of struggles. That is in between classes--between the oppressed and the oppressing. Psychoanalyst Freud saw "sexual energy" to be the motivating factor behind the human endeavour. Nabokov seemed to feel artistic impulse was the real factor, Marx thought that 'historical materialism' was the ultimate driving force, a notion involving the distribution of resources, gain, production, and such matters .

Marxist literary criticism is a loose term describing literary criticism based on socialist and dialectic theories. It views literary works as reflections of the social institutions from which they originate. According to Marxists, even literature itself is a social institution and has a specific ideological function, based on the background and ideology of the author. The English literary critic and cultural theorist, Terry Eagleton defines Marxist criticism this way:

Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature', concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history. .

It argues that literature reflects social conditions and that it is one itself, with a particular ideological function. Literature participates in the series of struggles between oppressed and the oppressing classes which make up human history. Through it, we also can examine how some works attempt to shore up an oppressive social order or how they idealize social conflict out of existence, how others offer an alternative collective life or propose a utopian vision as a solution.

The issue of the literary textbook and history concerned finds important to many debates within Marxism. Marx himself expresses critical concerns with the historicist tendency. He argues that people are products of their circumstances and social upbringing. Therefore, changed people are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is people who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine is bound to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.

In this play *Lights Out*, the playwright clearly portrays the response of 'surrounded' people against a gang rape of a woman. The readers hear the screams and know about it only through the dialogues of remaining characters. On whom? Who involved? How many? All these questions are left to the readers' perception. It is mentioned that gang rape happened in an apartment at night time. That gang rape victim may be a lower caste woman, an employee, a sex worker, or anyone, but a woman, a weakling and meant for bodily pleasure for the male. This literary text is certainly reflecting on the situation of women now and then in the 1980s.

### **Marxism And Women**

## Notes

The patriarchal families and domination of men over women in married life all made the women fight for the social equality. As Lindsey mentioned, “No one walks down the aisle in a white dress thinking they are doing this for the benefit of capital or to reproduce the next generation of workers”.

The focus of Marx is struggle and inequality which is a common theme in domestic violence. Marx discusses how the proletariat and bourgeois are dependent on each other which are also similar in relationships with domestic violence. The proletariat is without property .

The family is the place women and men expect to be loved and cherished, perhaps to bring up children, whether their own or those of their partner. However, the stresses and strains of daily life can make that a nearly impossible task. The family creates expectations about hierarchy and gender roles for all men and women and children, which can be unbearable for individual family members. Heather Brown argues, “men and women always exist and interact within concrete circumstances mediated by definite social relations” . Often relationships creak under the strains they are expected to bear; sometimes the family is an unbearable place to be, and at times it explodes.

Mitra and Ahmed Ghosh suggest that women in India live in a male-dominated society subjugated by heteronormative , and patriarchal ideals. The rigid mindsets with caste, creed, community, family structures contributed to the rapid increase in the domestic violence in society. Recent crimes by their family members on women and girl children show the reluctant behaviour of society and the role of the males in the family towards women.

A girl who was abused by her father reports that her father used to give her alcohol every day before sexually abusing her. She has also named 4-5 friends of her father who also abused her in an inquiry by Dr. Ajeesh Ramachandran, Psychiatrist of the Government District Hospital, Aluva, who treated the child . This was reported by the victim out of severe sufferance, so came into limelight and possible actions were taken. There are so many cases which go unreported due to many socio-psychological reasons and socio-cultural taboo.

Shreya Jani, who runs a peace education NGO in New Delhi, says to a news channel that “Sexual harassment and child abuse is definitely a cause for concern in India.... It’s heartening to see that now more women are reporting these crimes and speaking up. As Indian women, we are a paradox of strength and silence. I am glad the silence is being broken by many now.”

The facts about sexual violence within and outside of the house make this all too clear. In India, a woman is raped every 29 minutes. Incidents of reported rape increased 3% from 2011 to 2012. Incidents of reported incest rape increased 46.8% from 268 cases in 2011 to 392 cases in 2012 . Gang rape and issue of violence against women, in general, have been common to Indian society. According to NCRB data 927 incidents of children’s rapes were reported in 2015, making Delhi most unsafe city for children. Child rights activists and police agree that the actual number could be much bigger .

The almost constant stream of revelations about sexual harassment and worse in the public domain are a reminder, if one was needed, that women are not necessarily safe at work place. Amongst all the twenty-two countries covered by the IPSOS– Reuters survey , India recorded the highest incidence of sexual harassment. Similarly Center for Transforming India survey revealed that nearly 88 percent of women witnessed some form of workplace sexual harassment during the course of their work. Recently media widely reported about a lab assistant who set herself ablaze outside the Delhi Secretariat and succumbed to injuries. She was protesting against sexual harassment she faced from the college principal and termination from the job. She repeatedly filed complaints with several authorities including the University but in vain. Such incidents highlight break down of grievance redress mechanisms within the organizations and throw light on the predicament of women facing sexual harassment at workplace in India .

It is important to remember that feminists and socialists combined in the 1970s to campaign successfully in defense of abortion rights. Today there is no reason why a similar campaign in unions and workplaces could not be equally successful in establishing that sexual harassment of

## Notes

any kind is unacceptable. The acceptance of sexist language in society should be challenged.

Trotsky suggests that “To alter the position of woman at the root is possible only if all the conditions of social, family, and domestic existence are altered”.

Far from empowering women, it reflects the view that women are subordinate to men and reducible to their sexuality. Many women are forced to deal with harassment and unwanted attention because they are women. Inequalities in the position of men and women exist in nearly all societies and sexual harassment at work is a clear manifestation of unequal power relations. Women are vulnerable to the harassment because they lack similar power, lack self-confidence and are socialized that they are to suffer in silence. Sexual harassment is also used as a device to discourage women who may be seen to be competing for power. Discussions of sexual harassment in the international feminist and legal scholarship have been focusing overwhelmingly on the workplace; however adequate attention is yet to be given to harassment issues in universities and public places.

### **Analysis of the play**

The reluctance to get involved, the reluctance to get out and do something, to take a stand is all authentically portrayed in this play. Leela and Bhasker, an upper middle class married couple, have often been hearing to strange sounds of sexual harassment of a woman from their neighboring building. Leela is terrified and traumatized because of these sounds. These sounds make Leela hysterical; she is able to hear the voice of the victim and feel her cries in her subconscious mind. Leela implores to Bhasker to take action against the perpetrators, but all her pleas fall on the deaf ears. Bhasker is least disturbed by all these actions and sounds.

The Scene One starts with Bhasker, who lives in an apartment with the family opposite of it, a newly constructed building which is ready to occupy, but no living atmosphere except nightly scary sounds. His wife, Leela, who is scared of the sounds complains him and requests to find



out the possible solution. Bhasker suggests the possible ways to come out of the issue; he suggests practicing meditation and also educates Leela to learn to ignore. He always thinks of pros and cons without calling the police. Here how the common man is confused and afraid of the Police system and enquiry is shown. Of course, they are neither in a position to tackle the situation nor to get involved in it. Even they struggle in between not to disclose to any friends or relatives.

Leela: When you were away on tour, I couldn't sleep at night! And with all the windows shut, with all the curtains drawn, with cotton in my ears—the sound still came though! Even in the children's room, on the other side of the house, I could hear it! .

Meanwhile, one of Leela's female friends Naina and her husband Surinder arrive at their home unexpectedly. They too get involved in the discussion and begin to interpret things on the basis of the available proofs. All this shows the male attitude towards the suffering of women. Nainais told by Leela, that the strange sounds that she hears are the sounds of locale slum religious ceremony. But Naina grows inquisitive and looks out of the window to know what kind of religious ceremony is taking place exactly and finds to her horror four men assaulting a woman sexually. She is shaken to see three men holding a woman as the fourth attacks her brutally through which the audience/reader also witness the assault.

All male and female characters in the play, just talks of the nightly gang rape that takes place but no one is willing to do anything. They know clearly that some injustice is going on a woman or someone is forcing for sex. The Scene opens in an apartment in Bombay, India. For over half century now, there is no specific law for women. The play clearly examines the society around us as is said by Marx about the 'oppressed' and 'the oppressing' and also the dominating male class who own the woman either or the other way.

The woman in the play, Leela and Naina, are the ones moved by the rape and “nag” the men to take action. The men in the play, especially Bhasker and one of his male friends Mohan, don't mind watching the rape and look for excuses not to do anything. Mohan reveals his desire to

## Notes

see the crime out of curiosity and seek pleasure out of it which is another way of taking advantage of the adverse situation of others. Some of the arguments not to go to the police were: ugly sounds can't hurt; the police will not come even if they are informed; the unnecessary interference if it is a domestic fight; maybe it's something religious and therefore one should not interfere; if the victim is a whore she requires no protection; why should we interfere when we ourselves haven't been harmed; the 'rapists' are human beings and so we must understand that they have problems too; and then the endless discussion on what to do. By which time the rape is over and the rapists have all gone away. The way the play ends sends shivers down the spine.

Through the casual attitude of Bhasker and other male characters in the play Padmanabhan tries to project the mind set of male, usually men try to control women, men are the one to decide what a woman should think, what a woman should do, and what a woman should sense. The chief intention of the unconcerned outlook by Bhasker, his two friends Mohan and Surinder is to build internal dread in the minds of Leela, her friend Naina and Leela's domestic help Frieda. By doing so, they can uphold and sustain the ever-reigning patriarchal power inside as well as outside the home. The display of male dominance and women subversion is evidently seen in 'Lights Out'.

As L. Amrithashwori Devi truly comments, — “The subjugation, the torture or the way our women suffer may be different but the age old system of dominance over women by men will never end and they are and will always be victim in our male chauvinistic society”

Here it is clearly depicted the way the society thinks and behaves with 'others'. 'Other' is every difference from the superior one male to the female. As Marxism says there shouldn't be any classless society, but still it is in dreams and so the equality in between male and female. Because the middle-class attitude to prostitutes or to the poor, where it's all right “as long as it's the poor attacking the poor”, or it is some local religious ceremony put on by “the local slum dweller”, or about what “illiterate people believe” when a demon possesses a woman.

In the Second scene, its dinner time, when Mohan, a guest comes to their house, though they discuss a lot on the issue. Though he is of the opinion that it is unnatural not to involve if suppose someone meets an accident before us.

Mohan: .....It's unnatural not to look. It's unnatural not to get involved.

Manjula tried to peep into the human mindset, where very commonly in Indian society, especially middle class people, who always put themselves in boarders, never involve in such issues. When some unexpected incidents come to us then we remember about the humanity, values, societal changes, inequalities and so on.

When we go on reading the play, we certainly get involved and expect the characters should stop discussing and go for action, which ends very disappointingly, and proves that it's the society where we are living and expecting for identity. Though we live unpleasantly, there are so many people around us, whose lives we should not ignore.

In the last scene, the characters are eating dinner, they think of so many plans to end up the brutal scene going in the neighboring apartment, but they don't do anything. Finally, they think of taking snaps and to make money by selling the authentic rape scene snaps to the news channels and the media. Here one can observe how thoughts change from one to another in the little span of time. In India, such incidents are repeatedly occurring till now, though the play is focusing on the crimes happened in 1986. A woman was gang-raped in Uttar Pradesh, and said the incident had been recorded on a mobile phone by the rapists . Increasingly, perpetrators are recording their crimes on mobile phones to use as a blackmailing tool and to dissuade victims from going to the police. The Independent reported that graphic mobile phone clips of gang rapes are being sold in shops in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, as a spate of rapes in one of the country's most violent states has sparked anger and calls for the chief minister to step down. The clips, which last 30 seconds to five minutes, are being sold in the "hundreds, perhaps thousands, every day. They cost 50-150 rupees each.

## Notes

In the play Bhasker's friend Mohan like people certainly involve in such issues and they take pleasure to watch women appearing before them as a site of gratifying desire as well as transforms into a kind of cultural courtesan.

Another approach of this play is realism, which is a movement in literature and is based on "objective reality", and focused on showing every day, quotidian activities and life. That is primarily among the middle or lower class society, without romantic idealization or dramatization. It may be regarded as the general attempt to depict subjects as they are considered to exist in third person objective reality, without embellishment or interpretation and "in accordance with secular, empirical rules." As such, the approach inherently implies a belief that such reality is ontologically independent of man's conceptual schemes, linguistic practices, and beliefs, and thus can be known to the artist, who can, in turn, represent this 'reality' faithfully. Because a woman is always seen playing a subservient role to a man. The status of the woman and the plight of her suffering is seen between two influential beings, firstly a man, who with his age old dominant power has a control on the woman and secondly a woman who turns into an instrument of his authority.

Manjula has given such precise instructions, and her use of the language and sets is so realistic, that the only choice would be realism. Even her use of time would broadly coincide with the time it takes to enact the play. There is no moving backwards and forwards in time – there is a straight chronological progression of time in this play. Scene one opens with Bhasker coming home from the office, in Scene Two it's dinner time, in Scene Three, the characters are eating dinner, and this is where the play ends. Finally, when we read the incident was a fact, as in the play, a group of ordinary middle-class people chose to stand and watch while a woman was being brutalized in a neighbouring compound, in 1982, one can see that there is no change in the society and it is the same till now. Manjula believes that the growing indifferent attitude of the people is the major cause of the increasing rate of crimes in the society. Marxist criticism also challenges us to remember the 'centrality of class struggle' and the determining 'role of the forces' and 'relations of production to social life' and literary production.

In India, the laws for women should be strict like in developed countries. The expected change in the society is possible when there is social equality. It is the only solution which brings responsibility in society.

The humanity of things will mean shaping a new social system that will manage social equality among the people in the world. This will mean the need for a genuine reform of our political and economic institutions so as to make them fit for a new age. Also, it should also mean that concerted effort is channeled toward solving the political and environmental problems that will fit into the interconnected and highly complex global age. There should be more drama on social equalities and real situations which bring awareness among the people and its impact and effects on cultures and social life of nations. It is in the spirit of trying to change the fortunes of the developing countries that Padmanabhan wrote her play. This is because developing nations are the ones that are badly affected by inequality. According to Rai , Manjula draws our attention to the heart rendering screams of a woman. Women face violence in many aspects of their daily life. This violence is multi-faceted. It is not merely physical but more often mental or emotional and sexual. It is deeply complex, subtle and indirect, hard to recognize and much more difficult to overcome .

