

ENGLISH ELECTIVE

**BA [English]
Fourth Semester
Paper G4**



**Directorate of Distance Education
TRIPURA UNIVERSITY**

Reviewer

Deb Dulal Halder

Assistant Professor, Kirori Mal College, Delhi University

Authors

Suchi Agrawal: Unit (1) © Suchi Agrawal, 2017

Prof Sanjeev Nandan Prasad: Unit (2.0-2.2) © Prof Sanjeev Nandan Prasad, 2017

Prateek Ranjan Jha: Units (2.3-2.4, 3, 4) © Reserved, 2017

Vikas Publishing House: Unit (2.5-2.10) © Reserved, 2017

Books are developed, printed and published on behalf of Directorate of Distance Education, Tripura University by Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication which is material, protected by this copyright notice may not be reproduced or transmitted or utilized or stored in any form of by any means now known or hereinafter invented, electronic, digital or mechanical, including photocopying, scanning, recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without prior written permission from the DDE, Tripura University & Publisher.

Information contained in this book has been published by VIKAS® Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. and has been obtained by its Authors from sources believed to be reliable and are correct to the best of their knowledge. However, the Publisher and its Authors shall in no event be liable for any errors, omissions or damages arising out of use of this information and specifically disclaim any implied warranties or merchantability or fitness for any particular use.



Vikas® is the registered trademark of Vikas® Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.

VIKAS® PUBLISHING HOUSE PVT. LTD.

E-28, Sector-8, Noida - 201301 (UP)

Phone: 0120-4078900 • Fax: 0120-4078999

Regd. Office: 7361, Ravindra Mansion, Ram Nagar, New Delhi 110 055

• Website: www.vikaspublishing.com • Email: helpline@vikaspublishing.com

SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

English Elective

Syllabi	Mapping in Book
Unit I: Indian English Novel R.K. Narayan- <i>The Guide</i>	Unit 1: Indian English Novel: The Guide (Pages 3-33)
Unit II: Indian English Poetry Toru Dutt- <i>Our Casuarina Tree</i> , Sarojini Naidu- <i>If You Call Me</i> , Tagore- <i>Heaven of Freedom</i> , Nissim Ezekiel- <i>Night of the Scorpion</i> .	Unit 2: Indian English Poetry (Pages 35-68)
Unit III: Short Stories from Indian English J. Lahiri: <i>When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine</i> , Keki N. Daruwalla- <i>Love Across the Salt Desert</i> .	Unit 3: Short Stories from Indian English (Pages 69-80)
Unit IV: North Eastern Poetry in English Indira Goswami- <i>The Journey (in trans.)</i> , Robin S. Ngangom- <i>A Poem for Mother</i> , Nanda Debbarma (in trans.)- <i>I shall go to you</i> , Sachlang Tripura (in Trans.)- <i>Dawn at Hokutwisa</i> , Temsula Ao- <i>The Jungle Major</i> .	Unit 4: North Eastern Poetry and Short Stories in English (Pages 81-104)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
UNIT 1 INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL: <i>THE GUIDE</i>	3-33
1.0 Introduction	
1.1 Unit Objectives	
1.2 About the Author	
1.2.1 Narayan's Education	
1.2.2 Narayan's Career	
1.2.3 R. K. Narayan: A Comparative Analysis	
1.3 Summary of R. K. Narayan's <i>The Guide</i>	
1.3.1 The Story	
1.3.2 Raju's Childhood	
1.3.3 Raju's Indecisiveness about being a Holy Man	
1.3.4 Indianness in the Novel	
1.4 Themes in R. K. Narayan's <i>The Guide</i>	
1.4.1 Family Relationships	
1.4.2 Rejection of Traditional Norms and its Consequences	
1.4.3 From Selfishness to Selflessness	
1.4.4 Emancipation of Women	
1.4.5 Transition from Illusion to Reality	
1.4.6 Class Difference	
1.5 Characters in R. K. Narayan's <i>The Guide</i>	
1.5.1 Raju	
1.5.2 Rosie	
1.5.3 Marco	
1.6 R. K. Narayan's Technique of Writing	
1.7 Summary	
1.8 Key Terms	
1.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'	
1.10 Questions and Exercises	
1.11 Further Reading	
UNIT 2 INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY	35-68
2.0 Introduction	
2.1 Unit Objectives	
2.2 Toru Dutt: <i>Our Casuarina Tree</i>	
2.2.1 <i>Our Casuarina Tree</i> : An Introduction	
2.2.2 Summary	

- 2.2.3 A Brief Note on the Title
- 2.2.4 Critical Reception of Toru Dutt's Works
- 2.3 Sarojini Naidu: *If You Call Me*
 - 2.3.1 Analysis of the Poem
 - 2.3.2 Sarojini Naidu as a Romantic Poet
- 2.4 Rabindranath Tagore: *Heaven of Freedom* (From Gitanjali)
 - 2.4.1 *Heaven of Freedom*: Analysis
 - 2.4.2 Overview
- 2.5 Nissim Ezekiel: A Brief Sketch
 - 2.5.1 Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion*: Text and Summary
- 2.6 Summary
- 2.7 Key Terms
- 2.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 2.9 Questions and Exercises
- 2.10 Further Reading

UNIT 3 SHORT STORIES FROM INDIAN ENGLISH

69-80

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Unit Objectives
- 3.2 *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*: An Analysis
- 3.3 *Love Across the Salt Desert*: An Analysis
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 Key Terms
- 3.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 3.7 Questions and Exercises
- 3.8 Further Reading

UNIT 4 NORTH EASTERN POETRY AND SHORT STORIES IN ENGLISH

81-104

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Unit Objectives
- 4.2 *The Journey* (In Translation): Indira Goswami
 - 4.2.1 Analysis of the Text
 - 4.2.2 Different forms of Violence and their Interaction with each other in *Jatra*
- 4.3 *A Poem for Mother*: Robin S. Ngangom
 - 4.3.1 Interaction with the Outside World
- 4.4 *I Shall Go To You*: Nanda Kumar Debbarma
 - 4.4.1 Analysis of the Poem
 - 4.4.2 Departure from the Material World in North-Eastern Poetry
- 4.5 *Dawn at Hokutwisa*: Sachlang Tripura

- 4.6 *The Jungle Major*: Temsula Ao
- 4.7 Summary
- 4.8 Key Terms
- 4.9 Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’
- 4.10 Questions and Exercises
- 4.11 Further Reading

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Literature symbolizes people, culture and tradition. It guides us towards a world full of experience and helps us evolve ourselves through its literary journey. It speaks to us in its various forms such as short story, poetry, drama, prose, fiction, non-fiction and so forth.

The 1980s and 90s saw a renaissance of Indian writing in English spearheaded by Salman Rushdie with his path breaking work *Midnight's Children*. With his success more and more Indian writers joined the group. These contemporary writers are not only those who reside in India but include many who like Rushdie, reside abroad and are a part of the Indian diaspora. English, in its classical form was used by writers of the past like Raja Rao, Nirad C. Choudhuri, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand. However, Rushdie introduced a new trend in writing and voicing multicultural concerns.

The book, *English Elective* is divided into four units that discuss the different genres of Indian writing such as Indian English novel, poetry and short stories. Authors from different cultural backgrounds have been discussed in this book.