Although several case studies exist, few rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of law for women and policies by Government. There is also not much evaluation of the impact of NGOs educational programmes for women about awareness, prevention, and reporting of rape and other forms of sexual victimization, or how effectively people respond to the report of sexual assault. Together, along with social activists and women's associations, this new awareness will help to fill the knowledge gaps in these two areas and shed light on 'what works' to reduce rape and other types of sexual victimization within a women population.

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## **12.3 CHARACTER ANALYSIS**

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### MA

- Being an uneducated lower middle class woman, with no means of earning a livelihood, she represents a large chunk of the female population who go through life as financial dependents on men.
- “Ma” in Padmanabhan, All of them had to lead submissive lives with their husbands. They were subjected to humiliation and even physical abuse. Consequently, they now take revenge by wielding power over their sons and daughters-in-law. They provoke their sons into ill-treating their wives and derive sadistic pleasure from this.
- “Ma in Padmanabhan’s hates her daughter-in-law, Jaya, and lavishes all her love on her elder son, Om. But as a result of her over concern, Om turns out to be a weak-willed, cowardly, spineless man.
- This gives rise to a dual personality in such women, sycophancy toward the male holding the purse strings and tyranny toward the other dependents.
- While Om is addressed with endearments such as “my only delight”, Jaya, her daughter in law and Jeetu, her younger unemployed son, are abused. “ho-you”, “barren dog”, “pimping rascal”, “soul’s disgrace” are some of the words she uses for them. abused. “ho-you”, “barren dog”, “pimping rascal”, “soul’s disgrace” are some of the words she uses for them.
- oppression can warp, undermine, turn us into haters of ourselves.
- But this kind of survival comes at the cost of losing one’s self and one can survive only by developing a sense of detachment to people and surroundings. By the end of the play Ma is “through caring for or about anybody”. Even when the guards drag Jeetu away for his organs, she is interested only in watching T.V. The distaste which women feel for their restricted life is well dramatized in the method that Ma chooses to escape from this kind life. She buys a Super

Deluxe Video Coach. Once she lies down in it tubes are attached to a recycling and bio-feeding processor that takes care of all her needs. Ma, who appears a tyrant but is herself a victim of a repressive patriarchal society chooses to cut herself off mentally and physically from it. She chooses total silence as a route of escape.

## JAYA

- The gesture which underlines the effects of the vice like grip of poverty and patriarchy is where Jaya angrily wipes off the kum-kum mark on her forehead saying “ my forehead burns, when I say the word sister”, when she comes to know that Om, without her knowledge, has declared her as his sister to the company employing him to donate his organs.
- Jaya, in Manjula Padmanabhan’s Harvest, is the only person to survive the power play between the First World and Third World countries. While her husband and brother-in-law give up the fight soon, and her mother-in-law succumbs to the material charms offered, Jaya alone maintains her identity and establishes her right to be thought of as a human being.
- Om does this to circumvent the precondition of the company that the donor has to be unmarried. This gesture, usually associated with widowhood, is useful in making the audience critique the mental anguish of Jaya who does this when her husband is still alive.
- Out of a job for over two years and hemmed into a tiny house, the couple are increasingly frustrated over the quality of their lives when Om finally gets an interview call for a job.
- The catch being that it is from a company, Interplanta Services, that promises a luxurious life in exchange for signing up as an organ-donor for its wealthy clients.

## Notes

- For Jaya the word ‘sister’ being used in connection to herself and Om is like a death knell to her marital relationship. Her actions create an empathy in the audience as it is on the basis of this relationship, a large part of her identity, that Jaya is living in that home. The pain that this distortion of relationships causes is reinforced when Ma says “ But these aren’t words! They are people”. The word ‘sister’ negates the very foundation of her life and so the gest forms a point of enquiry into the circumstances forcing Om to take such a decision. For a person like Om, unemployed and struggling to provide two square meals to his family, calling his wife ‘sister’ on paper is a small price to pay if it ensures financial solvency. The gest problematizes the desperate situation in modern day society which forces a man to choose between being cut up/ dying one day at a time and abject poverty.
- when Jaya’s life seems to be at stake. Jaya comes to know that she has been the actual target of the organ buyer, Virgil, and that after using the bodies of both Om and Jeeten, he is now intent on impregnating her with his seed mechanically to propagate his race, irrespective of her wishes.
- Manjula Padmanabhan’s Harvest tells the futuristic story of a family in a third world country which becomes the “donor” for a member of a first world country. Jaya, “passionate and spirited is the only strong character in the play. No other character, except Jaya, shows any development. The play begins with Jaya and her mother-in-law waiting for the arrival of Om, Jaya’.
- What characterizes Jaya is her boldness. She is the only one bold enough to ask questions during the installation of the contact module and the food supply. She puts up a resistance as her kitchen utensils are thrown away. Being dissatisfied with her marital life, she seeks distraction with Jeetu. She is aware of her sexual urges and finds fulfilment with him. Her compassion for him :makes her take care of him when he comes back sick and covered with sores. Again, she is the only one to protest when Jeetu is taken away instead of Om.



- It is in the final scene of the play that Jaya evolves into the towering figure. When Virgil appears before her as an illusion created by the contact module, in Jeetu's body, Jaya realizes that Jeetu's body has been used by Virgil to prolong his life. Virgil had observed Jaya through the module and had grown to admire her spirited nature. He needs Jaya—"We're interested in women where I live, Zhaya .Childbearing women" .His country has lost the art of having children and is now in the process of getting bodies from poorer countries to populate it. He entices her with sweet words and with the promise of sensual pleasures to accept the implant which will make her insemination possible. However, though she wants to attain motherhood, she is not ready to get it by sacrificing her womanhood. She demands that if he needs her, he come to her in person. He refuses because her world would be a health hazard for him. She insists that she will not deal with a phantom any longer. Finally, she blackmails him by threatening him with suicide. The play ends with Jaya setting the terms and conditions. She will take pills for staying awake. If he does not come when she runs out of them, she will kill herself. ". . . I'll die knowing that you, who live only to win, will have lost to a poor, weak and helpless woman. And I'll get more pleasure out of that first moment of death than I've had in my entire life so far!" . In the meantime, she tells him to learn to pronounce her name correctly. Thus, "her spirit remains unconquered even in the face of insurmountable odds" . She fights for her rights as a woman and as a human being. The dramatist ends on a positive note "that hope still lies in this woman, a symbol of procreation" .
- Thus, Jaya emerges victorious in this power play between man and woman. She does not succumb to the panoptic gaze of the contact module. The reproductive power of women, often seen as a debilitating factor, is made by the dramatist into a trump card. She seems to stress the point that in this matter, women will always score over men. "Penis envy" is supplanted by "womb envy".

## Notes

- In an interview with Sunita Paul, Manjula Padmanabhan says that the play talks of the power equation between the first world and the third world :
- I hope it does try and address the duality of this relationship. It isn't purely first world-third world, power-powerless. The power equation does flow back and forth. There is a dependence of the first world on the third world which is we recognized in real life. As people living in the third world we are encouraged to think that we have nothing to give, but in fact even today, we are actually giving our minds, our body and our labour to the first world all the time.
- If we replace the first world with man, and the third world with woman, we have bare the relation between them. What needs to be acknowledged is the interdependence of man and woman. In the same interview, Padmanabhan stresses this point: "The Ardhanarishwar concept appeals to me greatly. The idea of a joined consciousness that borrows from both sides" .
- As Ma and Jaya await Om's return, Jaya, knowing what the job entails, hopes that he will not.

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## 12.4 IMPLICATION OF INSENSITIVITY IN MANJULA PADMANABHAN'S LIGHTS OUT

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Indian English Drama has a very few women dramatists. Out of the few, Manjula Padmanabhan seems to be engaged in a serious attempt to bring about a positive attitudinal change in women towards themselves as well as in society towards women. This paper is a study of Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* in the light of gender insensitivity and its implications. Manjula Padmanabhan started this play as a piece of journalism based on a friend's account of how she and a group of people were witnesses to a gang rape in their neighborhood. They were informed that it was a regular occurrence and the residents adjust their daily schedules accordingly. About the writing of the play the dramatist

says that the Bombay's Sunday Observer could not see any "news" in the story, as it was a year old. It can mostly be presented as a general piece about crimes against women, she was told. With Rekha Khanna, the then editor, assuring the dramatist of support and help in getting the play produced, she wrote this play, first performed as an excellent reading in Madras, and later in Bombay and Delhi. It was also filmed for television. The crux of the play is that in domestic problems which prevail in every house hold, women, the silent sufferer, is subjected to both mental and physical abuse day after day. She is forced to live as a mute victim of psychological and emotional trauma of everyday existence replete with seen/unseen violence. As the play unfolds, the reader or audience is bound to realize that woman in her roles of wife, mother or daughter suffers domestic abuse. Manjula Padmanabhan handles this sensitive issue with great subtlety.

Of the Indian women dramatists Manjula Padmanabhan attempted to bring about a positive attitudinal change in women towards themselves as well as in society towards women. She represents the contemporary drama to show that the women dramatists of Indian English drama, though very few in number, have emerged as a formidable force to reckon within India and abroad. She is one of the foremost among contemporary Indian English dramatists. Her artistic concerns lay with many millions of people "whose lives I cannot ignore – and which have an impact on my life – who seems to live beyond the edge of the acceptable universe". Truly the characters of her plays are 'People I look at: describe and comment upon'. Answering a question on what she learned from the confrontation of her characters the dramatist replies that she identifies herself with all her characters. Says the dramatist: "I wear all their masks when I write about them, regardless of who they are and what they do". Manjula Padmanabhan, a "rather slow, sleepy, middle aged person with short hair and fondness for the internet," created ripples in Indian English literature by being the first recipient of International Onassis Prize. A dramatist who believes in natural morality, who does not like rules and regulations, which prevent free flow of ideas and choices, has a unique technique of combining situations and characters in her dramas. Yet she has an uncanny ability of

## Notes

distancing herself from her creation, “You cannot watch a sunset unless you are at some distance from it”.

A dramatist who started her career as a cartoonist, Padmanabhan knows pretty well that there is ‘cruel side to humor.’ The dramatist uses humor “Channeling the rough stuff going on around her” . She further says that humor is like ‘sugar coating on a pill – it helps the medicine go down.’ Truly enough, for a cartoonist, dramatist, short storywriter and novelist that Manjula Padmanabhan is reflecting the real world and its issues edging on the ‘cruel side of humor’ seems to be of primary importance. In the play, a group of ordinary middle class people mostly men, choose to stand and watch while a woman gets molested in the neighboring compound. It is a one-act play with six characters. The action of the play unfolds in an upper middle class drawing dining area of a sixth floor apartment in Mumbai. Leela, the lady of the house is frustrated with the screams and sounds she hears every day in their vicinity. She accuses her husband’s carelessness in lodging a complaint. The following reveals the taken-for granted attitude of an average husband and the wife’s feeling of neglect in a normal Indian household: “You don’t care what I feel, what I go through every day! ... I feel frightened. All through the day, I feel tense ... At first it was only at the time it was going on. Then as soon as it got dark. Then around tea time, when the children came from school. Then in the middle of the day. Whenever the doorbell rang. Then in the morning. When I sent children off to school. And now – from the moment I wake up...”

Leela becomes paranoid about the noises in the next building to such an extent that she stops sending the children out. She spends the whole day with the door shut, curtains closely drawn and stuffing her ears with cotton to avoid the sound. Yet she hears it all over the house including the children’s room. By watching and hearing the noises every day, Leela feels they are in fact making themselves responsible, revealing the active role a woman assumes in the making of a society in spite of being confined to the four walls: “That we’re part of ... of what happens outside. That by watching it, we’re making ourselves responsible....”

Bhasker, the husband who knows where the screams originate from remains apathetic: ‘But see I’m not deaf and I’m not disturbed by them’ . Much to her chagrin he tries to prove to her that police complaint would not really hold good in terms of law: “... So why should we waste a phone call” “... I don’t want to stick my necks out, that’s all” .

The women folk of the apartment complex express their readiness in lodging a complaint. But with their constraints as women they know none can do it alone. Leela comments, “No one wants to do it alone” .

There is an element of suspense attached to the issue under discussion between Bhasker and Leela. Bhasker who knows what it is all about suppresses information from Leela: “... there’s no guarantee it’ll be on tonight...” The following lines from the text reveal the by-standers apathy of people as well as the callousness of the police force in the country: “You never know with the police these days. They may say it’s none of our business, what goes on in the next door compound. After all, there’s the chowkidar...”

The first scene ends with Leela trying in vain to keep her cool reflective of a women’s sensitivity to her surroundings: “I was, really I was. I did just what my guruji told me. I sat on a cushion, there by the window and I made my mind blank. I thought of a white wall, in the nothing written on it. And I thought of the cosmos, and of breath, coming in... and out ... in ... and out ... in... and out. And in my mind I said .. Om... again and again .... Om .. Om .. until my mind became absolutely quiet, absolutely calm..... Om...Om...Om....”

Mohan, Bhasker’s friend adds a new dimension to the typical male response a crime to be depicted in the play. He expresses his curiosity over how often one can stand and watch a crime being committed right in one’s presence. The conversation that follows between Mohan and Bhasker throws light on the voyeuristic pleasure one derives by watching an act of crime. Mohan says,

“But this! Just for enough not to get involved, just close enough to see everything clearly. Or so Bhasker tells me”. “... These intellectuals always react like that, always confuse simple issues. After all, what’s the

## Notes

harm in simply watching something? Even when there's an accident in the street, don't we all turn our heads to look?"

What follows is a middle class intellectual analysis, which invariably leads to inaction: Mohan: "... how shall I describe what I mean? Was there ...

Okay! Was it, for instance, like a singer's voice, high and sweet? Was it musical?"

Bhasker : "... What sort of situation would produce that, d'you suppose?" Mohan : "...

Well, all right, we'll rule out pleasure for the moment.... After all, it may be something private, a domestic fight; how can we intervene? ... Personally, I'm against becoming entangled in other people's private lives. Outsiders can never really be the judge of who is right and who is wrong". "Well, the assailants tear the clothes off the victims and then, perhaps in the general excitement, remove their own clothes as well".

The discussion reveals that the crime is a rape and for sure that the two men take pleasure in discussing it. Commenting on the discussion, Anjum Hasan says: A group of ordinary middle class people chose to stand and watch while a woman was being brutalized in the neighboring compound. However, this is something that is revealed only at the end. As the tension in the play builds up, one gets drawn into what seems like an absurd comedy – the insistent sounds of women's terrified screams are discussed by two nonchalant men and uneasy woman in a manner an archetypal is almost bizarre. If Bhasker is a 'protective' husband-- "Don't say anything" out loud – Leela will get upset!"

Mohan passes off as a class conscious pseudo intellectual: "Well, as long as it's the poor attacking the poor .. You know how it is... They live their lives and we live ours". However, both are archetypal symbols of male chauvinism that dominate a society: Mohan's observations, knowing pretty well that it is a rape are at once disgusting. Their observations--that 'the screaming', the wild abandon, the exhibitionism,

yes, even the nakedness --” lead them to conclude that the noise ‘Can be part of religious ceremony! Sacred rites’ ...

The discussion that follows shows that anything can be passed off under the banner of religion in a secular country:

“Not if it’s in the name of religion. Look at Sadhus? They sit willingly on nails or walk across smoldering coal. Look at the fast days? The flagellation with knives”

The whole discussion is a pointer on how a serious matter can be made to appear frivolous in the course of an intellectual analysis. The discussion also points out how middle class morality determines one to impose one's own value based judgements on issues which concern the larger public.

Scene III opens with the crime under discussion actually taking place with the victim helplessly shouting for help. Mohan, Leela and Bhasker are found discussing the banquet the cook has produced, as Leela's feminine instinct is alert to what is happening outside. Mohan, the intellectual too agrees that the actual sound is unpleasant and that it sets his teeth on edge.

The entry of Naina, Leela's school friend changes the tone of the play. Naina recognizes some one's call for help. She loses no time in getting ready to rush. As expected the men folk prevent her from doing so. They all try to make her believe that the screams are all part of a religious ritual, but she prefers to see it herself to believe it. Naina smells something fishy about the whole thing from the way Bhasker and Mohan stop her from going out. When Naina peeps out of window, Bhasker and Mohan rush to the rescue of the horrified Naina. Bhasker, the ‘responsible’ husband tries to divert Naina's attention, lest Leela should get upset with the disclosure. As Mohan remains at the window mesmerized, Naina shouts. “Someone's being ... There's a woman being-”

What follows is a description of rape through the eyes of Mohan and Bhasker a la chorus in a Greek drama. Mohan: “Earlier I saw them actually sort of pounding and kicking – in rhythm, almost –“ Bhasker: “

## Notes

...see, they're kicking her – ..... And there now- they're hitting her with their fists, aren't they?... Mohan: "One man each leg. spread wide apart –"  
" Bhasker: "... Well, you know, illiterate people believe that when a demon possesses a woman, it is always via the - uh – lower orifice"-  
Mohan : "yes, of course, and that's why, earlier, they were dragging her around in that ungainly position, as if to coax the demon to come out".  
When Naina insists that it is nothing but a rape, a mocking Mohan says:  
"You must've seen a lot of rape... to recognize ..." –

Disgusted Naina shoots back:

"Three men, holding down one woman, with her legs pulled apart .....  
What would you call that ---a poetry reading?" – Both the men pull Naina into a revolting discussion on rape, with the men insisting that the victim could be a whore. Lude exhibitionism of male chauvinism of the average Indian male gets revealed in this Scene III of the play. Mohan comes out as symbol of an insensitive urban male, "You see, if she were a decent woman, we people would go to her rescue! ... She is not, and so she's being left to her fate!" while Bhasker emerges as a middle class escapist, an upholder of "decency and middle class values". – They [whores] live at the outer limits of human society," concludes Bhasker...

Naina, whose entry initially promises some positive action, too ends up intellectualizing rape, this time from a woman's point of view: "And women believe they are vulnerable to rape -"

Unfortunately, the entire discussion dilutes the much needed action to stop the crime. The discussion also throws light on how today's media functions: Mohan: "Hey, come on! Any newspaper! Pictures like these, even the foreign press would snap them up---I'm telling you, we'd make a lot of money— after all, how often does anyone see authentic pictures of a gang-rape in action ?"

A play based on a real incident concerning the vulnerability of women ends up as a mere drawing room or dinner table discussion. However, the play emerges as a strong voice of protest against physical vulnerability of women. What Manjula Padmanabhan "appears interested in exploring, against the backdrop of the sound, are the implications of a insensitivity,



so extreme that it has developed a strange, cold logic of its own,” says Anjum Hasan.

### Check your Progress-1

1. Name one of Bhasker’s friend.

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2. What does “Lights Out” by Manjula Padmanabhan talk about?

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3. Who is Bhasker’s wife?

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## 12.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we learned about the Marxist Analysis, Character Analysis and Implication Of Insensitivity In Manjula Padmanabhan’s Lights Out.

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## 12.6 KEYWORDS

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- **Vulnerability** : The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.
- **Exhibitionism**: Extravagant behavior that is intended to attract attention to oneself.
- **Chauvinism**: Exaggerated or aggressive patriotism.
- **Frivolous**: Not having any serious purpose or value.

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## 12.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

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- Write a short note on Marxist analysis of Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out.
- Write a brief note on Character analysis of Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out.
- Write a note on Implication Of Insensitivity In Manjula Padmanabhan's Lights Out.

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## 12.8 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

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## 12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- Mohan is Bhasker's friend.
- "Lights Out" by Manjula Padmanabhan throws light on the gender inequality as well as insensitivity and its consequences.
- Leela is Bhasker's wife.

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# **UNIT-13 AMIT CHAUDHURI – “NOTES ON THE NOVEL AFTER GLOBALIZATION” AND “HUGE BAGGY MONSTER : MIMETIC THEORIES OF THE INDIAN NOVEL AFTER RUSHDIE” FROM HIS BOOK CLEARING THE SPACE-1**

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## **STRUCTURE**

13.0 Objectives

13.1 Introduction

13.2 Regional Sensibility in the Novels of Amit Chaudhuri

13.3 Mapping Cultural Sensibility

13.4 Let us sum up

13.5 Keywords

13.6 Questions for Review

13.7 Suggested Reading and References

13.8 Answers to Check your Progress

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## **13.0 OBJECTIVES**

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Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about Regional Sensibility in the Novels of Amit Chaudhuri;
- and further, you would also go through the Mapping Cultural Sensibility in the Novels of Amit Chaudhuri.

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## **13.1 INTRODUCTION**

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## Notes

Amit Chaudhuri is a novelist, poet, essayist, literary critic, editor, singer and music composer. He was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2009. He is a professor of Contemporary Literature at the University of East Anglia.

### **Personal life**

Amit Chaudhuri was born in Calcutta in 1962 and grew up in Bombay. His father was Nages Chandra Chaudhuri, the first Indian CEO of Britannia Industries Limited, and his mother, Bijoya Chaudhuri was a highly acclaimed singer of Rabindra Sangeet, Nazrul Geeti, Atul Prasad and Hindi bhajans. He was a student at the Cathedral and John Connon School, Bombay. He took his first degree in English Literature from the University College London, and wrote his doctoral dissertation on D. H. Lawrence's poetry at Balliol College, Oxford. He is married to Rosinka Chaudhuri, a critic and literary historian, and they have one daughter, Aruna.

Chaudhuri began writing a series for The Paris Review titled The Moment from January 2018.

### **Activism**

In response to the marginalization of the literary by both the market and by academia, Amit Chaudhuri began, in December 2014, a series of annual symposiums on what he called 'literary activism'. This brought together writers, academics, and artists each year. One of the features of Chaudhuri's initiative has been a resistance to specialization, or what he calls 'professionalization'. The project has involved the fashioning of a new terminology by Chaudhuri, in which he creates terms like 'market activism', and assigns very particular means to words like 'literary activism' and 'deprofessionalisation'.

A collection of essays from the first symposium was published in 2017 by Boiler House Press in the UK, and by OUP in India and the US.

In 2015, Chaudhuri began drawing attention to Kolkata's architectural legacy and campaigning for its conservation.

### **Music**

Amit Chaudhuri is a singer in the North Indian classical tradition. He learned singing from his mother, the well-known exponent of Tagore songs and devotionals, Bijoya Chaudhuri, and from the late Pandit Govind Prasad Jaipurwale of the Kunwar Shyam gharana. In the 1990s, he learnt new compositions from Pandit A. Kanan. He has performed worldwide. HMV India has released two recordings of his singing, and a selection of the khayals he has performed on CD. Bihaan Music brought out a collection called *The Art of the Khayal* in 2016.

- Puriya Dhanashree
- Jog Bahar Drut
- Meera Bhajan
- Jog Bahar Tarana
- E parabase rabe ke, Rabindra Sangeet
- Chandrasakhi

In 2004, he began to conceptualise a project in experimental music, *This is Not Fusion*, which received critical acclaim upon its inaugural performance in Calcutta on January 15, 2005. His first CD of experimental music, *This Is Not Fusion*, was released in Britain on the independent jazz label, Babel LabelK. His second CD, *Found Music*, came out in October 2010 in the UK from Babel and was released in India from EMI. It was an [allaboutjazz.com](http://allaboutjazz.com) Editor's Choice of 2010.

### **Awards and honours**

- 1991 Betty Trask Award and Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book for *A Strange and Sublime Address*
- 1994 Encore Award and Southern Arts Literature Prize, *Afternoon Raag*
- 1999 Los Angeles Times Book Prize, *Freedom Song*
- 2002 Sahitya Akademi Award, *A New World*
- 2012 Rabindra Puraskar, *On Tagore*
- 2012 Infosys Prize for the Humanities in Literary Studies.

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## Notes

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## 13.2 REGIONAL SENSIBILITY IN HIS NOVELS

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Amit Chaudhuri is a versatile writer of contemporary Indian English Literature. He is a poet, novelist, essayist and literary critic and also a good singer. He has been acclaimed worldwide for his novels and love for Indian classical music. He has made a mark in the pantheon of contemporary Indian writers in English. His writings are conspicuous, striking and vibrating touch the heart of his readers. His works reflect the Indian values and Bengali sensibility, simplicity and distinctiveness of language which speak to the reader and pave a ground for them to move forward. Chaudhuri's controlled writing, which is very lyrical, firmly places him in the frontline of contemporary Indian Writing in English. That is to say, Bengali ethos and Indian values are primary concern in the writings of Amit Chaudhuri who has a great concern for Indian values and Bengali sensibility. He initiated his literary career with poems and wrote five novels. He seems to have maintained in his writings Indian values, Bengali culture and tradition. Amit Chaudhuri's works show the influence of a particular space on the characters and events of his novels. He describes the hills, the forests, the roads, the buildings, the architecture, the towns and the countryside of his region and gives

## Notes

maximum exposure to them. It has been used as a background of his works. The region is much more than a mere setting or background of his works. It plays an important role in the development of the story and characterization. The region participates in the works of Chaudhuri with all its aspects: nature, culture, legends, customs, conventions, superstitions, topography, and environment. He describes farmers, businessmen, labourers, fairs, market places, river-bridges and sea, the backwardness and superstitions of the local people, rustic songs and dances and Bengali dishes etc. all with a wide knowledge and acute feeling because he has known them intimately.

The present paper is a modest attempt to elucidate and analyse the tropes of regional sensibility in the novels of Amit Chaudhuri. It is an open fact that in the postmodern era, the individual has become everything, and people extend greater importance to individuality. The personal being political as the password of contemporary cultural milieu, it has become a tendency of all post-colonial writers to highlight their cultures and region of the particular areas sometimes culminating into glocalization. Amit Chaudhuri belongs to this category of writers and depicts Bengali Culture and its people in his novels.

Amit Chaudhuri represents both a synthesis of and a tension between his Bengali and postmodern sensibility. His writings serve as a wonderful key to understanding the vitality and specificity of Indian modernity and of modern transformation of Indian civilization. His works reflect the Indian values coated in Bengali sensibility.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the term 'regional sensibility' has been used to denote an intellectual and emotional perceptiveness, the sense employed by T.S. Eliot when he described the "Dissociation of Sensibility." Regional sensibility means characteristic ways of responding in perception, thought, and feeling to experience. It emphasizes the setting, speech, social structure and customs of a particular locality. It manifests not only the local colour but also an important condition affecting the temperament of the characters and their ways of thinking, feeling and interacting. Chaudhuri's works deal with the physical features, people, life, customs, habits, manners, traditions, languages and life-styles of



people of his own region. This, however, does not mean that Chaudhuri's work is a mere factual reporting or photographic reproduction of reality. His regional sensibility emphasizes the uniqueness, and the various ways in which it is different from other localities. Thus, regional sensibility means the cultural and moral attitude of people, their overall characters, and customs and the way of life. Chaudhuri's writing is characterized by the prominence of regional sensibility in his fictional oeuvre.

Amit Chaudhuri cultivated a subversive alternative ethos, distinguished by his crystalline miniaturist style, which means his moral ideas and attitude belong to the particular Bengali society and culture. Though he was born in Kolkata, grew up in Mumbai, and studied in England, yet he could never forget his childhood; most of his novels are set in Mumbai and Kolkata. In his first novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Vikram, a school-going boy, describes the gradual awakening to the life of a young writer to be in vibrant Calcutta household. *Afternoon Raag* found its narrator studying at Oxford and remembering his early boyhood life. *Freedom Song* returned to Calcutta to follow the interconnected lives of their Bengali families, observed with contemplative humanity that is Chaudhuri's landmark. His next novel, *A New World*, exemplifies the author's preoccupation with the theme of childhood. *The Immortal* alternates between Bombay and Calcutta, focusing on the characters involved in their love and practice of music. It is impressive and rare, and it seems somewhat old-fashioned in its slowness, its refusal to tip toward facile plotting, grandeur and postmodern irony. The clash between the old and the new is in fact a central theme of the novel. Broadly speaking, Chaudhuri examines the ways in which customs both unite families and pull them apart, and the anxieties stirred by that struggle.