This book, *English Elective*, is written in a self-instructional format and is divided into four units. Each unit begins with an Introduction to the topic followed by an outline of the Unit Objectives. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to test the reader's understanding of the topic. A list of Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit, and includes short-answer as well as long-answer questions. The Summary and Key Terms section are useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

NOTES

UNIT 1 INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL: *THE GUIDE*

NOTES

Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Unit Objectives
- 1.2 About the Author
 - 1.2.1 Narayan's Education
 - 1.2.2 Narayan's Career
 - 1.2.3 R. K. Narayan: A Comparative Analysis
- 1.3 Summary of R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*
 - 1.3.1 The Story
 - 1.3.2 Raju's Childhood
 - 1.3.3 Raju's Indecisiveness about being a Holy Man
 - 1.3.4 Indianness in the Novel
- 1.4 Themes in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*
 - 1.4.1 Family Relationships
 - 1.4.2 Rejection of Traditional Norms and its Consequences
 - 1.4.3 From Selfishness to Selflessness
 - 1.4.4 Emancipation of Women
 - 1.4.5 Transition from Illusion to Reality
 - 1.4.6 Class Difference
- 1.5 Characters in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*
 - 1.5.1 Raju
 - 1.5.2 Rosie
 - 1.5.3 Marco
- 1.6 R. K. Narayan's Technique of Writing
- 1.7 Summary
- 1.8 Key Terms
- 1.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 1.10 Questions and Exercises
- 1.11 Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

R. K. Narayan is one of the most famous and widely read Indian authors of the twentieth century. He is credited with introducing Indian culture to the rest of the world. Though Narayan's work has been often criticized for being too simple in prose and diction, he has managed to gain international visibility based on his highly-localized novels that are usually set in the fictional Mysorean village of Malgudi. In 1935, Narayan began his writing career with *Swami and Friends*. Not only has the Indian culture been described intricately in Narayan's writings, it also possesses a uniqueness of its own.

He was a gifted author who immaculately described the simplicity of old days and how people tried to cope with the changing world. Some of Narayan's famous works include *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938),

The English Teacher (1945), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *Malgudi Days* (1982), and *The Grandmother's Tale* (1993). This unit discusses R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* and evaluates Narayan as a prolific figure in Indian English writing.

NOTES

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the various aspects of R. K. Narayan's career
 - Summarize the novel *The Guide* by Narayan
 - Describe the major themes of *The Guide*
 - Analyse the characters in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*
 - Evaluate R. K. Narayan's technique of writing in *The Guide*
-

1.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan was born on 10 October 1906 at Puraswalkam, Madras. It was a congested, noisy and dusty downtown locality. The large family of Iyers included many uncles, brothers, sisters and cousins. Narayan was the third of eighteen children of his parents.

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

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

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

1.2.1 Narayan's Education

Narayan studied at his father's school and disappointed his family's emerging middleclass aspirations as he failed his first attempt to qualify for the graduate

course in Arts. When his father was transferred to the Maharajah's Collegiate High School, Mysore, Narayan shifted there to be with his family. Delighted by the well-stocked library at school as well as his father's collection, Narayan's reading habit intensified.

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

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

1.2.2 Narayan's Career

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

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

Earlier, Narayan had sent the manuscript of a novel to a friend at Oxford, who showed it to Graham Greene. It was this first novel, *Swami and Friends*, which brought him in contact with Greene. The first novel of Narayan was published again in 1935 under Greene's care in England. Greene also advised Narayan to shorten his name to enable it to be easier for the English-speaking readers. In his first novel, he attempted to be a realist and used his own experiences in the form of a story. Though it elicited favourable reviews, sales figures did not go up. The Indian publishing industry in the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s

NOTES

NOTES

was not very well organized. There were not many readers of Indian fiction in English. This meant small or nonexistent means to support oneself as a writer.

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

Towards the end of 1930s, Narayan started to contribute regularly with short stories and other pieces to *The Hindu*. This paper published many of his short stories and essays. During the latter half of the 1980s, Narayan's work was published in the magazine *Frontline*. These included some essays, short stories, and three novels in a serial form. During the middle of his literary graph, Narayan had a fruitful association with *The Illustrated Weekly* and *The Times of India*.

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

His next novel was *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), which presented a picture of his own college life and experiences. In this book, Narayan described how marriages in India are finalized based on horoscopes and how a wife bears all animosities of her husband in the social contract of marriage. A different publisher published it on Greene's recommendation. Soon, *The Dark Room* (1938) was published, which dealt with the theme of domestic disharmony.

In his third book, he wrote about a dominating husband whose wife was a victim of his oppression. Narayan's first three books dealt with socially accepted practices. In 1937, after his father's death, he accepted a commission from the Government of Mysore, which was a proposal to write a book to promote tourism in the state.

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

1.2.3 R. K. Narayan: A Comparative Analysis

Narayan was one of the first Indians to have his work published outside India with the exception of Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie. Before we analyse and compare Narayan's work, it would be apt to describe the unique features of his writing style. His writings were considered to be simple and unpretentious with a dash of humour. Narayan mainly focused on ordinary people and his writings usually reminded the reader of people who are a part of their daily life, such as the next-door neighbour, cousins, friends and postman. It was this focus on ordinary people that the readers are able to relate to the story as it unfolds.

Narayan had a very different approach from his contemporaries and was able to give a detailed version of the Indian society without making changes in his characteristics or the simplicity of his subject. His writings seem to be devoid of the current trends in fiction writing and, therefore, are unique in their own sense. Narayan's work is said to have gentle Tamil overtones and he also employed the use of nuanced dialogic prose.

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

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. When did R. K. Narayan begin his writing career?
2. Why was R. K. Narayan's family not inclined towards politics?
3. What was Narayan's first published work?
4. When was *Malgudi Days* published?

1.3 SUMMARY OF R. K. NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE*

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

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

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

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

NOTES

It is the triumph of the traditional mode of living through natural and man-made catastrophes.

The whole story in the novel is presented in flashbacks. The author moves on two planes of time—the past and present.

1.3.1 The Story

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

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

A scholar of ancient culture, Marco comes to visit Malgudi to study the paintings in the caves. Raju lodges him at the Anand Bhavan Hotel and takes him to show the caves in Gaffur's taxi. Soon, thereafter, Marco's wife Rosie comes too. She is a postgraduate, 'not very glamorous, but she did have a figure, slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion, not white but dusky'. She belongs to a family of temple dancers. Marco married her after advertising for a bride with educational qualifications and good looks. She is, however, not interested in Marco's passion for paintings and objects of art. Rising with good temperament but sleeping after a quarrel was their routine. In such a situation, betraying his relationship with his wife, Marco looks for an opportunity to Raju to be closer to Rosie.

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

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

Raju, too, becomes a respectable person with judges, ministers, officers and mill-owners seeking his company. His household has several servants, a

driver and a Gurkha guard. One day, Raju receives a book, *The Cultural History of South India*, sent by Marco's publishers. He does not show or talk about it with Rosie. After some time, he finds an insured envelope addressed to Rosie from Marco's lawyers. It contains a document for the release of a jewelry box to be signed by Rosie. Fearing revival of feelings for Marco in Rosie's heart, Raju forges her signatures on the document and sends it back. Soon, he is arrested on Marco's complaint. In spite of Rosie's best efforts, he is sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

While in jail, Raju is a model prisoner and is referred to as a teacher. But, after his release, he comes to the village of Mangal and camps at an old desolated temple on the banks of river Sarayu.

The poor, ignorant but innocent villagers gather faith in him and start flocking round him for solutions to their personal problems. They come to believe that his mere look transforms a person. They bring him offerings of fruit, rice and milk and clothes on festivals. They start calling him the 'swami'.

Many years pass. Then, there is a drought which is shown resulting in famine. Food brawls and murders start taking place. In his humility, Raju sends a message to a man named Velan and other villagers to stop quarrelling, otherwise he would not eat. The message is sent through an idiot who reports that the 'Swami' informs that he would not eat until it rains. Villagers from far and near start thronging the place to have a glimpse of the holy man who is fasting for rains. Newspapers flash the news and several governmental agencies come to exploit the potential of the congregation there.

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

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

Opening of the Novel

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

NOTES

NOTES

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

Raju mistaken for a *sadhu*

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

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

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

1.3.2 Raju's Childhood

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

After his father had milked the cow, he tried to teach Raju the Tamil alphabet on the *pyol* of the house. But, Raju was not interested in studies. He was relieved when his father went to attend his shop. He would rush off to the shade of a tamarind tree across the road and play there all day. Sometimes, his father took him to the town in a bullock cart for shopping. Raju liked these excursions, as is evident in phrases like 'men and vehicles, hogs and boys—the panorama of life enchanted me'.

As Raju is musing over his childhood and how he came to be a tourist guide, the stranger interrupts his trail of thoughts with his problem. He then

suggests to the worried Velan to bring his sister to him. Raju ruminates, 'I wish I had asked him what the age of the girl was. Hope she is uninteresting. I have had enough trouble in life.' Raju starts feeling that he is 'attaining the stature of a saint'.

Velan and his Sister

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

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

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

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

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

NOTES

NOTES

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

Raju's Schooling

Raju thinks of the time when the railway line was being laid a little distance away from his house. It would take six to eight months for the tracks to be laid before trains could come to Malgudi. Work continued at a brisk pace, Raju lost part of his freedom under the tamarind tree because lorries were parked there now. He would climb onto them and play; nobody minded him but his clothes became dirty. He would often stand on top of red mud and view the distant Mempi hills.

Gradually, he befriended the men working on the track listening to their talk and sharing their jokes. Raju's father was worried and he decided to admit him to school, which he 'loathed'. A great fuss was made every morning when Raju was sent to school. He was dressed in clean shirt and shorts, his hair was combed and a tiffin was packed for him. But it soon became a drudgery for Raju, 'I preferred to be neglected and stay at home than to be fussed over and sent to a school.' But, he was helpless as his father was a stern disciplinarian who would take no nonsense from him.

The teacher, an old man, believed in 'getting the maximum noise out of his pupils'. Raju would have preferred to be sent to the fashionable Albert Mission School which was close by—'I'd have felt proud to call myself an Albert Mission boy'. But, his father didn't want him to have anything to do with a Christian school. The place where Raju was sent to study was hardly a school. The teacher was an abusive man, who habitually used to address his pupils as donkeys.

Whenever the teacher went inside the house, which was very often, the students would peep in to see what was going on there. Once they saw the teacher cooking while his wife stood closely. From that day the teacher decreed that his students were not to cross the threshold of his house. From that day they never peeped in again but confined their attention to the drain that flowed beneath the *pyol*. The teacher's fee was one rupee a month per student and whatever else his students brought him. That was his only interest in his students who felt honoured to serve him. Despite the teacher's obvious disinterest in him and Raju's own indifference to studies, he proved 'good enough.'

Velan's Problem Solved

When Velan comes to see Raju the next day, the girl listens to Raju's advice and apologizes to her brother for the inconvenience and embarrassment caused. She also agrees to get married to the person chosen by Velan. This establishes Raju's claim as a holy man in Velan's village.

He, however, does not attend the girl's marriage. He does not want to be seen in a crowd and he does not want to gather a crowd around him as a man who has worked a change in an obstinate girl. Velan brings the girl to him along with her husband and a crowd of villagers and relatives.

The incident attracts more followers. Raju is now looked upon as a holy man and people gather around him every evening. Raju cannot question them or ask them to go away as the river bank is a public place, where he himself is an intruder. People come and sit on the steps lower, to where Raju sits and keep looking at him. He doesn't have to say a word to anyone; he just keeps sitting there at the same place, and tries hard to think 'where he should go from there next and what to do.'

People do not so much 'whisper a word for fear that it might disturb him'. Raju is 'beginning to feel uncomfortable on these occasions' and wonders 'if he could devise some means of escape from their company'. Throughout the day, he is practically left alone, but late in the evening after finishing their work, the villagers would come there; they felt blessed in his company.

1.3.3 Raju's Indecisiveness about being a Holy Man

One evening before the people arrive, Raju moves to the backyard of the temple and hides himself behind a huge hibiscus bush full of red flowers. He hears their voices on the steps of the river. Talking in low whispers, they go round the shrine and pass by the hibiscus bush where Raju is hiding. He holds his breath and waits. He thinks of an excuse of hiding there in case, he is discovered. He would tell them that he has found this an ideal place for meditation.

But, fortunately, they do not look for him there and wonder where the swami could have gone. 'What a pity he is not here today!' They exchange views on how the swami has changed their lives ever since his arrival. They all miss him. They leave the food they have brought him in the temple and go home since it was getting dark. As Raju cautiously peeps out of his hiding plane, he hears their voices trailing off in the distance.

Since he is hungry, he goes inside the shrine and devours the food they have brought wrapped in a banana leaf for him. He prays that Velan never discovers who he is in reality; he is grateful for the food Velan and his friends regularly bring for him. At the same time, he is amused at the qualities they attribute to him.

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

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

With his mind made up, Raju prepares to receive Velan and his friends in the evening. He sits as usual on the stone slab waiting for them with a blessed and calm look on his face. He prepares to act the part of the holy man assigned

NOTES

NOTES

to him by Velan and the other villagers. The thing that really bothered him was that he might sound so brilliant in everything he says.

Raju shifts his seat to the inner hall of the temple and awaits Velan's arrival with some excitement. When no one turns up at the appointed time, he gets panicky. He is restless at night, wondering whether his followers have deserted him and whether they would return at all. He thinks of walking to the village and letting Velan and his friends know that he is back.

However, he dismisses such a move as undignified and cheap. Suddenly, he sees a boy grazing his sheep on the opposite bank of the river. He calls the boy and offers him a banana. During his conversation with the boy, Raju discovers that he has been sent there by his uncle to ascertain whether the swami has returned to the temple. Raju sends him back with the message that he is back and that people should visit him in the evening.

1.3.4 Indianness in the Novel

The novel is an essentially Western art form but Narayan has successfully used it to express Indian sensibilities. Narayan's works are a curious blend of Western method and Eastern material. Narayan's Indianness is seen in various ways. It is seen in his simple and traditional mode of narration, which is straightforward and chronological, even in *The Guide*, where part of the story is narrated by Raju and a part by the novelist.

It is also seen in his exploitation of such Indian motifs as cobras, *devdasis*, Bharata natyam, gurus, sadhus and swamis. It is also seen in the setting of the novel. Malgudi is a typical Indian town gradually and steadily transforming from a semi-agricultural town to a big city. This transformation is a symbolic one; representing the change that was taking place in India as a whole.

Malgudi has its own distinct individuality. It is but a small representative of the Indian social system, the Indian way of life and also of the Indian values cherished and followed through the ages. The residents of Malgudi, despite their local trappings - are essentially human. Therefore, they are related to humanity. In this sense, Malgudi is everywhere.

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

In the words of author A. Hariprasanna:

Narayan creates his fictional world of Malgudi as an essentially Indian society or town. The Indianness and Indian sensibility pervaded the whole place. Narayan's Malgudi is also a microcosm of India. It grows and develops and expands and

changes, and is full of humanity, drawing its sustenance from the human drama and is enacted in it.

Indianness is seen in Narayan's stress on the family which is assigned a place of central importance in each of the novels. As William Walsh points out:

The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates, and his novels are remarkable for able subtlety and conviction with which family-relationships are treated—that of son and parents and brother and brother in *The Bachelor of Arts*, of husband and wife and father and daughter in *The English Teacher*, of father and son in *The Financial Expert*, and of grandmother and grandson in *Waiting for the Mahatma*.

The closeness of relationship between the adults and children, and the absence of watertight compartments between the worlds of the two, constitute the basis of these novels. But the action is developed through the conflict between the egocentricity of an individual member and the family's claim on him.

Indianness is seen in the way Rosie, despite being in an unhappy marriage, tries to make up for her momentary infidelity by owning up to her mistakes and asking for pardon. The importance given to marriage in India is brought out in Rosie's relationship with Marco. The Indianness is seen in the way Raju's mother depends on her brother to put some sense into Raju.

She does not mind her brother coming and scolding her son because in the absence of her husband, she gives him the respect due to an elder male. The Indianness is seen in the way Velan is eager to take advice from an unknown Swami because learned men or Swamis are respected in society. He laps up everything that Raju tells him ignoring the fact that he has served a sentence in prison.

Indianness is seen in the fact that Marco is educated and progressive enough to marry Rosie who belongs to a family of Devadasis. However, he is still the true Indian male who cannot tolerate his wife pursuing dance or being unfaithful to him. He does not pardon his wife even though she confesses her mistake.

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. How does the life of the protagonist end in *The Guide*?
6. What kind of family did Marco belong to?
7. What book was sent by Marco's publishers to Raju?
8. How does *The Guide* open?