Chaudhuri's novels explore the disconnected fragments of the quotidian, idiosyncratically refract, rather than mimetically reflect, the larger historical realities of the public spheres of rational life. His novel is, in fact, a continual reminder that the marginalized objects, practices and behavior patterns of everyday life are valuable sites of the rent and ideologically conflicted cultural realities of post-independence India, and that such sites often have a domestic habitat. One such ideological

## Notes

tension within the modern nation-state has been the gradual disappearance of the traditional, spiritually driven Gandhian model of life vis -a vis the emergence of ideals of Nehruvian secular socialist modernity. This duality is identified in a scene in Chaudhuri's first novel,

*A Strange and Sublime Address*, which captures the middle class Calcutta, a city of industrial and economic stagnation but with the unique cultural flavor, seen through the eyes of the twelve-year-old protagonist, Sandeep, who comes to the city from Mumbai to spend his summer vacation in the household of his maternal uncle. *A Strange and Sublime Address* is the story of a school-going boy. The novel has a very thin plot; it is a journey down memory lane. The protagonist, Sandeep, a ten-year-old boy, lives with his parents in a multi-storeyed building— twenty-third floor of a twenty-five floor building. Every year during the summer vacation he comes to Calcutta with his mother and stays at the house of his maternal uncle. The world here is quite different from the one in Bombay. With a feeling of amazement, he enjoys his new world. A vivid picture of Calcutta life— its summer, its power-cuts, the daily puja of the household deity, the hustle and bustle of city life – is faithfully depicted. This gives the readers a clear idea about a typical middle-class household in Calcutta. With dexterous skill, Chaudhuri recreates in the novel simple pleasures of childhood bathing, eating, and also sleeping. And the writer successfully transforms this world of children into a universal vision. The narration does not merely present a story, it makes us live and share an actual experience with minute details of time and place.

In his fiction, Mumbai figures as the symbol of disorienting modernity to be contrasted with Kolkata. It is informed by a lyrical sense of the loss of self. What for Rushdie is a supplementation of identity, the possibility of an idea of Indianness built on the very differences within the culture, is for Chaudhuri more often a lack, a sense of disorienting loss. Every detail in the novel has its proper place and the detail is deeply linked with the child's world - view just opposed against adult choices and attitudes. The detail at once arouses feeling for the whole narrative not really one of nostalgia but a sense of loss, a sense of dislocation.

Sandeep, the main character of novel seems to be a portrayal of Amit Chaudhuri's own childhood who celebrates not only the simple joys of childhood-bathing, eating, sleeping and exploring the city-but also how the business of living, working, coming to terms with the world of senses imposes an increasing burden on the soul. From an organized and lonely life of a flat in Bombay, Sandeep comes to Calcutta to spend his holidays at his uncle's home. Through the eyes of the ten-year-old, a vast, kaleidoscopic backdrop emerges, and even such a simple act as bathing takes on the overtones of a ritual and a keen sense of nostalgia assails us. A passage like this shows the twin themes inextricably linked in Chaudhuri's novel: the celebration of simple joys of childhood and the evocation of a way of life. This comes out forcibly in the lunch that follows; it is as if he opens our taste buds and the tastes stay long after the lunch is over:

Pieces of boil fish, cooked in turmeric, red chilli paste, onions and garlic, lay in a red, fiery sauce in a flat pan; rice, packed into an oven-white cake, had a spade-like spoon embedded in it; slices of fried aborigine were arranged on a white dish; dal was served from another pan with a drooping ladle; long complex filaments of banana flower, exotic, botanical, lay in yet another pan in a dark sauce; each plate had a heap of salt on one side, a green chilli, and a slice of sweet-smelling lemon. The grown-ups snapped the chillies and scattered the tiny, deadly seeds in their food. If any of the boys were ever brave or foolish enough to bite a chilli their eyes filled tragically with tears, and they longed to drown in a cool, clean lake. Though Chhoto mama was far from affluent, they ate well, especially on Sundays, caressing the rice and the sauces on their plates with attentive sensuous fingers, fingers which performed a practiced and graceful ballet on the plate till it was quite empty.

The conflict of worldviews mentioned above is here crystallized in the scene where a younger relative, during a social visit, tries to touch the elder's feet as a traditional gesture of respect, but the latter refuses to let him do so. This behavioral conflict becomes, in Chaudhuri's narration, the dichotomy between "Nehru's secular India, free of ritual and religion," and "the old, 'traditional' India -Gandhi's India of ceremony and custom" In *Afternoon Raag*, the narrator, when physically situated

## Notes

in Oxford, often returns in his thoughts to his family home in Bombay and, later, to Calcutta. He straddles the two worlds literally — on his trips back and forth — and more importantly, imaginatively. The new surroundings of the Oxford campus, as well as the house in Bombay to which the narrator's parents have moved, prompt a range of sensual reactions. Sharma, the protagonist of the novel in *Afternoon Raag*, is not like many Indians who go to Oxford and change their style of living. All the same, he has generous openness, is adept at picking up English customs and making English friends and does not betray that he feels homesick or alienated. The narrator is fond of Sharma's company but he does not allow him to disrupt his world of wistful longing, loneliness and languor. Nor can Shehnaz and Mandira the two women who 'were waiting to happen' to him. The discussion reveals how Chaudhuri has captured the essence of the city of Calcutta and the life there. Though the narrative focus remains largely confined to the household where the narrator Sandeep stays with his Chhoto mama, the adjacent surroundings, the peace of the life in the city and host of other local details make

*A Strange and Sublime Address* an engaging novel. The second novel, *Afternoon Raag*, is remarkable for its evocation of Bengali music and by extension its depiction of Bengali life through the patches of memory. Oxford and Calcutta are skillfully brought in for comparison but the local essence of Calcutta seems to be strange and more evocative.

*Freedom Song* is about the life of three generations of an extended family set in Calcutta in the 1990s, the novel chronicles the lives of Bhola and his sister Khuku and their respective families, portraying the banalities of daily life: eating, sleeping, and going to work. In the novel, Bhola's family lives in a house on Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar Road with his wife and three children. Khuku lives with her husband Shib nearby, and her friend Mimi is staying with them. Running through the novel, is a strong sense of stability and continuity of domestic life that anchors home against external changes taking place in Calcutta as well as in India in general. These changes include communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims, globalization and economic liberalisation, diasporic scattering of family members living worldwide.

Freedom Song represents a more subtle shift in the changing middle class values, showing gradual transition and change in the structure and decoration of the houses and the arrival and departure of family members. The novel revolves around the lives and reminiscences of two families, Khuku and her husband Shib, a couple in their sixties, and of Khuku's younger less prosperous brother Bhola and his wife Abha, and the family's marriage plans for their unambitious son Bhaskar. It is about the lives of educated middle class family. The important things that make up the novel are the individual, the trajectories of their lives, the situations, the moment that are part of their indelible memories and desires and the web of their social life, its compulsions and desires and the web of their social life, its complications and complexities. The important characters who figure in the world of this novel are Khuku and Shib, Bhola and his wife Abha, Mini and Shantidi Bhaskar and his nephew, Mohit son of Puti and a few other relations and acquaintances. So, we can say that it is almost family saga.

Chaudhuri's novels are primarily descriptions of people and places. As the title Freedom Song makes it clear that the novel is a song but of Bengali culture and Kolkata rather than any kinds of freedoms. Dr. Anu Shukla has something to say about the title, Freedom Song, in her article "Such Stuff as Amit Chaudhuri's Song is made on":

The title Freedom Song is as difficult to explain as the title of Amit Chaudhuri's first novel A Strange and Sublime Address. At first sight we are led to think that it must be a song which either leads to freedom or celebrates it. However, at a deeper probing we find that the absence and not presence of freedom happens to be at core of the narrative. The title is both suggestive and ironical, and irony is one of the strands that weave the narrative. Thus, social freedom too appears to be withering away with the ever-increasing intervention of multinationals and forces of privatization. Individual freedom appears to be at stale because of the compulsive, conventional social structures. The title sings of not the freedom of country but what freedom has come to. Freedom Song, however, is neither the song of nation nor the narration of the nation but a part of nation, Bengal or to be precise part of Bengal, Kolkata and the part synecdochically and elliptically embraces the whole. It is a song

## Notes

with no hangover of postcolonialism and no shadows of Rushdie Indian English novel.

The novelist sings of Bengali culture and Kolkata he is like Bhaskar in this novel who as a boy went around the house chanting “We are Bengalis” after reading a book titled “We are Bengalis and thereby understating” what a wonderful thing it was to be a Bengali and that he was a Bengali himself” . All the novels of Chaudhuri are rooted in Bengali way of life and Kolkata, even when he is writing about Oxford and Mumbai.

*A New World* is all about relationships between parents and children. Jayojit’s parents are deftly depicted. His father is a retired Admiral of the Indian Navy. After a life of privilege, the old man and his wife now have to fend for themselves and count every penny of their dwindling savings. The retired Admiral has to take the bus to the bank because he can no longer afford a chauffeur for his battered old car. But he is proud, when Jayojit wants to buy a washing machine for his mother, his father objects. His mother is disappointed, but she can’t go against her husband. It’s a traditional Indian marriage. Jayojit’s father doesn’t even always speak to his wife though they clearly depend on each other. The narrative of this novel starts with Jayojit, a Bengali economist, teaching in America. He visits his parents in Calcutta during his college holidays with his seven-year-old son, Bonny. He has recently divorced his wife, also a Bengali from Calcutta, who has left him to live with her lover who is a gynecologist and lives in America. The story describes his stay in Calcutta. In the process, we see his interaction with his parents, his parent's relationship and his own relationship with his parents. There are also flashback to his broken marriage and his parents’ abortive attempt to arrange a second marriage for him with a Bengali divorcee. He had met her on his previous visit but they had got nowhere. She had backed out; he now leaves from his father, because he had seemed to be looking not so much for a wife as a governess for his son. Chaudhuri is excellent at portraying little boys. It was a little boy at the center of *A Strange and Sublime Address* that gave its story a wonderful freshness: it was written from his perspective. Bonny, Jayojit’s son is beautifully described too. The story comes into life whenever he is on the scene. It’s not as if he is

naughty or mischievous or does anything special-self-sufficient, self-conscious, playing with his toys, just by being himself, he draws affection from his father, doting on grandparents and their readers too. In *The Immortals* Amit Chaudhuri utilizes music, foods, and clothes as a metaphor in his novels to show how trans-valuation of values is taking place in the matter-driven modern society. He builds the narrative around the ragas of music to show the difficulty of those artists who are struggling to find their right place in the fashion of popular art culture. Chaudhuri charts the by-ways of the Indian soul, and thus marks in the pantheon of contemporary writers. His works reflect the Indian values coated in Bengali sensibility. This chapter intends to assess how music reflects culture.

*The Immortals* is a story of two families: one luxuriating in a new world of corporate affluence and the other is getting by on the old world of musical tradition. Together, they are joined by a common, day-to-day pursuit of music. Music is the thread that ties the novel. The setting of the novel is in Bombay during the 1970s and early 1980s. Mallika Sengupta, the central character of the novel, married to a high-profile executive, has never pursued a career in music but her musical interests are more than the casual hobby of a rich woman.

Chaudhuri has no plot or story to tell in his novels; rather he describes day-to-day living and experiences of everyday lives like getting up in the morning, reading news paper, taking bath, having meals, visiting relations and so on. It is thus clear that Chaudhuri considers the poetry of the common place to be the importance and the importance he attaches to is well reflected in his writings. He finds magic in the ordinary, and so he depicts just the small, ordinary details of everyday life of an individual in his novels. We have already seen that almost nothing spectacular happens in his novels unless small happenings and events can be called spectacular. He writes about familiar, ordinary things of daily lives in such a way that it gets defamiliarized. His novels amply illustrate how he defamiliarizes the familiar; poeticizes the ordinary and makes humdrum things exciting.

## Notes

Chaudhuri's novels abound in beautiful images. For Chaudhuri, image is important; it is a visual experience for him. So, he poetically renders the events and characters in his novels. He describes them so vividly and beautifully and in such a way that they seem new and interesting. As far as sight is concerned, nothing which can kindle the imagination of the writer can escape him. He can register all kinds of sounds; he can render various kinds of smell and tastes. He can feel the breeze as well as the storm. Imagery in fact is an indispensable part of his writings.

Thus, a discussion of Amit Chaudhuri's works in the main analysis show how the notion of regional sensibility informs his works, his overall ethos and moral attachment towards the Bengali Society. His minute descriptions of the living style of Bengali people and their culture is very outstanding. In the postmodern era individual has become the most important phenomenon. Postmodern authors are trying to highlight their particular region and culture even though they are cosmopolitan wanderers. But they never forget their own culture and region. They are victims of nostalgia. Amit Chaudhuri is also one of them. He was born in Kolkata, he grew-up in Mumbai and later studied in London, Oxford. Presently he is a professor in Contemporary Literature in East Anglia University in the U.K. He, however, never forgets his home. This is why we can easily see in his works the details of Kolkata life and culture. Chaudhuri has no real plot or particular story to tell his reader in his novels, but goes on to describing day-to-day living and experiences in a beautiful manner. In his novels we can read about every minute detail of a house or typical day. The novel, we can say, is a glimpse into his characters' everyday mundane life that is disguised behind his beautiful prose. He has the unusual gift of turning every little mundane detail of daily life into poetic beauty. His novels abound in pictorial quality. He literally paints a picture of characters and places while describing them through the use of his beautiful, vibrant and complex fabric of language. He is an expert in creating images. Chaudhuri possesses a unique gift for sounds and sound patterns. His novels abound in sound images. He has an acute ear for sound effects probably due to his training and accomplishment as a musician. He is a novelist who depicts the ordinary, mundane, daily activities of people specially the middle class and by the



magic of his words and language, defamiliarizes the familiar happenings of daily life.

It is not surprising then that much of Amit Chaudhuri's novels are a celebration of local cultures and subjectivities. His uniqueness as a writer, however, rests largely on the fact that his most sensitive evocations of locality are done through an exclusive focus on the banal and the quotidian in fragmented, episodic form, he never wove into holistic narrative, much less one about the development of the modern Indian nation-state. Banality and locality, in fact, construct themselves as mutual preconditions in his novels.

Amit Chaudhuri's novels deal with issues neither related to the destiny of nations nor with matters of heart and caste, but with quotidian details of the middle class Bengali life of *maach bhaat* , *doi-mishti*.

. There is also in Chaudhuri's writings a marked quality of difference - a special texture of style, mood, feeling and evocation- which distinguishes him from a great many other Indian English novelist.