1.4 THEMES IN R. K. NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE*

When *The Guide* was published in 1958 by Methuen in London and by Viking Press in New York, Narayan was already a fairly well-known writer in India, England and the United States. His previous novels, *Swami and Friends* (1935),

The Bachelor of Arts (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945), *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952) and *The Printer of Malgudi* (1957) had already gained him a faithful reading audience.

NOTES

The Guide brings out the simplicity of rural folk, their superstitions stemming from illiteracy, the position they give to women in their society, the husband-wife relationship, the disdain with which infidelity is looked upon, the helplessness of widows and the manner in which money can corrupt.

In this section, we will explore the major themes of *The Guide* including the repercussions of deviating from acceptable norms or conventions, marital disharmony, emancipation of women and class difference.

1.4.1 Family Relationships

Narayan's novels are studies in human relationships, particularly family relationships. Of relationships within the family, the father-son relationship is most frequently studied. In *The Guide*, Narayan has studied the relationship between Raju and his father. When Raju gets into bad company at the construction site, his father is concerned and enrolls him in a school.

On this issue, there is a clash of ideologies. Raju wants to study at the Albert Mission School. His father feels that in this school, Christianity is imposed on the students and they are forced to convert. So, against Raju's wishes, he decides to send Raju to the *pyol* school. The headmaster of that school is an abusive man and his language is no better than the labourers at the construction site. Soon, Raju discontinues school and helps his father in running the stall at the Malgudi railway station. After his father's death, Raju is left to manage the stall alone. He now also has to look after his widowed mother.

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

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

As his art matured, Narayan's study of human relationships became more complex and intricate. Such complex relationships which he explores are those which center around sex or money. These relationships are of particular importance in *The Financial Expert*, *The Guide*, *Man-Eater of Malgudi* and *The Sweet-Vendor*.

In these novels, money and sex appear in different guises, and are explored and studied from different angles. Excessive preoccupation with either money or sex is an aberration which results in discord and disharmony—in the disruption

of normal family life, for instance—but peace and harmony ultimately return and normalcy is restored. This is so much so the case that the disruption of the accepted order and the ultimate restoration of normalcy may be said to be the central theme of the novels.

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

Narayan's fictional characters have their mooring in Malgudi. This town of Malgudi is a traditional one visited by Lord Rama, Laxmana, Sita, Hanuman and Goddess Parvati—the mythical gods and goddesses to Buddha, Sankara and Gandhi—from the mythical to the real.

According to P. S. Ramana, Narayan has studied a character first on the test of social order, i.e., in the context of his community, set up and social environment; secondly, he studies a character in relation to himself. An analysis of their life reiterates the claims of their foregrounding in Indian moral and social value system. Narayan's vision illuminates numerous significant themes, which are discussed in this unit as follows:

- The place of woman in a traditional society
- The moral limitations of a materialistic way of life
- The consequences of flouting accepted codes
- The psychological and ethical implications of some Hindu concepts as ascetic purification, *Yoga*, renunciation, non-attachment, *Maya* and the cyclic progressions of life and death

The great Indian theory of *Karma* and the various paths of achieving *Moksha* or self-realization.

1.4.2 Rejection of Traditional Norms and its Consequences

In *The Guide*, Narayan develops a theme touched in *The Bachelor of Arts*, that of a bogus *sanyasi*. Raju, a restless, attractive youngster, acts as a guide to the tourists who come to visit the Malgudi ruins. The corruption-by-outsiders theme is this time initiated by the tourists, Marco and his glamorous wife, the dancer Rosie.

Raju's love for Rosie is delineated as a consuming obsessive passion, fundamentally destructive and terrible. We find that Raju comes into conflict with traditional morality as he seeks to realize his aspirations. The result is that the accepted order is disturbed, and there is chaos and disorder. He seduces Rosie and thus is guilty of immorality and corruption. When she comes to live with him, conventional morality is violated, and there is displeasure all around.

NOTES

NOTES

The neighbours are annoyed, and his widowed mother is obliged to leave the home and stay with her brother. Raju does not attend to work, has to give up the railway stall and soon is in financial trouble.

He is unable to pay his debts and has to face prosecution in the law courts. He is an egotist, an individualist, a self-seeker who exploits Rosie sexually and commercially. They earn fabulous amounts, but he wastes it all in drinking, gambling and extravagant living. He is too possessive and centred and forges Rosie's signatures to get a box of jewelry. It is a criminal act, and it soon lands him in jail.

It is a violation of ordinary norms of conduct, and his example shows that crime does not pay. We must not act as Raju acts, we must not be over-possessive, self-centred, extravagant or jealous. Thus, the violation of conventional norms creates chaos and disorder in his own life and in the life of his social environment.

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

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

The traditional world of Malgudi has its own custom of arranged marriage which is settled by parents after negotiations and matching of horoscopes. In Indian society, marriage is looked upon as a sacrament and a spiritual union. It has been sanctified by society and sanctioned by tradition. Men and women living together as husband and wife outside wedlock are regarded as sinners and hence do not enjoy or receive any social acceptance or recognition.

It is, therefore, sacrilegious to violate the sanctity of sex. Illicit relationship is considered a stigma on those who are engaged in this kind of relationship. In *The Guide*, Rosie, after separation from her husband, lives with Raju as his wife under the assumed name of Nalini without marrying him. Raju's mother who is an orthodox woman is dead against her son's way of life with Rosie. She says to Raju:

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

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

1.4.3 From Selfishness to Selflessness

Raju's evolution from a tour guide to a spiritual guide forms the central theme of the novel. The title of the novel, *The Guide*, has two implications. It brings out the two roles played by Raju. One, as a tourist guide, where he is impulsive, undisciplined and given to self-indulgence; and the other, after serving a sentence and converting to a holy man who thinks over life philosophically, is careful and self-disciplined.

There are two stories in the novel. One is Raju's relationship with Rosie and the other is his relationship with the villagers. In the opening scene, Raju is sitting by the temple talking to Velan, one of the villagers who mistakes him to be a holy man. The novel then moves back and forth with accounts of Raju's life as a holy man told in third person, and Raju's account to Velan of his previous career as a tour guide and lover, which is told in the first-person. Raju plays a dual role, that of a saint and a sinner. But, it should be noted that he is, at no point, in the story a complete sinner, nor a complete saint. Raju's character strikes a chord of sympathy in the readers.

The title leads us to the question of who is the guide and how he guides people. Raju is first a tour guide as he shows the interesting sights of Malgudi to people who come to visit the town. He also plays guide to Rosie as he is instrumental in helping her find a way to fulfill her dreams. We should not, however, mistake Raju as a political or moral guide who leads a community. All his actions are self-centred and while guiding people, he keeps his interest in mind at all times.

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

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

1.4.4 Emancipation of Women

Rosie is a complex character and Narayan uses her to talk about women liberation. Rosie feels suffocated in her marriage and tries her utmost to emerge in her own right as a woman who is talented and artistically inclined. She is married to Marco, an archaeologist, whose only interest is the academic research

NOTES

NOTES

he is pursuing. He has come to Malgudi to study some caves. He is busy in stone statues but does not value human relations.

Rosie is not at all interested in the 'Cold, old stone walls' that excite her husband. Rosie meets Raju, a local tourist guide and it is in his company that she finds happiness and enjoys life. Rosie and Marco are incompatible. Marco has no interest in Rosie's love for classical dance. It is Raju who later encourages her to emerge from her shell and bring forth her talent.

According to C. D. Narasimaiah, she is the only character in the novel who changes and grows and recovers from folly, as the novel progresses. To quote his own words, 'It is strange that Rosie is completely free from Narayan's ironic handling. Considering she was a highly educated woman—a Master of Arts—and a married woman at that, and in the Hindu society too, and considering, above all, that Narayan is operating within the framework of traditional Hindu society whose code of conduct he largely endorses, it is curious that Rosie's departure from that code invites no adverse comment.

In all fairness to Rosie, Narayan tries to show how the instincts of a faithful wife were not dead in her. Quickly realizing her mistake, a repentant Rosie tries to mend fences with Marco. 'I realized I had committed an enormous sin ... My mind was greatly troubled. I didn't want anything more in life than to make my peace with him. I did not want to dance. I felt lost ...'