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### **13. 3 MAPPING CULTURAL SENSIBILITY**

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Culture can be described as the behavior and beliefs characteristics of a particular social age group while sensibility is defined as aware of one's moral, emotions, existence, sensations, aesthetic notions and standards. So cultural sensibility suggests awareness towards one's culture while still being able to understand other cultures and differences that exists between them. The ability to recognize ourselves and others is stepping stone in cultural sensibility. Every culture captures some elements of a deeper truth, but each represents only one of many possible ways of interpreting the data generated by the human senses. Interest in culture has always been a part of writer's curiosity about the background and environment of the nation. The powerful influence of culture can be noticed since the very birth of human being in this cosmos. Culture is considered powerful than life and death but it triumphs over death. Indo-English novels have presented a world of colorful and graceful shades of customs of our country. Literature coming from bilingual culture

## Notes

demonstrates how tensions existing in different cultures, languages and systems can be utilized for narrative purpose. The fiction itself is a platform of a cross culture phenomenon. Culture includes language, views, perceptions, traditions, codes, systems, values, art, ritual ceremonies and so on. It is a complex whole that includes knowledge, law, capabilities and habits implemented by man as a social being. The Indian English novels interpret some sensible concepts of culture and creates a theoretical axis upon which it charts insightful and engaging aspects of selfhood and identity. Culture is an essential part of human life that has a great influence on one's personality and gives a proper shape to it. So it has been tempting the native and non-native writer's to innovate their writings with its varied theories and delineation. Like many other Indian-English writers Amit Chaudhuri has also explored the vitality of Indian Culture through his novels and embellished the tradition of Indian English novels with his creative innovations. Amit Chaudhuri entered the literary world of Indian English Literature in 21st century. Right from his birth he always dreams enormous and always wanted to achieve something very different in his life. He is a versatile genius who can write novels, compose music and perform on stage. He has touched day-to-day living and experiences of everyday lives like getting up in the morning, reading newspaper, taking bath, having meals, visiting relations and so on. He presents real India especially Bengali culture in his novels. His artistic perception and innovative vision assist him to change the conventional concepts of Indian English Fiction. Chaudhuri's novels provide new perspectives on the theoretical models of the Western and the Indian domesticity. My aim is to explore that how Chaudhuri's novels represent the importance of the construction of cultural sensibility about class, caste, family and identities. Chaudhuri captures life's every detail with all his perfections of daily existence with depth and compassion in an outstanding manner. Amit Chaudhuri is one of them who also have been narrated in his novels the cultural sensibility through the representation of the lived experience of home in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, *Afternoon Raag*, *Freedom Song* and *A New World*. Bengali ethos and Indian values are primary concern in the writings of Amit Chaudhuri who has a great concern for Indian values

and Bengali sensibility. He initiated his literary career with poems and wrote five novels. He seems to have maintained in his writings Indian values, Bengali culture and tradition. Amit Chaudhuri's works show the influence of a particular space on the characters and events of his novels. He describes the hills, the forests, the roads, the buildings, the architecture, the towns and the countryside of his region and gives maximum exposure to them. It has been used as a background of his works. The region is much more than a mere setting or background of his works. It plays an important role in the development of the story and characterization. The region participates in the works of Chaudhuri with all its aspects: nature, culture, legends, customs, conventions, superstitions, topography, and environment. He describes farmers, businessmen, labourers, fairs, market places, river-bridges and sea, the backwardness and superstitions of the local people, rustic songs and dances and Bengali dishes etc. all with a wide knowledge and acute feeling because he has known them intimately. Amit Chaudhuri's the first novel *A Strange and Sublime Address*, Sandeep, the main character of novel seems to be a representative of Chaudhuri's own childhood who celebrates not only the simple joys of childhood as bathing, eating, sleeping, playing and enjoying with cousin and exploring the city but also how the business of living, working, coming to terms with the world of senses imposes an increasing burden on the soul. This shows the twin themes inextricably linked in Chaudhuri's novel: the celebration of simple joys of childhood and the evocation of a way of life. The relations between various members of an extended family, the flavour and fragrance of Bengali food, prayer times and visit to relatives, all are portrayed with a touch of humour that amused the readers from the beginning to end. We can see Chaudhuri's cultural sensibility in the following lines: "...Later, they went down to have lunch in the dining-room; they dangled their feet ferociously from chairs round a large, shabby table with pots thronging in the centre. Pieces of boal fish, cooked in turmeric, red chilli paste, onions and garlic, lay in a red, fiery sauce in a red pan; rice, packed into an even white cake, had a spade-like spoon embedded in it; slices of fried aubergine were arranged on a white dish; dal was served from another pan with a dropping ladle; long,

## Notes

complex filaments of banana flower, exotic, botanical, lay in yet another pan in a dark sauce; each plate had a heap of salt on one side, a green chilli, and a slice of sweet-smelling lemon. The grown-ups snapped the chillies, and scattered the tiny, deadly seeds in their food. If any of the boys were ever brave or foolish enough to bite a chilli, their eyes filled tragically with tears, and they longed to drown in a cool, clear lake. Though Chhoto mama was far from affluent, they ate well, especially on Sundays, caressing the rice and sauces on their plates with attentive, sensuous fingers, fingers which performed a practiced and graceful ballet on the plate till it was quite empty" Being a Bengali the writer's knowledge of Calcutta city appears to be very sound. He suggests various ways of spending a Sunday evening in Calcutta, for instance, —one should drive to Outram Ghat, take a stroll at river Hooghly, could stay home, and listen to plays on radio or watch a cinema. In *Afternoon Raag*, the narrator delights with a tidal wave of little insights, and with the delicate curlicues of his classically crafted prose. This piece of work by Chaudhuri is loosely structured like a Hindustani *raag* the classical music. The *raag* of the title is not just allusion to the musical taste of the *I* narrator – it seems to refer to the very substance of novel and its poetic, musical prose. The novel adopts the metaphor of Indian Classical Music, the *raag*, to evoke the complex emotions displayed by the narrator, in a young Indian student at Oxford. When he physically situated in Oxford, often returns in his thoughts to his family home in Bombay and, later, to Calcutta. He straddles the two worlds literally—on his trips back and forth—and more importantly, imaginatively. They learn to perceive the present moment as it was perceived by modernists. In his *Notes on the Novel after Globalization*, Chaudhuri stresses that the *now* of globalization has little to do with—is, in fact, inimical to—the *epiphanic*, with its disruptive, metaphysical potential. In *Freedom Song* Chaudhuri depicts the decline and eventual destruction of the family business and the loss of the extended family's houses, moving from a privileged cocoon life in the family's private compound to ordinary apartments in a municipal block. This loss of house and the decline of the family business, in this novel, is a metaphor for the decline of *old* middle class values in modern India, which shows that

Chaudhuri has great concern for Indian values coated in Bengali sensibility. *Freedom Song* is about the life of three generations of an extended family. Set in Calcutta in the 1990s, the novel chronicles the lives of Bhola and his sister Khuku and their respective families, portraying the banalities of daily life: eating, sleeping, and going to work. Its Chaudhuri's style to somehow focus on culture and tradition in his writing that connects his readers with native and regional aspects of different culture and helps them to understand minutely. His fourth novel, *A New World*, won Sahitya Akademi Award in 2003. It is the story of Jayojit Chatterjee, a divorced writer living in America, who returns to his parents' home in Calcutta with his son Vikram for summer break. His elderly parents are first unable to comprehend the collapse of his marriage. What hurts Jayojit is the shrinking space that Bengali culture carries with itself and the changing face of the metropolis. Bengali and commonplace things like hurry to catch the train, noise in the railway, canteen and announcement in the departure. It is thus clear that Chaudhuri considers the poetry of the common place to be the importance and the importance he attaches to is well reflected in his writings. He finds magic in the ordinary, and so he depicts just the small, ordinary details of everyday life of an individual in his novels. We have already seen that almost nothing spectacular happens in his novels unless small happenings and events can be called spectacular. He writes about familiar, ordinary things of daily lives in such a way that it gets defamiliarized. His novels amply illustrate how he defamiliarizes the familiar; poeticizes the ordinary and makes humdrum things exciting. *The Immortals* is a fascinating look at the Bombay of 30 years ago — a Bombay that existed in pre-boom India. Most of all, it's a meditation on how — or if — art and commerce interconnect through insightful observations that are both precise and graceful. It is a tale of two families: one luxuriating in a new world of corporate affluence and the other getting by on the old world of musical tradition. Together, they are joined by a —common, day-to-day pursuit of music. Music is the thread that ties this book together, and Amit Chaudhuri knows his stuff. He is, himself, a composer and musician and the meticulous detail and grand amount of exposition is clearly written by a man who has inhabited the

## Notes

world he creates. Hence Chaudhuri's minute descriptions of the living style of Bengali people and their culture is very outstanding. In the postmodern era individual has become the most important phenomenon. Postmodern authors are trying to highlight their particular region and culture even though they are cosmopolitan wanderers. But they never forget their own culture and region. They are victims of nostalgia. Amit Chaudhuri is also one of them. He is an expert in creating images. Chaudhuri possesses a unique gift for sounds and sound patterns. His novels abound in sound images. He is a novelist who depicts the ordinary, mundane, daily activities of people specially the middle class and by the magic of his words and language, defamiliarizes the familiar happenings of daily life. It is not surprising then that much of Amit Chaudhuri's novels are a celebration of local cultures and subjectivities. Amit Chaudhuri belongs to the category of writers and depicts Bengali Culture and its people in his novels. Amit Chaudhuri represents both a synthesis of and a tension between his Bengali and postmodern sensibility. His writings serve as a wonderful key to understanding the vitality and specificity of Indian modernity and of modern transformation of Indian civilization. His works reflect the Indian values coated in Bengali sensibility.

### Check your Progress-1

1. Where was Amit Chaudhuri born?

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2. When was Amit Chaudhuri born?

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3. Who is Amit Chaudhuri?

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4. For which organization was Amit Chaudhri elected as a fellow?

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## 13. 4 LET US SUM UP

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In unit we learned about Regional Sensibility and the Mapping Cultural Sensibility in the Novels of Amit Chaudhuri.

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## 13. 5 KEYWORDS

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- **Civilization:** the stage of human social and cultural development and organization that is considered most advanced.
- **Luxuriate:** enjoy as a luxury; take self-indulgent delight in.
- **Nostalgia:** a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past.
- **Cosmopolitan:** including people from many different countries.
- **Globalization:** the process by which businesses or other organizations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale.

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## 13. 6 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

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- Write a note on Regional Sensibility in the Novels of Amit Chaudhuri.
- Write a brief short note on Mapping Cultural Sensibility in the Novels of Amit Chaudhuri.

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## 13. 7 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

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- "Royal Society of Literature » Amit Chaudhuri". [rsliterature.org](http://rsliterature.org). Retrieved 18 November 2018.

## Notes

- "Your Teachers - UEA". [www.uea.ac.uk](http://www.uea.ac.uk). Retrieved 18 November 2018.
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- <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/01/23/the-moment-of-the-houses/> ). He also writes an occasional column for The Telegraph.
- "UEA professor Amit Chaudhuri wins £30,000 literary prize - Press Release Archive - UEA". [www.uea.ac.uk](http://www.uea.ac.uk). Retrieved 18 November 2018.

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## 13. 8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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- Amit Chaudhuri was born in Kolkata.
- Amit Chaudhuri was born in 15 May 1962.
- Amit Chaudhuri is a singer in the North Indian classical tradition.
- Amit Chaudhuri was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2009.



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# **UNIT-14 AMIT CHAUDHURI – “NOTES ON THE NOVEL AFTER GLOBALIZATION” AND “HUGE BAGGY MONSTER : MIMETIC THEORIES OF THE INDIAN NOVEL AFTER RUSHDIE” FROM HIS BOOK CLEARING THE SPACE-2**

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## **STRUCTURE**

14.0 Objectives

14.1 Introduction

14.2 Craft Of The Artist

14.3 Let us sum up

14.4 Keywords

14.5 Questions for Review

14.6 Suggested Reading and References

14.7 Answers to Check your Progress

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## **14.0 OBJECTIVES**

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Once you go through this unit,

- you would learn about the Craft of the Artist in Amit Chaudhri's novel.

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## **14.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The essays gathered in "Clearing a Space", written over the last 15 years, cover an amazing range of subjects. The writer treats himself as a specimen for an exploration of what it means to be a modern Indian in relation to the West. Personal memoir gives readers a glance into a nation's history; his relationship to the West provides insight into India's

## Notes

national relationship to the West; and, his struggle to define 'Indianness' for himself becomes a paradigm of searching for Indian identity. With the same elegance and intelligence for which the author has become known, Chaudhuri writes anecdotally in these essays about Indian popular culture and travel, high culture, and location in Paris, Dublin, Calcutta, Bombay, and Berlin, empire and nationalism, Indian and Western cinema, music, art and literature, politics, race, cosmopolitanism, urban landscapes, globalisation, Anglophone India, Hollywood and Bollywood, internationalism, the Indian English tradition that earlier Rushdie, post-colonialism and much more.

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## 14.2 CRAFT OF THE ARTIST

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Analysis of any work of art does not complete without the assessment of the craft of the artist. The history of world literary criticism beginning from the dates of Plato and Aristotle to that of Derrida, Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi-Strauss has accorded importance to the craft of the works. Compact Oxford Reference Dictionary defines the word 'craft' as "an activity involving skill in making things by hand." In the present study, the word, 'craft' means 'the method of story-telling and the narrative part of it.' Narrative part forms the structure of the text. Structure is the fundamental unit of any literary work which studies the value of craft. Structuralism takes its impetus from Aristotelian science and from the development in the field of chemistry and physics in the nineteenth century. These theories establish the fact that all matters are made up of atoms. In a literary text, the structural analysis starts with a structural examination of language itself. The supremacy of language in a work of art has been explained by Gerard Genette in an article, "Structuralism and Literary Criticism" thus:

Literature being primarily a work of language and structuralism for its part, being preeminently a linguistic method, the most probable encounter should obviously take place on the terrain of linguistic materials: sounds, forms, words, and sentences constitute the common object of the linguist and the philologist to such an extent that it was possible.

Amit Chaudhuri, though not a prolific writer, has a steady writing career spanning two decades since 1990s. He has written five novels, many short stories and critical essays which testify his contributions to Indian English literature. His works have a steady progress both in respect of form and content. Educated in India, London and Oxford and dividing his time between Kolkata and Oxford he has written mostly about 'being and becoming' or commemorating 'home' in his novels. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, it is returning to the native place namely Kolkata, in *Afternoon Raag*, it is the expatriate remembrance of home and in *A New World*, it is spending the vacation in Kolkata to overcome the blues of divorce. Thus as Nizzim Ezekiel in his poem, "Enterprise" said "Home is where we have to gather grace" Amit Chaudhuri celebrates the bliss of being in 'home' in all his works.

The novel which is one of the genres of literature has come to be regarded seriously by modern critics who consider its form to be as complex and subtle as that of an epic or drama. The novelist assumes a close link with the characters and situations which are viewed through his eyes. Hence, while studying the narrative technique of a particular novelist one must view how form and content are interlinked and intermixed. On the other hand, the novelist must be on his guard without being obsessed by the rigours of form. Lionel Trilling justifies this view:

A conscious per-occupation with form at the present time is almost certain to the novelist into limitation. Form suggests completeness and the ends tucked in; resolution is seen only as all contradictions equated and although form, thus, understood, has its manifest charm, it will not adequately serve the modern experience.

An Indian novelist, writing in English sooner or later, encounters the problem of form of expression which is ultimately two folds. Firstly, the type of English he is supposed to use and secondly the articulation of the native sensibility in an alien language. His creative output is expected to face the challenges of the responsibilities to search his own identity through a foreign medium or idiom. Amit Chaudhuri as an Indian novelist writing in English has taken up this challenge fearlessly to produce five novels to his credit. Bill Ashcroft believes that "A global

## Notes

language such as English, inflected with locally produced variations, can become a key mode of empowerment.” . In his essay “Commonwealth Literature does not Exist” Salman Rushdie embraces the creative energy of the English language; but he goes a step further, taking the language debate beyond the post-colonial debate. He says:

As for myself, I don't think it is always necessary to take up the anti-colonial – or is it post-colonial? – cudgels against English. What seems to me to be happening is that those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it – assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers.

Amit Chaudhuri himself explains in one of his interviews to Sumana R. Ghosh about his use of English language rarely mixed with the Bengali language to express his Indian theme. In fact, only a few Indian writers are writing in English maintain the serenity of the language in the postmodern context. They do not use the chutneyfied English as Salman Rushdie does. Amit Chaudhuri is one among the Indian writers writing in chaste English. He is conscious in avoiding the hybrid English language. His sporadic use of Bengali words and phrases in his text highly suit to the situation and it never mars the beauty of the English language. Chaudhuri states:

SRG: How difficult is to narrate a Bengali/ Indian experience in a foreign tongue? A Strange and Sublime Address you call the Bangla ‘jatee’ ‘a sharp and dangerous implement’ for example.

AC: I liked the phrase ‘sharp and dangerous implement’. I did not translate it. I translate things when I find words in English which to me aesthetically pleasing. They may be witty or they might sound nice to my ear. The ear is, for me, a very important guide. ‘A sharp and dangerous implement’ sounded good to me. When I think that the sound of the Bengali word is better, then I keep it there. In Freedom Song there are many Bengali words. But it is quite arbitrary. It depends on what I feel.

While Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth are concerned with the vernacularization of the English language Amit Chaudhuri, adopts entirely a different strategy in his representation of India and other localities. He dissociates himself from the kind of writing that originated with *The Midnight's Children*, and was used again in books by such writers as Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, or Rohinton Mistry, where India, the 'huge baggy monster' must be represented correspondingly by a large novel. Chaudhuri points his finger to the Indian writers in Bengali, such as Buddhadeva Bose or in Kannada, Anantha Murthy, who have endorsed the form of a novella or a short story to suggest India by ellipsis rather than by all-inclusiveness. In his view, "the large postmodernist Indian English novel, while apparently eschewing realism, pursues a mimesis of form, where the largeness of the book allegorizes the largeness of the country it represents". Chaudhuri explains:

Rushdie's style robustly extroverted, rejecting nuance, delicacy and inwardness for multiplicity and polyphony, and moreover, the propensity of his imagination towards magic, fairy tales and fantasy, and the apparent non-linearity of his narratives – all these are seen to be emblematic of non-Western mode of discourse, of apprehension, that is at once contemporaneously post-colonial and anciently, inescapably Indian. Again, although the emphasis on the plural and the multivocal, in this reading, is postmodern, the interpretative aesthetic is surprisingly old-fashioned and mimetic: Indian life is plural, garrulous, rambling, lacking a fixed centre, and the Indian novel must be the same. Delicacy, nuance, and irony apparently belong to the domain of the English novel and to the rational tradition of the European enlightenment

As Amit Chaudhuri has aimed at covering a wide range of reading public, he is possessed with a constructive power combined with a skill of organization which set him towards the inner vision which is so essential for a writer. E.M. Forster was among the few novelists who distrusted a rigid mechanical system of organizing the structure of plots in a novel and valued the compulsive soaring of imagination. Regarding the disadvantages of a rigid pattern he opines:

## Notes

It may externalize the atmosphere but it shuts the door on life and leaves the novelist doing, exercise. Beauty has arrived but in too tyrannous a guise.

On the other hand, there are other reputed novelists who lay great importance on the equipment of a writer. Feoder Dostoevsky for example is of the opinion that: I have been driven to the conviction that an artist is bound to make himself acquainted down to the smallest details not only with the technique of writing but with everything.

Looking to the two extreme opinions, it should be safe for a novelist to evolve a seemingly neutral and natural technique, for, ultimately art lies on concealing art. Amit Chaudhuri adapts naturalistic and realistic techniques in all his works. In this regard it is worth quoting yet another Indian novelist writing in English, namely Nayantara Sahgal's opinion here. She states in one of her articles about style as:

Style is something so individual that one could not bear to change it at all. It has to come from inside and it has to suit the material. It is not something one would consciously influences the way one writes. There is an accretion of influences at the back of the mind which probably work subtly.

Eschewing the surrealism of Salman Rushdie, Amit Chaudhuri opts for a narrative where the folk, the myth, realism, and symbol form seamless whole. The sights and sounds of Indian metropolis namely Kolkata and Mumbai come alive and are real to the core and are not realistic in his novels. They carry in their unobtrusive orchestration an imminent simplicity and direct lyricism. Every detail in his novels has its proper place and is linked with the world-views of the protagonists' which ultimately are juxtaposed by counter views. The author's originality both in theme and technique has enabled him to carve a unique niche for him in the contemporary Indian English literature. Appropriately, in his search of the language of literary expression Amit Chaudhuri associates himself rather with the pre-Rushdian mostly with the regional writers of Bengal because he feels that delicacy and nuances are conveyed with great skill and beauty in their works. Sound plays a prominent role in Chaudhuri's works. Even the cry of birds, chime of clock, sound of car

engine, sound raised by washerwoman while washing clothes and the cooking sound from the kitchen become real in Chaudhuri's description. In fact, sound adds musical quality to his narrative. As he wants to celebrate music in his works he allots many passages that describe classical music in a detailed manner. Since its inception literature has often borrowed from other forms of art in order to better convey the thoughts and feelings and various shades and nuances of life. In the eighteenth century, for example, literature was closely associated with painting. Authors at that time had a thorough knowledge in the history of graphic arts. This is perhaps, why painting is associated with neo-classical literature, as illustrated for example in John Barrell's lengthy discussion of "how the technique of composition used by the landscape painters in mid-eighteenth century was adapted by poets who introduced passage of landscape-description into their works" .

At the same time, however, development in Enlightenment philosophy gave priority to music as the most significant counterpart to literature. The turn from pictorial art towards music coincided with the growing skepticism in the representative powers of language. Rather than possessing an immanent meaning, language began to be seen as uncertain, insecure, like music which evolved from a primordial representational medium to one that refused the representational imperative in which one thing always stands for another. Music was thus becoming an empty sign: "form without content, expression without meaning" .

This lack of determinate meaning was believed to enhance the listeners' involvement in the act of listening. This shift led to the introduction by the German Romantic philosophers namely Goethe, Schiller, and Schlegel, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, of the idea of 'pure' or 'absolute' music, that is a self-sufficient object which represented nothing but itself. The validity of the idea of 'pure' or 'absolute' music has subsequently been questioned. It managed though to exert considerable influence on nineteenth century philosophy, especially on thinkers such as Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. In music Mozart, Beethoven, and later Wagner became its main proponents and ultimately the idea of 'pure' music influenced the novel, where it again

## Notes

brought into focus the question of the adequacy of the literary language. The influence of music on the questions of language and meaning continued in the twentieth century, when such figures as Jacques Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, or Roland Barthes produced their literary theories drawing from music. Amit Chaudhuri perhaps believes that music cannot be separated from man and music cannot be separated from a literary text. In India man born with music and his life ends with music. In *A Strange and Sublime Address* Sandeep's uncle sings songs while he is taking bath. Young Sandeep hears them from outside and imagines that his uncle as a hero who can sing in his full-throat. Chaudhuri has mentioned that the sound of splashing water, sound of closing window and Mamima's footsteps coming from upstairs – all altogether create a background music for Chhotomama's song. Hence Chaudhuri writes in *A Strange and Sublime Address*: Chhotomama was singing: Whether you'll remember me or not, I have forgotten. ... Moment after tiny moment, I come to your door, Sing without cause. Days pass; I remain' if ever, on the road, I find my self near you, ... I long to see a smile of startled peace upon your face, That is why I sing without cause, Another loud splash of water, then the sound of water draining away, then silence, as he dried himself, then again: Spring-flowers drift to the earth; spring time comes to a close. It has filled an instant's fist; it need know nothing more The day will end, the light draw to a fineness, the song cease, the instrument be silent. As long as I'm here, won't you load with riches this mock-raft of mine? That is why I sing without cause. The sound of Saraswathi shutting the windows in the other room, the footsteps of his aunt coming up the stairs with two cups of tea in her hands, and the sound of the grown-ups talking, falling silent, talking, falling silent, like the advance and retreat of tide.

The book *Afternoon Raag* which commemorates the death of Pandit Govind Prasad, music teacher of Chaudhuri quite naturally resounds with music and the various sounds heard in different occasions. In this book the author clearly explains in minute details what a harmonium is and how it produces sound. This description perhaps makes even foreigners to understand about harmonium. He explains how the mother of the protagonist of the novel, once practised 'Todi' a beautiful raga on her



harmonium. Chaudhuri exquisitely described how the raga is produced on the harmonium: Each time the bellows are pushed, the round holes on the back open and close like eye. Without the body music is not possible; it provides the hollow space for resonance as does the curved wooden box of the violin or the round urn of the sitar. At the moment of singing, breath tips in the welling diaphragm as water does in a pitcher. The voice-box itself is a microscopic harp, its cords tautening and relaxing with each inflection. My mother begins to practise scales in the raag Todi. In Freedom Song, Khuku practises various raga and always sings in her melodious voice. The song sung by Khuku echoes in the surrounding air. Amit Chaudhuri has once again created a musical background in this novel through Khuku for which the author himself has translated many Urdu or Hindustani songs into English in some of the passages of the book. At the same time he faithfully writes its Bengali version of the songs for the sake of readers who know both Bengali and English. His translation and the Bengali version read as: How could I be happy at home? For if my Shyam has become a Yogi Then as a Yogini with him I'll roam. Aam ki shukhe lo grihe roba? Aamar shyam Jodi ogo jogi hoh shakhi Aamio jogini hobo. The novel, Freedom Song begins with music. Khuku's day starts when she gets up from her bed hearing the 'azaan' from distance. This is the beginning of the novel: Each day the azaan rose in the morning.... Meanwhile, the muezzin went on praising the virtues of Allah in syllables that sounded like 'laillallah rasulallah'; and Allah was great, Allah was good and glorious. Chaudhuri's translation of Bengali songs into English in Freedom Song seems lower in quality yet suit to the situation at where they occur. For example, the following translation looks low in its degree. However, in the postmodern context when writers are given freedom to write songs with fragmented form and in blank verse the following translation can be considered fair at where it appears: The moon smiles without a hindrance, high overflows. O flower, o tuberose, Pour forth the nectar of your fragrance The blue sky's forehead Is smeared with sandal, And the pair of swans that belong to the forest Of woods have spread their wings Lost heart On a verdant road I gather strewn flowers By myself. Even Though music is absent in A New

## Notes

World, the sounds of the household, the sounds made due to plying vehicles, the bell of cycle-rickshaw, the cry of the ice-cream seller, the cry of the birds, the noise made by the air conditioner, the 'whir' sound of the mosquitoes, and the voice from the TV and radio make an echoing background throughout the novel. When Jayojit presses the doorbell of the Admiral's house in his Kolkata flat, "which was really a buzzer with a prolonged middle-class constrictedness", the readers also hear the sound of the doorbell through their sensuous perception. Like this Chaudhuri describes the sound of many things of Bengali household in this novel. He writes: Even since evening, the sound of television music and the voices of television characters had begun to come from the other flats, like a form of public dreaming. But when Jayojit turned on the air-conditioner, nothing could be heard but its hum. Amit Chaudhuri's fifth novel *The Immortals* also celebrates music and various Hindustani ragas. Besides, the sound of the atmosphere is echoing everywhere in the book. Even the language used by the author seems 'ragas' of various notes and tunes. In its evocation of music and the artist's life, Chaudhuri cultivates a pervading melancholy that perfectly matches his elegiac subject matter. His descriptions of Indian classical music are expertly rendered in this book. The various notes of different ragas show how music dominates in this book than the incidents and characters. Antara Dev Sen praises Chaudhuri's art in *Hindustan Times* thus: Chaudhuri's sentences often seem to take on the style of the taan reaching different notes within the raag of thought, looping back, surging forth, touching upon an idea here, half a thought there. His sentences are like an Ustad's expensive improvisations, embroidering sentences with sift suggestions, clear asides.... Chaudhuri dignifies the ordinary. Besides ragas there are lighter-classical forms like ghazal and American rock and blues that caress the book. Amit Chaudhuri believes that ragas are like human beings which have different temperaments and behaviors. The novel that celebrates music certainly tells the different shades of man's character and behavior through various ragas sung at different situations. In *The Immortals* Pyarelal gives Nirmalya the traditional understanding of the raag: 'Every raga has a roop... a form', he'd say with a very adult wistfulness, as if he'd had a vision of a raga once. It has a chehra, a face

and here with the involuntary dancer's movement, he'd etch the face in the air before him, his own stubbled, hook-nosed face narrow-eyed in concentrations... 'a body. When you sing Yaman properly, for instance, you can see its form. Yaman comes and stands beside you! There is a strong connection between Indian classical music and dance as Michael Clayton views "the North Indian raag performance primarily has an intricate gestural dance" . He argues: "the development of a rag is a sequence of gestures, figures mimed by the singer as he traces a graceful arc stretches out an arm to let the melody out before pulling it back. Melodic figures seem to have a spatial presence" . He also adds: "if a melody has an image , it is an image being viewed, explored and experienced in time by the observer's eye" . This understanding of raga seems to suggest an easier translatability of Indian music into images, pictures rather than words. Again, this seems to confirm the prominence given in Hindu drama to the visual, with dance gestures being the carriers of meaning, rather than to plot or fable, as in the Western tradition. Pyarelal in *The Immortals* further underlines the role of 'dance' for storytelling by drawing Nirmalya's attention to etymology. Being a teacher of kathak, one of the six classical dances of India, he explains that the name of the dance "derives from 'katha' or 'story'" : The dancer was not only a virtuoso but a story teller; the face was contained in the word 'kathak' itself. Sitting on the carpet in the air-conditioned room, the curtains half drawn behind him. Pyarelal showed Nirmalya how Radha would pull the end of the sari before her face to protect herself from prying eyes when she went out into the lanes towards her lover; a motion of the wrist, an avertedness of the eyes, were enough to convey Radha's vulnerability, her racing heart. Amit Chaudhuri from his first novel *A Strange and Sublime Address* to his fifth novel, *The Immortals* employs various literary techniques such as shuffling and reshuffling the scenes from present to the past and vice versa. In most of the scenes the narrative shifts from present to past and sometime into future. Rarely does he shift his narrative from first person to third person to make the readers to view his point clearly. While using the first person narrative he gains the advantage of in-depth study of the characters' mind and heart; whereas the third person narrative technique lends him the distance