After studying Rosie's character, we can conclude that women have a fixed place in society. They have to be economically dependent on their husbands and tolerate the treatment meted out to them. This situation prevails in all levels of society in India. Such is the practice of gender inequality. As long as Rosie allowed herself to be confined within the walls of her husband's existence, she suffered silently. But when she emerged from its confines, she was able to prove her worth as a classical dancer.

Though R. K. Narayan had to face controversy for dealing with an issue like extramarital relations, his attempt to portray emancipation and empowerment of women through the character of Rosie was indeed a brave effort.

Rosie is the one character in the novel who seems to offer a singular example of recovering from folly as the novel progresses. In fact, she has always been dignified, noble and the very picture of ideal womanhood in spite of her loss of chastity—there is enough atonement for it and that is what matters.

And significantly, this has been achieved by as serious a treatment of the character as any novelist in the tragic mode may have done. This seems to be true of almost all the women characters created by Narayan. But, especially in the way he takes care to preserve Rosie from inner taint, Narayan seems to be affirming what has been hailed in the Indian tradition as the feminine principle, the primary process of a woman's life, as it incorporates the rules and values of natural law.

1.4.5 Transition from Illusion to Reality

The following passage serves to answer the question of whether or not Raju finally manages to transform himself as a 'swami':

The sky was clear. Having nothing else to do, he started counting the stars. He said to himself, 'I shall be rewarded for this profound service to humanity'. People will say, 'There is the man who knows the exact number of stars in the sky. If you have any trouble on that account consult him. He will be your night guide for the skies.' He told himself, 'the thing to do is to start from a corner and go on patch by patch. Never work from the top to the horizon, but always the other way.'

He was evolving a theory. He started the count from above a fringe of the Palmyra trees on his left-hand side up the course of the river, over to the other side. 'One ... Two ... fifty-five ...' He suddenly realized that if he looked deeper a new cluster of stars came into view; by the time he assimilated it into his reckoning, he realized he had lost sight of his starting point and found himself entangled in hopeless figures. He felt exhausted.

This passage is very important as we see how Raju progresses from a regular guide to someone who guides the progress of souls.

The title of the story now assumes a far deeper meaning. The novel moves on from being the story of an ordinary guide known as 'Railway Raju', to the story of someone who has more significance. The above paragraph also shows Raju's transition from fantasy to actuality.

In the act of counting the stars or trying to assess what is intangible, Raju is trying to work out the vastness of life. For once in his life, Raju is thinking about something so deeply knowing that there will be no material gain from this. His life now goes beyond its personal limitations and encompasses a wider sphere.

1.4.6 Class Difference

Narayan presents social norms and class distinctions in *The Guide* mainly through the symbolism of Rosie's name. The non-traditional name is the marker of Rosie's social hybridity, through which the novelist gives a realistic and truthful representation of social norms and prejudices in India.

In this respect, Rosie's failure to give the name of her father locates her social identity as belonging to a family of devadasis—'I belonged to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers ... we are viewed as public women ... we are not considered respectable, we are not considered civilized.' It may seem ironic that both Raju's mother and uncle seek to view Rosie in terms of social class:

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

They judge her according to their social norms, instead of her individual merits. It is shocking that in their prejudice they completely ignore Rosie's other identity as an educated woman with an M.A in Economics. Rosie's Westernised name and her association with the symbol of snake, mark her social exclusion;

NOTES

NOTES

Marco's satiric name and appearances also symbolizes his detachment from reality; and various other personality traits also symbolize a move from the time-honoured orthodox Hindu belief to a modern urbanized society.

The use of symbolism, when combined with realism of the novel, unfolds a wide spectrum of walks of life in a modern society of India through Narayan's meticulous attentions to details of characterization.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

9. Why is Raju sent to the *pyol* school?
10. When does Marco separate himself from Rosie?
11. What forms the central theme of the novel?

1.5 CHARACTERS IN R. K. NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE*

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

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

1.5.1 Raju

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

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

From a stall-keeper, Raju turns into a tourist guide. He is shrewd, intelligent and observant, and he soon acquires little bit of knowledge by reading the old

magazines and books which he stocks, and by talking to the passengers who come to his stall. He is a fraud who does not know much about Malgudi and its environs, but pretends to know everything. He never says 'no' to any customer. He freely changes and distorts facts to please the tourists.

The result is that his fame spreads and he comes to be known as 'Railway Raju'. His confidence and nonchalance pay him rich dividends, and he never worries about the many distortions in which he has indulged and the untruths he has told. He deceives, lies and adopts crooked ways to fleece the unknowing tourists.

Raju would have remained a successful tourist guide all his life, but for the arrival of Marco and Rosie in Malgudi. Raju is fascinated by 'the divine creature' that he perceives Rosie to be and wins her heart by his sympathy and consideration, as well as showing keen interest in her art. Both of them are born romancers and the novel celebrates the coming together of two similar temperaments.

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

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

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

In the third stage of his career, he becomes a convict, and even this role he performs with enthusiasm, becoming an ideal prisoner. This was an act that Raju did voluntarily and deliberately, it did not happen to him. But, Raju

NOTES

NOTES

was bewildered that such a trivial action should bring down such frightful consequences on his head.

When out of jail, we find him playing the role of a Swami or Mahatma. He plays this role to perfection, for basically, there is not much difference between the role of a railway guide and that of a spiritual guide. The same eloquence, the same ability to make grand, mystifying statements, the air of knowingness, enables him to play his new role with such success. Although he is a fraud and a rogue in reality, he appears to be a 'mahatma'. He sits on slab of stone as if it was a throne. Raju felt he was attaining the stature of a saint and later he felt he was growing wings.

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

It is not clear to the reader whether or not the rain occurs due to Raju's penance. Also, the change of heart that Raju undergoes has not been given much importance by Narayan. He makes it seem as if that is the least he could do to atone for his sins. He doesn't give more than a few lines to mention this. It is a moment of great disturbing beauty, in which we know something larger and more affecting than the working out of an individual destiny in an inhospitable world.

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

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

1.5.2 Rosie

Rosie, in the novel, overshadows Raju whereas Raju remains the pivot for the whole part of the novel. Hers is a very complex character. Rosie is portrayed moody, impulsive and ambitious. These frail aspects of her character have been

glossed over in the novel. It was because the character of Rosie was ahead of its times. To imagine a woman leaving her uncaring and impotent husband and live with her lover in his house was almost impossible in the sixties.

Though she has been represented as a rebel, her rebellion has been justified in such a way that it finds consonance with the novel. To humanize her and get the sympathy of the viewers with her, Marco has been demonized. This is the reason why it is difficult to understand her in the novel but still easy to comprehend.

Rosie is one of those butterfly-type of woman who frequently appear in the novels of Narayan. She is the heroine of the novel. She has a charming and fascinating personality. Raju falls in love with her at first sight and says:

She was not very glamorous, if that is what you expect, but she did have a figure, a slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion not white, but dusky, which made her only half visible as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice.

Her arrival at Malgudi with her husband Marco plays havoc with the life and career of Raju.

Born in a family of dancing girls, she knew her mother but not her father. She is given a college education and is an MA in Economics. She is flattered that a man like Marco wished to marry her, and is devoted to him in spite of his impotence and priggishness. But her inherited feelings for dance cannot be suppressed, and when she gets a chance to perfect the art, she seizes it.

Her giving way to Raju is understandable. She might have resisted her physical urge if her husband had been at least kind and considerate, but his inhuman coldness, Raju's evident admiration and the opportunity so conveniently provided by her husband, result in what seems a foregone conclusion. When that husband throws her out and she has no other place to go to, she comes to Raju.

More than the attraction of sex is the desire to perfect her and realize herself fully in her god-given gift. She does not take long to achieve eminence. When Raju wants her to give performances she is not unwilling. But, with fame came unceasing demands on her time and energy. She has to fall into a routine and go round like a bull yoked to an oil-crusher. Her weariness of it all is like that of any film star—she is being exploited but manages to prevail.

It is through the character of Rosie in *The Guide* that Narayan truly takes up and treats the concept of women emancipation. Rosie attempts to break free of the restrictions that her husband has imposed on her. Her husband, an archaeologist, is busy with his research and exploration and has no value for living beings.