## Notes

required to judge the situations and events. Thus, he avails himself of the advantages of both the techniques as and when the situation demands. However, by the end of the novel there is a closure called open-ended close in all his novels. While commenting the narrative strategies of Amit Chaudhuri in *Afternoon Raag*, Devika Bose states thus: The novel is a self-observed monologue and though the chapters devoted to Calcutta and Bombay retain some of the spirit of *A Strange and Sublime Address*, those connected with Oxford and strikingly different. The novel is in the first-person narrative and Oxford is delineated in the past tense while India is placed in the present. Numerous small events are presented in a comic light when he talks about India.... Amit Chaudhuri employs flashback and stream of consciousness techniques in all his novels to tell the events that happened in the past. In *Freedom Song*, the marriage of Khuku with Shib, her childhood days, her friend Mini's early life, their encounter as friends, their separation after Khuku's marriage, the partition of Kolkata from Bangladesh, Khuku and Shib's early married life in England, and the marriage between Bhola and Abha are told using the flashback technique. While appreciating the technique of the novel, Penelope makes a poignant observation. He states: The narrative loops back and forth in time, with an effect not so much of flashbacks as of infillings, so that a total picture of the family and its past emerges gradually, like the gathering clarity of a developed photograph. There is writing of great precision and economy, each incident, each small revelation about the past selected like a careful brushstroke. The two elderly women, Khuku and Mini, chat and remember.... And all the while the loudest of those background sounds is the steady rumble of the public events which inexorably direct those private lives. In *A New World* the marriage between Jayojit and Amala and their married life in America are discussed using the flashback technique by the author. Even the marriage of Ranajit, the Admiral's service in ICS, the flat he purchased in Kolkata and the babyhood days of Bonny are brought out alive using the flashback technique. The narrative seems almost travelling into past from the present moment and then suddenly jerk into the present and that ultimately reflects the psychological imbalance of the protagonist, Jayojit. Hence the narrative shuttling between the present

and the past and present and the future is apt to the theme of the novel. Suma R Ghosh considering the narrative technique of Amit Chaudhuri questioned him in an interview and the author answered thus: SRG: As I'd pointed out to you earlier all your novels begin with someone travelling or going somewhere. AC: Yeah. It's like the story of a changeling child, who is abducted by fairies and taken to another world. That story keeps recurring in *Freedom Song*, Mini comes to Khuku's house. It's a different world. In *A New World*, it's again what lies at the heart of old mythologies, of moving from one kind of mythology, transformed, metamorphosed, of being remade in body and mind. I actually take a little bit about that, about jetlag, in the beginning of *A New World* and how you live to a different time bodily and how you already have to begin to live to another one. It's almost like being recreated into a new world or almost like life after death. *The Immortals* is a novel which immortalizes the mortal and mortalizes the immortal naturally abounds with incidents and events told using flashback technique at many places. The marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Sengupta, the life history of Shyamji and his grandfather and father, and Nirmalya's babyhood are told using flashback technique. Chaudhuri once again has proved his craftsmanship by telling the past history of these people without affecting the flow of the plot in the present moment. The tradition and legacy of Shyamji's musical family come alive when the generations of Shyamji's musical tradition is described using the flashback technique. An observation appeared in *Boston Globe* about Amit Chaudhuri's craftsmanship supports the said view. It reads: In the gloriously crowded world of modern Indian fiction, Amit Chaudhuri stands out as a master craftsman who with exquisite wit and grace can depict a rapidly changing India in a single life, and an entire life in a single detail. Even though Amit Chaudhuri does not prefer to identify himself with Salman Rushdie, one cannot deny the fact that Chaudhuri also like Rushdie has told his stories in both first person and third person narratives. Like a postmodern novelist, Chaudhuri also adapts fragmented narrative style in his novels. As a lover of Indian tradition and culture, he gives references to them in his works with fondness. He even uses the stream of consciousness technique scarcely in his novels.

## Notes

The term, 'stream of consciousness' is used by William James in his *Principles of Psychology* to describe the unbroken flow of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings in the waking mind. It has been adapted to describe a narrative method in modern fiction. M. H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines the term, 'stream of consciousness' as: ... Stream of Consciousness is the name applied specifically to a mode of narration that undertakes to reproduce, without a narrator's intervention, the full spectrum and continuous flow of a character's mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations.... The diasporic longing for 'home' is told in all the novels of Amit Chaudhuri without any direct reference to it. Yet the diasporic angst of the protagonists of his novels or the author's persona is felt in all his novels. His *A Strange and Sublime Address*, it is homecoming of Sandeep. It is thinking about 'home' while miles far away from home in *Afternoon Raag*. In *A New World*, it is Jayojit who looks at his 'home' as a new one after his return from America to spend the vacation to heal his scars of divorce. In *The Immortals*, it is 'home' and 'home' alone is in the mind of the protagonist, Nirmalya when he is in London. Hence, Chaudhuri has adopted the technique of stream of consciousness abundantly in *Afternoon Raag* and *A New World* and sporadically in *The Immortals*. In *Afternoon Raag* whenever the protagonist encounters anyone or any incident, immediately he goes back to his home country namely, India through his thought process. The author has used stream of consciousness technique to describe this thought process. The narrative is shuttling between India and Oxford. When the protagonist experiences the varied incidents in the morning in Oxford, his mind travels back to India and thinks about his mother an insomniac who does her daily morning activities such as her morning exercise and music practice. The numerous afternoons and the western music make the protagonist to remember one such afternoon in India during when he bought an Indian musical instrument namely tanpura with the help of his guru. He says, "My memory of the day I bought the tanpura with my guru is like such a dream" . Jayojit in *A New World* gets back the memory of food, American way of life, and his years with his wife Amala, when he

encounters many incidents while spending his vacation in Kolkata. When fresh and tastier food is served by Jayojit's mother, he thinks about the preserved and dry food like bread and burger that he generally eats after his divorce. Suddenly coming out his thought process he answers his mother "What if they need – need some matches – or milk? Oh they phone! Home delivery! And then they go for a 'work out' and for hours on a treadmill" . Jayojit also recalls his ex-wife in his mind when his parents talk about his ex-wife: There were birds in the trees overhead, all shouting together. He remembered how he and Amala, when visiting India... had gone to Nainital in the second year of their marriage, to the wild life sanctuary... what had struck Jayojit then more than anything else was the crescendo caused by the birds' chattering and crying at dusk. At night, in the hotel they'd been bitten by mosquitoes they had forgotten about the mosquitoes.... That was in 1986. Two years after Bonny's birth in March 1987, their love-making dried up almost without their noticing it.... The child, instead of bringing them together,... Nirmalya in *The Immortals* though selects England for his further higher education often suffers from nostalgia. In the lonely room he could understand his inner heart that prefers company rather than seclusion. Hence he often gets his memory back whenever he encounters incidents or events in his life in England. Amit Chaudhuri once again uses the stream of consciousness technique to read the inner sanctum of Nirmalya when he is in the alien land. Nirmalya's mother's letters telling the happenings in the home country make him to associate many things that take place in England in the present moment. A letter by Mrs. Sengupta stating Shyamji's death makes Nirmalya shattered. He in a trance like state: Taking a tube from the strand, numb, like everyone else on the train, but vivid with a secret grief that made him, in his own eyes, separate from the other commuters, and suddenly immune to the awkwardness of exile, he got off finally at Tottenham. Court Road, and wandered, as he often did without rhyme or reasons, among the crowds and theatres but this time to clear his thoughts.... Even though Chaudhuri's main linguistic focus is on the power of words, said or unspoken, his novels also hint the multilingual reality of India. No writer of Indian origin in the postmodern period can escape from the

## Notes

multilingual influence. In *A Strange and Sublime Address* a Sikh driver in Kolkata wants to be courteous to Sandeep's mother and aunt by speaking their language but only manages to achieve a comic effect, "...it even made the language smell of onions and chappatis". In comparison to the novels of postmodern Indian writers writing in English, Chaudhuri does not aspire to represent the full linguistic diversity of the country. Only three languages namely Bengali, Hindi, and English featured his novels. The novels also depict a language hierarchy which depends on the locality. The English language is perceived differently in Kolkata and Mumbai. Sandeep, who lives in Mumbai, is not only fluent in English, but he even writes poems and stories in the same language. One day his Bengali aunt asks him to create a slogan about coffee for a competition, as the boy "was supposed to have a good vocabulary in this idiotic foreign language which no one, especially coffee companies, could apparently do without. Already, he used words like 'tentative', 'gingerly', and 'enthusiastic'". Here, in his aunt's focalization, one can see "dignified nonchalance some Indian women have" in their ignorance of English. However, the knowledge of English can be a maker of social status in India. A young visitor in his uncle's house questions Sandeep, and then the man's self-esteem either diminishes or grows depending on Sandeep's answer. When he hears that the boy writes in English, the visitor once more diminishes, "while Sandeep grows several feet, in this endless terrifying cartoon." While in *A Strange and Sublime Address* characters struggle with English and various Indian languages, in *Afternoon Raag* there is a wider, international, perspective, as the characters move between India and England. In Oxford, the narrator befriends Sharma because of their common love for the English language. In his striving for perfection in the language Sharma reads aloud passages from Mandelstam, Updike or Lawrence, asking for corrections wherever necessary, as his English had a strong, North India accent which made him pronounce, for example, 'toilet' as 'twilit'. His accent could never be silenced. In fact, the narrator believed it constituted Sharma's identity. He enjoyed the local inflection of the language, which is not only reminded him of home, but in which he could also see creative potential: "Mandelstam, read by Sharma, took



on a different, unexpected life, odd, cubist, harmlessly egotistical, and atmosphere” . In a similar vein, the narrator describes his mother’s hybrid language which she acquired during her years in England: Like most Bengalis, she pronounces ‘hurt’ as ‘heart’ and ‘ship’ as ‘sheep’, for she belongs to a culture with a more spacious concept of time, which deliberately allows one to natively and clearly expand the vowels; yet her speech is dotted with English proverbs, and delicate, un-Indian constructions like ‘It is a nice day, isn’t it?’ where most Indians would say. Straightforwardly, ‘It’s a nice day, no?’ many of her sentences are plain translations from Bengali, and have a lovable homely melody, while a few retain her English inflections, and are sweet and foreign as the sound of whistling. In *Afternoon Raag* the protagonist’s mother’s language is a mixture of English and Bengali, yet it is not hybrid in the sense of Rushdian hybridity. Rather than a playful appropriation, her speech is a palimpsest of moments in her life that she spent in the two countries her experience formed the language she uses. In *The Immortals*, Chaudhuri introduces the Indian polyphony through dialogues. The characters usually begin conversation in their own languages and the meaning is clarified later in the sentence, either through translation into English or by the context in which it is uttered. To give an example, Mallika complains to her husband about her music teacher, first she speaks in English, but then reports her conversation with the teacher in Hindi: “He taught me the same song for three sittings, and then he gave me one with a slightly cheap tune. I told him, ‘Shyamji, yeh gaana mijhe pasad nahu aaya, I didn’t like the song’, and he looked puzzled and irritable and said, ‘Achha gaana hai didi, it’s a good one.’” . Like this in many passages the readers are given both the original and the translation for the best understanding of the text. Amit Chaudhuri literary journey from his first novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address* to his fifth novel, *The Immortals*, reveals his increasing story telling competency through his linguistic ability and his adaptability to the ambience of changing scenario in the world of literature and literary criticism. In his works, he employs stylistic devices such as metaphor, simile, humour, symbols, images and he also uses Bengali or Hindi words for creating nativity. Whenever, Bengali or Hindi words are used by the author, their