Rosie's encounter with the enthusiastic tourist guide Raju, at Malgudi railway station proves to be the turning point of her life. Rosie and her husband, Marco are two very different individuals and function on different planes. In the initial stage, he aggressively defies the wishes of his wife who desires to see a king-cobra. He snubs her and the following lines mention, 'Don't expect me to go with you. I can't stand the sight of a snake-your interests are morbid.' On the other hand, Rosie has a distaste for 'Cold, old stone walls'. Marco was

NOTES

NOTES

not interested at all in Rosie's talent of classical dance which was encouraged by Raju.

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

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

Raju exploits Rosie for his own advantage and narrow, selfish ends. He says: I had monopoly of her and nobody had anything to do with her ... She was my property ... I did not like to see her enjoy other people's company. I liked to keep her in a citadel.

Raju takes all the credit for her success and is of the view that she would not be able to do without him. But, he is soon disillusioned. She rises to new heights of popularity and stardom without him. He is amazed at her extraordinary vitality. He realizes that neither he nor her husband matter at all to her.

The rift is cemented when Raju is arrested for forging Rosie's signature on a legal document sent by Marco's solicitors over the custody of a jewelry box. When Rosie is hurt, she promises to pawn the last of her possessions to defend Raju in court, but tells him categorically that she won't have to do anything with him after that. Rosie proves to be true to her word. She engages the best lawyer from Madras to defend Raju and has to undertake numerous dance engagements to pay the star lawyer.

When Raju is sentenced to two years' imprisonment, she closes down the establishment at Malgudi and moves over to Madras, where Marco lives. Her career is on the upswing, as Raju learns from newspaper reports that he reads in jail. This, in turn, makes him wonder how she can manage without him. But, Rosie is managing her career on her own admirably because she has found her métier at last.

Rosie's behaviour is always dignified and noble despite her nightlong bickerings behind the closed bedroom doors with Marco or altercations with Raju later when she cautions him not to discuss anything in the presence of servants. She does not react when Raju's boorish uncle shouts at her, calls her names and orders her to get out of the house where she has come, and is staying, uninvited. There is enough atonement for her adulterous liaison with Raju, which is there primarily because he helps her realize her ambition of displaying her art in public.

Rosie's delineation is in keeping with Narayan's delineation of female characters in general. Rosie may have succumbed to circumstances but she remains free from inward taint. That is why she makes such a complete and miraculous recovery, though the novelist, quite wisely, does not restore her to her earlier dubious marital status. Rosie is a strong-minded woman who is unwilling to sacrifice her happiness or ambition for the sake of keeping up appearances and staying with an appalling husband.

According to Narasimaiah, 'she is the only character in the novel who changes and grows and recovers from folly as the novel progresses'. In his words:

It is strange that Rosie is completely free from Narayan's ironic handling. Considering she was a highly educated woman—a Master of Arts and a married Hindu woman at that, it is surprising that Rosie's departure from that code invites no adverse comment from the novelist. In fact, she has always been dignified, noble and a true picture of ideal womanhood. Despite losing her chastity, she confesses to her husband and tries to seek pardon. This is highlighted as her biggest virtue.

And significantly, this has been achieved by as serious a treatment of the character as any novelist in the tragic mode may have done. He takes special care to protect the character of Rosie from being tainted internally. Narayan seems to be affirming what has been hailed in the tradition as the Feminine Principle in life.

1.5.3 Marco

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

He is bored with Marco's ruin collecting activities. Rosie, too, doesn't like to see the 'cold, old stone walls'. She finds that her wealthy husband is more interested in books, papers, painting. When Marco decides to stay on to explore the cave painting more fully, Raju takes charge of Rosie and soon becomes her ardent lover. Analysing the causes of Marco's failure with Rosie, Raju says:

Marco was just unpractical, an absolutely helpless man. All that he could do was to copy ancient things and write about them Perhaps he married out of a desire to have someone to care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong—this girl herself was a dreamer if ever there was one.

Marco has nothing in common with an average tourist as he doesn't wish to visit the traditional tourist spots in and around Malgudi. He has come there with a purpose to study and decipher carvings in temples and to visit the ancient caves near Mempi Hills. And he is single minded in the pursuit of his goal in the same manner as his wife, Rosie, who is devoted to dance. They are a mismatch as they fiercely hate each other's hobby and this leads to frequent arguments and quarrels between the two. There are a few ugly scenes in the hotel at Malgudi and the guesthouse on Mempi Hills.

NOTES

NOTES

Marco's satirical name and the descriptions of his appearance are also symbolic in *The Guide*. 'Marco' is a name that Raju invents because of the man's weird attire somehow, reminds him of Marco Polo. Certainly, the name resembles the potential strangeness in him, and his appearance reinforces this:

He dressed like a man about to undertake an expedition, with his thick coloured glasses, thick jacket, and a thick helmet, over which was perpetually stretched a green, shiny, water proof cover, giving him the appearance of a space-traveler.

This idiosyncratic outfit, so inappropriate for the hot climate of Malgudi, symbolizes his lack of connection with the reality and the emotions of this world, which ultimately explains his failure to understand Rosie. The presentation of Marco's desire to control every aspect of his environment seems to stem from his distaste for the unpredictable vitality and willfulness of living things: 'dead and decaying things seemed to ... fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs'. This obviously creates a symbolical contrast between him and Rosie—while Rosie is projected as a symbol of life, Marco is anti-life.

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

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

Marco strikes us as uncommonly eccentric—'He would not part with an anna without a voucher, whereas if you gave him a slip of paper could probably get him to write off his entire fortune.' Stern, self-cantered and self-righteous, Marco thinks he has acquired his wife's body and soul, and he thinks that his rights over his 'property' are unlimited. Dancing to him, is another form of prostitution, especially when Rosie belongs to a Devadasi family of temple girls, who have no respect in society and are considered public property.

One of the conditions of his marriage to Rosie was she would give up dancing, and now that she mentions it, he is furious; he accuses her of breaking the covenant of marriage. Her confession of infidelity stuns him and he stops talking to her. He fails to understand that a wife can be unfaithful to her husband even once and can still be in love with him.

To Rosie's passionate appeal when she says to him, 'I want to be with you. I want you to forget every thing, I want you to forgive me', he replies, 'Yes, I'm trying to forget even the earlier fact that I ever took a wife. I want to go out from here too—but I want to complete my work; and I am here for that. You are free to go and do what you please.' When he leaves for Madras, he buys only one railway ticket, leaving Rosie behind in Malgudi to fend for herself.

Marco leaves for Madras, but even though he is physically not there in Malgudi, he seems to be an ominous, overhanging presence. Rosie never forgets him, 'for after all, he is my husband', she tells Raju. She sees his picture in the *Illustrated Weekly* cuts it and places it on her dressing table. She wants to see his book but Raju has hidden it in his liquor cabinet.

Rosie is grateful to him for letting her go, any other man in his place would have throttled her when he learnt of her adulterous liaison with Raju. This induces a feeling of insecurity in Raju. Yet, Marco is full of honesty and integrity in his own way. In spite of the fact that Raju has insulted him and seduced his wife, he acknowledges Raju's help in his book, 'This author is obliged to acknowledge his debt to Sri Raju of Malgudi Railway Station for his help.'

He is scrupulous towards Rosie also, as he tries to restore a box of jewelry to her. We have no reason to believe Raju (who forges Rosie's signature in the legal document and lands in jail on a forgery charge) that it is a plot to entrap Rosie and force her to return to him. Nor must we blame him for pressing his charge of forgery against Raju.

It is not an instance of vindictiveness but a desire to let the man who has wronged him have his just deserts. Marco wishes to restore the box of jewelry to his wife and when he finds that her paramour is trying to grab it through fraud, he is perfectly justified in taking the measure that he takes. In this way, he has revenge on the man who has seduced his wife.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

12. What happens in the third stage of Raju's career?
13. Why is *The Guide* not a picaresque novel?
14. How does Raju think of Marco?
15. Why does Raju invent the name Marco?

1.6 R. K. NARAYAN'S TECHNIQUE OF WRITING

R. K. Narayan is a storyteller in the Indian tradition of storytelling. The narration moves forward chronologically, each succeeding event being linked causally with the previous one. As Paul Verghese points out:

Narayan's is the most simple form of prose fiction—the story which records a succession of events. There is no *hiatus* between character and plot; both are knit together. The qualities the novelist attributes to these characters determine the action, and the action in turn progressively changes the characters and thus the story is carried forward to the end.

In other words, as a good story-teller, Narayan sees to it that his story has a beginning, middle and an end. The end of his novel is a solution of the problem which sets the events moving; the end achieves that completeness towards which the action has been moving and beyond which the action cannot progress. This end very often consists either, in a balance of forces and counter-forces or in death or both.

NOTES

NOTES

However, *The Guide* is an exception in this respect. The narrative technique Narayan has followed in this novel is different from that of the other novels.

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

Narayan deviates from the traditional mode of narration; part of the story is told by the author and part in the first person by the hero himself. This is certainly an improvement in Narayan's narrative technique; here, however, it is necessitated by the nature of the story. The novel begins with the release of Raju from prison.

Whatever happens to Raju after his release is told by the narrator—the novelist; whereas, whatever had happened to Raju before he was imprisoned is told in a series of flashbacks in Raju's own words, in the form of a confession to Velan who has come to think of him as a saint. Then Raju takes over the narrative chores and relates his progress from sweetmeat seller to jailbird to Velan. In between, the omniscient narrator punctuates Raju's narrative by showing him dealing with the villagers as a holy man.

The Guide is divided into two parts and narrates the story of Raju's childhood, his love affair, imprisonment (first part) and growth into a swami (second part). Though the streams move simultaneously, the first part is set in Malgudi. Raju's past and the second part is set in Mangla, which represents Raju's present. While Raju's past in Malgudi is narrated by Raju himself, his presence in Mangla is narrated by the author.

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

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

16. How does the narration move in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*?
17. How many parts is *The Guide* divided into?

1.7 SUMMARY

- Among the Indian writers in English, R. K. Narayan has a special place in history.
- Narayan was looked after more by his maternal grandmother addressed as Ammani.

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

NOTES

NOTES

1.8 KEY TERMS

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

1.9 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’

1. In 1935, Narayan began his writing career with *Swami and Friends*.
2. R. K. Narayan’s family was not inclined towards politics as they regarded all governments as wicked.
3. Narayan’s first published work was a book review of *Development of Maritime Laws of 17th-Century England*.
4. *Malgudi Days*, Narayan’s first collection of short stories, was published in November 1942.
5. The protagonist in R.K. Narayan’s *The Guide* ends his life by sacrificing himself for an illusory cause.
6. Marco belonged to a family of temple dancers.
7. Raju receives a book called *The Cultural History of South India* sent by Marco’s publishers.
8. As the novel opens, we find Raju sitting alone and bored in a crossed-legged position on a granite slab on the banks of river Sarayu, waiting for someone’s company.
9. Raju’s father feels that in this school, Christianity is imposed on the students and they are forced to convert. So, against Raju’s wishes, he decides to send Raju to the *pyol* school.
10. In *The Guide*, Marco snaps his conjugal tie with Rosie when he comes to know of her intimacy with Raju.
11. Raju’s evolution from a tour guide to a spiritual guide forms the central theme of the novel.
12. In the third stage of his career, Raju becomes a convict, and even this role he performs with enthusiasm, becoming an ideal prisoner.
13. *The Guide* has an element of the picaresque, but it is not a picaresque novel in which there is no such transformation and spiritual rebirth.

14. Raju thinks of Marco in relation to Rosie as ‘a monkey’s picking up a rose garland’.
15. ‘Marco’ is a name that Raju invents because of the man’s weird attire which somehow, reminds him of Marco Polo.
16. In the story *The Guide*, we see the narration moving back and forth, from the present to the past and again to the present.
17. *The Guide* is divided into two parts and narrates the story of Raju’s childhood, his love affair, imprisonment (first part) and growth into a swami (second part).

NOTES

1.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What was Narayan’s place in Indian English literature?
2. Write a brief note on the story of *The Guide*.
3. How does Narayan use the character of Rosie in *The Guide* to broach the subject of women’s emancipation?
4. What was the reason for the marital discord between Rosie and Marco in R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide*?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain Raju’s obsession with Rosie in R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide*. What are the events that compel Raju to exit from Rosie’s and Marco’s life?
2. Describe the scene in Raju’s house when his uncle visits the family in R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide*.
3. How does Raju’s greed and insecurity bring his downfall? Discuss with reference to R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide*.
4. Describe Raju’s ultimate spiritual transformation in R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide*.
5. ‘*The Guide* is a typical picture of Indian society’. Justify the statement with relevant examples from R. K. Narayan’s novel.
6. Discuss Raju as an anti-hero in R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide*.
7. Explain the significance of the title of R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide*.
8. ‘*The Guide* possesses perfect artistic unity.’ Explain this statement with relevant examples from R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide*.

1.11 FURTHER READING

- Naik, M. K. 1982. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- Iyengar, K.R.S. 1962. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publication.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. 1971. *The Twice Born Fiction*. Delhi: Arnold Heinemann.

UNIT 2 INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 Toru Dutt: *Our Casuarina Tree*
 - 2.2.1 *Our Casuarina Tree*: An Introduction
 - 2.2.2 Summary
 - 2.2.3 A Brief Note on the Title
 - 2.2.4 Critical Reception of Toru Dutt's Works
- 2.3 Sarojini Naidu: *If You Call Me*
 - 2.3.1 Analysis of the Poem
 - 2.3.2 Sarojini Naidu as a Romantic Poet
- 2.4 Rabindranath Tagore: *Heaven of Freedom* (From *Gitanjali*)
 - 2.4.1 *Heaven of Freedom*: Analysis
 - 2.4.2 Overview
- 2.5 Nissim Ezekiel: A Brief Sketch
 - 2.5.1 Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion*: Text and Summary
- 2.6 Summary
- 2.7 Key Terms
- 2.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 2.9 Questions and Exercises
- 2.10 Further Reading

NOTES

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study some of the unique works of well-known poets, namely Toru Dutt's *Our Casuarina Tree*, Sarojini Naidu's *If You Call Me*, Rabindranath Tagore's *Heaven of Freedom*, and Nissim Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion*.

To study Rabindranath Tagore is to know the essence of Indian artistic traditions, to understand a great man who became a cultural hero and international figure. *Gitanjali*, a collection of poems, is considered to be one of his most unique works. The original Bengali collection of 157 poems was published on 14 August 1910. The English *Gitanjali* or *Song Offerings* is a collection of 103 English poems of Tagore's own English translations of his Bengali poems, first published in November 1912 by the Indian Society of London.

Sarojini Naidu was one of the most famous poets of post-independence India and is also referred to as the 'Nightingale of India'. She had a special and rather sensitive relationship with the sights, sounds, smell and feel of the people and culture of India. This relationship reflects not only in the choice of her subject matter but also in the way she treats the subject of her poem.

Toru Dutt was an Indian poet who wrote in English and French. Dutt holds a prominent place in the early phase of the history of Indian poetry in English. Though she lived for a very short span and did not produce a prolific creative literature, yet the quality of her creative endeavour is unmatched.

NOTES

Our Casuarina Tree is a poem published in 1881 by Toru Dutt. It is a perfect example of craftsmanship. In this poem, Toru Dutt celebrates the majesty of the Casuarina tree and remembers her happy childhood days spent under it, and revives her memories with her beloved siblings. It still remains one of the more popular poems in modern Indian literature.

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the prolific Indian writers in English of the 20th century. He was a playwright, editor, critic and poet. Nissim Ezekiel (14 December 1924 – 9 January 2004), on the other hand, was a renowned Indian poet of Jewish origin. He was also a prolific playwright, broadcaster, social commentator and art-critic. He had the distinction of being an editor of repute. Ezekiel was one of the prominent figures writing in English. He had made several contributions towards post-colonial literature of India as well as literary history.