## Notes

meanings are given immediately next to the words where they occurred or the author explains the meaning of the words in the context to facilitate the readers to understand the meaning. Sometimes he keeps the same Bengali or Hindi words in order to get the feel of nativity. He, at the same time, makes competent use of English language due to his exposure to it right from his childhood. His creative use of English language mixing with Bengali or Hindi word is typically his own style. The readers are apt to conclude that he thinks in his mother tongue and produces it in English as Kamala Das stated in her poem, "Introduction". He keeps some of the works like 'Baba', 'luchi', 'dada' as they are used in Bengali without providing any meaning for them. In his interview about the use of Bengali or Hindi words Chaudhuri avers: SRG: Since the question of language has come up, I would be interested to know about the use of Bengali in your fiction. You call Sandeep a 'language orphan' but at the same time you present Bangla graphically; you also make abundant use of Bangla songs, Tagore, Nazrul, etc. How important is Bangla in your fiction? AC: Bangla was for me a graphic experience SRG: Yes, that's pretty evident in the wonderful graphic representation of the Bangla alphabet in A Strange and Sublime Address. AC: I did that with the Bengali alphabet but I took care to make it comic. I didn't want to make it serious. I didn't want to make it another postcolonial statement. I was true to that child, to my self as a child that Bengali alphabet had a kind of resonance for me just as the mandolin had for Proust. The Bengali alphabet was a material thing to me and in "Beyond Transition", I have written about that as well I was fascinated by the Bengali books which my cousins used to read and which I could not read. That whole world of rakkhosh, khokkhos, raja, saatsamudra, etc. I felt very deprived to be cut off from that amazing world, Thakumar Jhuli, all those illustrations in blue ink, and those covers, I was fascinated by them. So Bengali at first was a very visual experience for me besides, of course, the oral one. It resonated for me in many ways. Amit Chaudhuri in A New World shows how Jayojit is rather ignorant about Bengali names, food and habits. Jayojit who is fed on with luchis fed up with it. So he puts Bonny on diet by giving cereal, a glass of milk and fruit juice and he himself also takes only milk, fruit, cornflakes or toast or tea. Even

he avoids oily food thinking that oily food would not suit to them. One must not mistake that like Jayojit, Chaudhuri also hates Bengali food and its language. In fact, many Indian NRIs like Jayojit behave as if India is a forbidden country for them especially for its food and climate. However, Chaudhuri has everlasting love for Bengali culture and language. Hence from his first book to the latest one, he uses many Bengali words to get the feel of being at 'home'. Many Bengali food items are special to Chaudhuri. So he often refers to them in his novels with their Bengali names. He never tries to transliterate or translate their names. Instead gives a full length description about the items. In one of his interviews he states: SRG: For example, how would you translate a word like 'luchi'? AC: But I don't. I use 'luchi' all the time. It depends on what my ear is telling me. If the translation leads to creativity, then I welcome it. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, for example, I kept the explanatory note there because creatively I was quite pleased within it. I thought it, formed a part of the fiction. If it was a dry exploratory note, I wouldn't have kept it there. But I think that the problem of translation has led me to write something which I am happy with a piece of writing. The lucidity in his usage of English language is impressive and the foreign tongue does not seem to be artificially imposed on him. The occurrences of Bengali or Hindi words in the passages are never introduced voluntarily or they never intrude the flow of the thought process of the plot. Picturesque descriptions are meticulously drawn in Chaudhuri's novels. It seems that the author is a painter who paints series of pictures with his words the varied incidents and events in his novels. Every event comes alive in the mind of the reader while reading the passages. In *A Strange and Sublime Address*, the moving of flies is graphically described by the author as: Flies were dancing gracefully in front of the mirror, and the sun kept coming out of and going back behind clouds, so that there were phases of light and shade in the world, as if a giant bird were flying across the sun, the obstructing, partially, the sunlight with its slow moving wings.... In *Afternoon Raag*, when the author describes the musical concert given by the guru of the narrator that comes alive in the words of Chaudhuri. He humorously describes how the players of tabla and harmonium carried out the notes on their musical instrument while the guru was singing. The

## Notes

description renders pen-picture of the scene: Similarly, when a singer is executing his difficult melodic patterns, the harmonium player must reproduce the notes without distracting him. The tabla and harmonium players behave like palanguin-bearers carrying a precious burden or like solemn but indulgent guardians who walk a little distance behind a precocious child as it does astonishing things, seeing, with a corner of their eyes, that it does not get hurt, or like deferential ministers clearing a path for their picturesque prince, or like anonymous and selfless spouses who give of themselves for the sake of a husband. Mohan, who plays the tabla with clarity and restraint, created the ground on which my guru, constructed his music, and Sohanlal, attentively playing the harmonium, filled in the background. In the care of these two custodians, my guru sang and shone with his true worth. Amit Chaudhuri's use of similes, metaphors and images in his novels is worth mentioning while appreciating the craft of the artist. In *Afternoon Raag* he uses similes which really startle the readers as they are far-fetched. He writes: "a single serpent-like plait that looks paradoxically innocent" ; "the scar is printed on her skin like a radiant star" ; and "seeing her was like roaming alone in a familiar garden" while describing the narrator's mother. Chaudhuri also writes "his voice sometimes carrying my hesitant voice, and negotiating the pathways of the raag, as a boat carries a bewildered passenger" ; "I hated libraries, where human beings hunched strangely over their books, behaving like birds who were not eating, but studying, their prey, in a silence" ; "each building looking at this stage like a huge bird-house" ; and "creation was worship" . Hence it is understood that Chaudhuri uses of similes are in fact, deconstruct the familiar into unfamiliar. Amit Chaudhuri's art of using similes is excelled in his work, *Freedom Song*. In this novel he uses similes in order to express the inner minds of the important characters: "Like a house which shelters sons, daughters, grandparents, servants, frustrations, expectations, a whole world under its roof, the postcard, with not one inch of it wasted, gave whatever space it could to words that expressed both necessary sentiments and urgent requirements" . In *A New World*, Chaudhuri uses similes which ultimately match with the theme namely the melancholic harmony. In *The Immortals* the similes are used very often to suit the

situation and add beauty to the passages: “Like a mirror’ he had a problem with his marriage” and “Nirmalya was moved by his singing; it was like a spray of rainwater” are some of similes that are apt to quote. Moreover, he repeatedly uses some words and phrases in all his novels to get the satisfaction of being at ‘home’. He never addresses the cities as ‘Kolkata’ and ‘Mumbai’ instead he writes ‘Calcutta and Bombay’ to get the essence of old and tradition. It is worth mentioning the interview of Chaudhuri here: SRG: Your prose, too appropriate – in too many instances to neglect – a model of a text. ‘silence’, ‘play’, ‘presence’, ‘absence’ ‘hidden’ , ‘meaning’, ‘decentred’, ‘margins’ seem to be recurring words. Do you then consciously model your writing on a specific methodology of reading? AC: No, you absorb some words from theory; may be what you have read on theory and then use them for your own ends by obviously no writer works that way. You unconsciously sometimes subvert the word and then it is up to the reader to unearth connections and to find out ways in which he feels they might have been played out. But I think no writer writes in a void and you are always reacting to things, not only the world you are writing about but reacting to other forms of writing which you want to go against. One is not very conscious of doing these things but one of the things... Another thing is, when I was quite young, in the seventies, when I was about seventeen or eighteen years old, then in the intellectual circles in Bombay, what you had were the leftovers, of existential thought and although I did not understand at that time what it meant, I sensed a great individualism over there and I wanted to avoid that. At one point I realized that the individual was not of primary interest and therefore the novel of character and character development was not primary interest for me. What was interested in was certain things juxtaposed against each other, whatever in groups, cultural worlds signified by words. Amit Chaudhuri excels in the art of giving the topography of the place with minute details. This helps even the foreign readers to locate the place imaginatively. Hence, the roads, streets, lanes, and the places come live in his description and even it seems that they play a role in the course of the novel. The houses with their rooms right from the entrance to the backyard, and the terrace come alive in his description. There is no

## Notes

artificiality in his explanation. Places like Deshpriya Park, Hazra Road, Bollygunj, Circular Road, and so many other places in Kolkata and St Giles' Café, New Bodleian Library, Holywell Street, Cornmarket Street, St Aldate's – High Street, Tottenham Court Road and still many other places in England get life in the description of Chaudhuri. It is perhaps, the places, play a role to suit to the mood of the characters. While commenting Amit Chaudhuri's art of writing novels Namita Gokhale comments thus: The point of view, the texture and emotions that make up the book, are entirely rooted in place and time. In that sense Amit Chaudhuri is writing in the great Bengali tradition, he writes in English but it is English injected and irradiated with the magical flow of the Bengali tongue. He has appropriated the English language and made it his own. Chaudhuri is of course, heir to one the great literary traditions of our land, and has to be considered and evaluated in the tradition of Bangla literature, whether in English or Bengali.... Like places, the temporal element takes a keen role in the novels of Chaudhuri. Though morning, evening and night get theorized in his novels, 'afternoon' is the time that plays a vital role to suit to the various themes of the novels such as from Sandeep's innocence to his experience of various Bengali tradition in *A Strange and Sublime Address*, the loneliness and melancholy of the protagonist in *Afternoon Raag*, the recollection of past and the present conditions of the Khuku's family in *Freedom Song*, the homecoming of Jayojit to get solace in *A New World*, and Nirmalya's various music practices and his introspections about life in *The Immortals*. Like this 'months' have a special feature in his novels. Like T.S. Eliot he writes "he had come back in April" which certainly indicates the readers that April is the cruelest months that announces the melancholic theme of the novel well in prior even in the first line of the novel. Light plays its symbolic role in Chaudhuri's writings. Its very luminosity comes from his acute awareness of climate and place. As in Hardy's *The Woodlander's* one can see from Chaurudhi's first novel, *A Strange and Sublime Address* to his latest novel, *The Immortals* the change of seasons, the alternate change of light and darkness and the change of day and night. In *A Strange and Sublime Address* the change of seasons has been focalized elegantly. The summer gives a way to

rains, autumn gives way to winter, and winter once again gives way to summer as the novel progresses. In describing the seasons Chaudhuri is not like Kafka. The Indian experience of light, of windows and doors thrown open, of street spilling into houses and vice-versa give his writing a rare luminous quality. He evokes what Carlyle called 'chiaroscuro' of light, night and half-light. Not only climate and place but also food, rooms of the houses especially the 'verandah' clothes, ragas, wet rag, photographs, and so on are some of the elements which are used as metaphors recurring in Chaudhuri's works. Hence it is worth mentioning the words of Chaudhuri here: SRG: Architecture happens to be a major trope in your fiction. You seem to be interested in exploring the poetic of space though doors, windows, room, house, etc. the concept of enclosed space or space within space seems to be very important in your work AC: I'm very fascinated by it. Again, it's the idea of life as a text, of interiorities, of being able to look enclosed, of being able to look from one space to another. So I love those films- Renoir, certain French films – which show one looking from windows of another house. I love these scenes. There is a film called *Les enfants du paradis*. The gods are the audience and the children are the actors. It has this shot of the tenement house moving through one space to another, talking from one space to another, in the verandah and the camera captures it. I like that. I love the opening of Naipaul's *Miguel Street* when one man is talking to another in a different verandah.... I've always been interested in verandahs. I love the verandah, the balcony. At one point long ago, when I'd written *A Strange and Sublime Address*, I theorized about it, how the verandah was important to me as an in between space, with no inside or outside, how the narrator becomes a kind of ghost who is not seen, who sees life unfolding before him and is yet also inside something Amit Chaudhuri is a young writer. He is rarely gifted with his musical sensibility which most writers do not possess. His command on language is evident when he lovingly dwells on details. He is pacing in his career as a writer. He is a prose writer of occasional brilliance. He is a gifted miniaturist who gives a series of pictures of life impeccably executed out of primary interest only to those who share it or have an anthropological interest in it. It is only now and then that the language he so skillfully wields helps

## Notes

him overcome the banal he depicts. His arresting description though not insightful is skillfully executed. One can have the sensuous experience of noise, smell, and people in Chaudhuri's novels. He has a justifiable reputation for a remarkable prose style. It is the direct opposite of V.S. Naipaul's simplicity and transparency. It is impressionist, elliptical, yet wordy, and author-centered, filled with similes and stands between the readers and the events. Amit Chaudhuri is in no way a part of "Empire writes Back" phenomenon and his English has no 'chutnification' in it. He is conscious of various types of English namely Mumbai English, Bengali English and North Indian English, but he refrains from reproducing them for the sake of making his English spicy. He writes with self-consciousness. He writes in Queen's English to suit the need of his themes and occasionally using Hindi or Bengali words when demanded by the situation. What he has done in his works is he does not try to imitate other contemporary Indian writers writing in English but he has his own style of mingling prose and ragas which suit both to his fictional and musical composition. It is needless to emphasize that Chaudhuri has superbly succeeded in his task. He stands in a different platform from his contemporaries who are struggled from problems of postmodernity and chutnification of English. Thus, 'writing' for Amit Chaudhuri is kind of 'spiritual exercise' in which he finds a strange satisfaction, by amalgamating the traditional music and the day-to-day life of the people who are living in the postmodern era. The music and the sound heard resonate and guide him in the domain of creative writing. In the works of art the author's attitude is to narrate the whole experience and theory of life. The first duty of a writer is to be an intellectual being because wittingly or unwittingly he sets himself up for a leader of mankind and for that his own mind must be supple and charitable. Unity of time, persons is not the only cement which binds a work of art in a harmonious whole but 'subject' also is required. Amit Chaudhuri has achieved this harmony by objectifying his subjective experiences through his skillful use of narrative technique without losing sight of fundamental values of art. Though a conventional finale is not arranged in any of his novels, the protagonists solve their inner-dilemma through sublimation of their 'self'. Thus Chaudhuri proves that he is one



of the leading master craft-men of contemporary Indian English literature. He has gradually evolved his literary style in his work, characterized by lucidity, perspicuity, sobriety of tone and humor. Amit Chaudhuri's fictional universe is highly characterized by his deviant style. The readers are startled and surprised by his deviant expressions. One can easily find the device of foregrounding in his use of verbal patterns. His linguistic innovations are more conspicuous in the use of lexical items. It has been seen that Amit Chaudhuri has not only modified some existing lexical items but also coined a number of neologisms to suit his various artistic needs as in, "In short, money was short. 'Today the palm of my left hand's itching' said Mamima. 'God, God I wonder – it means I'll have to spend more money – on what ...'". In this way, the various verbal patterns form the major part of his style. Taking into consideration the competent use of words and different verbal patterns, it is pertinent to say that Amit Chaudhuri is one of the masters of the verbal art and so it seems to be fittingly applicable to Chaudhuri what Raja Rao has said about words, "unless the word becomes mantra no writer is a writer". Even though English is the language of the global culture, Amit Chaudhuri develops his own idiosyncratic style contributing to the variety of world English.

### Check your Progress-1

1. How many novels has Amit Chaudhuri written?

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2. Where did Amit Chaudhuri study?

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## 14.3 LET US SUM UP

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## Notes

In this unit we learned about the Craft of the Artist in Amit Chaudhri's novel.

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### 14.4 KEYWORDS

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- Lucidity: clarity of expression; intelligibility.
- Sobriety: the state of being sober.
- Lexical: relating to the words or vocabulary of a language.

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### 14.5 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

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- Write a short note on Craft of the Artist in Amit Chaudhri's novel.

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### 14.6 SUGGESTED READING AND REFERENCES

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## **14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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- Amit Chaudhri has written 5 novels.
- Amit Chaudhri study in London, Oxford and India.