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the major themes of Toru Dutt's poem, *Our Casuarina Tree*
- Critically analyse Sarojini Naidu's poem, *If You Call Me*
- Describe Sarojini Naidu as a Romantic Poet
- Explain Rabindranath Tagore's poem, *Heaven of Freedom (Gitanjali)*
- Discuss the life and works of Nissim Ezekiel
- Analyse and assess Nissim Ezekiel's poem, *Night of the Scorpion*

2.2 TORU DUTT: *OUR CASUARINA TREE*

Toru Dutt (4 March 1856–30 August 1877) was an Indian born poet who wrote in English and French. She was born to Govin Chunder Dutt and Kshetramoni of the Rambagan Dutt family. Toru was the youngest child after sister Aru and brother Abju. Although Hindus by birth, their family converted to Christianity in 1862 when Toru was six years old. The Dutt family left for England when Toru was still very young. In England, she continued her higher French Studies. While living in Cambridge between 1871 and 1873, she attended the Higher Lectures for Women at the University. What needs to be noticed here is the multi-cultural synthesis that went into the making of this poet. To many, she remains the first and perhaps only example of an Indian woman's views on European colonizing powers. The poet lived a life of synthesis of some of the best ideas from both the cultures.

Toru Dutt met and befriended Mary Martin, the daughter of Reverend John Martin of Sidney Sussex College. The friendship that developed between the two girls at this time continued in their correspondence after Toru's return to India. Not only did Mary help in publishing and publicizing some of her works, she was her close confidant to whom Toru could write her last letter.

Mary was not only a huge source of support for Toru but was also an anchor and representative of Toru in the western world after she returned having lived in Italy and France apart from England.

Toru Dutt was proficient in four languages: Bengali, English, French and, later on, Sanskrit. All these languages contributed uniquely in the creation of her uniquely syncretic style in which the emotional and sentimental sway characteristic of the Indic cultures can be represented with a degree of precision that is characteristic of the European language.

Toru left behind an impressive collection of prose and poetry. Her two novels, the unfinished *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* written in English and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*, written in French, were based outside India with non-Indian protagonists. Her poetry comprises *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* consisting of her translations into English of French poetry, and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* which compiles her translations and adaptations from Sanskrit literature. The poem under study was a part of this collection, the last poem in her last work.

A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields was published in 1876 without preface or introduction. At first, this collection attracted little attention. When her collection of Sanskrit translations *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* was published posthumously in 1882, Edmund Gosse wrote an introductory memoir for it. In this, he wrote of Toru Dutt: 'She brought with her from Europe a store of knowledge that would have sufficed to make an English or French girl seem learned, but which in her case was simply miraculous.' We know that Toru aspired to be a novelist who could balance the Indian and European worlds in her writing. To what extent did she achieve that goal is something that we need to assess after reading her entire works.

At the time of her death, she left behind two novels, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*, the first novel in French by an Indian writer, and *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden*, (thought to be the first novel in English by an Indian woman writer) in addition to an unfinished volume of original poems in English, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. The attribution of so many firsts to her writings indeed establishes her as a pioneer of sorts, and we should be generous in giving her the credit for her path-breaking goals and achievements. Writing from the heart of a patriarchal society, it was commendable that she could aspire of excelling in a masculine domain. The aspiration becomes more commendable when we realize that she was writing in a language and form completely foreign to her. Moreover, the achievements become truly remarkable when we find her struggling and overcoming the hurdles of an immature publishing industry in a colonized land.

It was after Dutt's death in 1877 that her father discovered the manuscripts of her writings, among which was *Ancient Ballads*. The ballads are essentially Indian in genre and outlook, and are poetical attempts to reveal her return to her land. In them are enshrined what she had learnt of her country from books and from her people. She did not anglicize her ideas but kept close to the ethical

NOTES

values of the original tales while her understanding of modern life and dedication to craft has helped her to make these ideas relevant to posterity.

2.2.1 *Our Casuarina Tree*: An Introduction

NOTES

Our Casuarina Tree is an intensely personal poem. Laced with memories of her childhood and foreign trips, the poem was perhaps composed as a tribute to the garden home where Toru, her sister and her brother grew up as children along with other children of the family and the neighbourhood. So dear were this garden and home to Toru that she returned to this place in the last phase of her life to eventually die. The reference to death in the poem is in certain senses a foreboding of her premature death. The fondness and nostalgia with which she speaks of the tree clearly reflect a desire to use the tree as a central figure around which to organize the various memories of her short but intense life. No wonder it is the last poem of her last book.

Literary critic and Editor Dipendranath Mitra summarizes the creative phase of Toru's life, thus:

After a stay of about four years in France and England, the Dutt family—Toru, Aru and their parents—returned to Calcutta in November 1873. The sisters, who had, while in Cambridge, started translating into English from French poetry, appeared in print for the first time in the March 1874 number of the Bengal Magazine. Aru was already seriously ill and died four months later, in July. Between March and July of the same year, fourteen translations from French poets appeared in the magazine with the initials 'A.D.' or 'T.D.', inconspicuously printed at the bottom of each piece, from which we know that each sister contributed seven translations. Thereafter, only T.D.'s contributions, but in larger numbers, continued to appear in the magazine regularly for quite some time after her death on 30 August 1877.

As you read in the biographical note, Toru led a checkered life. Though born as a Hindu, her family embraced Christianity when she was six. She was English by education and a French woman at heart as her family stayed in France during and after her maturing phase. The poem, thus, displays an intense nostalgia for her native land and the memories of her childhood.

In the first part of the poem, she depicts the Casuarina tree wound up with a creeper as if it was in the folds of a huge python. Among its dense boughs, nests and beehives abounded and the garden overflowed with the sweet songs of the nestled birds during the day but especially at night. As the poem moves on, the poet reveals why the Casuarina tree was dear to her soul. It was because under its shade, she had played with her childhood companions, specially her sister Aru. Now those individuals may be no more but their memories are undeniably linked with the tree. The tree is the sole bond between her past and her present. In foreign lands, the tree stands as a majestic symbol of her motherland, India, and her beautiful childhood memories associated with that country.

2.2.2 Summary

As you know that a large part of Dutt's adult life was spent abroad. While living abroad, she used to often recollect nostalgically and pine for her native land and the fond memories of her childhood. It is interesting that the giant Casuarina tree that forms the centre of this poem should be one of the dominant presences in her memory relating to her native land and her childhood. This alerts us to the fact that the tree is not a mere physical beauty in the poem but a metaphor for important parts of her past as well as associated with her past in numerous ways.

NOTES

Stanza 1

In the first stanza of the poem, the poet is remembering with nostalgia, the garden of her old home back in her native place. In it, a huge python-like creeper climbs the strong and sturdy trunk of the Casuarina tree. It appears as if the tree had been there for some time and grown a full thick trunk and canopy. The trunk is full of notches and marks showing the age of the tree. The notches and marks indicate the trials and tribulations that the tree has undergone as a part of its, perhaps, century long existence. The python image is suggestive here—a large tropical snake that kills its prey by winding itself around its victim and squeezing life out of it; it is also of thick and strong built. The thick and strong creeper, as it moves upwards towards the top, is weighed down with bright red flowers and it appears as if this giant tree is wearing a colourful scarf. This creeper has tightly encircled the tree and so tight is the embrace that it would have proved fatal for any other tree. However, the Casuarina tree is so strong that it can prosper even within this fatal embrace.

Throughout the day, small birds and bees gather in and around the tree. Obviously, the bright red flowers of the creeper attract them even as the strong branches and dense leaves of the tree provide them with support and shelter. Often in the night, the garden resounds with the sweet, never-ending song of a bird. The reference to the birds and the bees indicates that it is not only the creeper which derives sustenance, support and its entire being in the present form from the tree. Birds and bees also nest in the tree, making it a complete ecosystem. The tree now starts resembling nature. In its functions and form, it becomes a metaphor for nature which sustains plants, birds, insects and man, the man in question here being the poet herself. The poet cannot make out which bird sings in which corner of the tree, but she knows that the bird's song provides rest and repose to herself as well as other human beings.

Stanza 2

When the poet opens her window at dawn, the first sight that meets her eyes and gives her some delight is the Casuarina tree. However, the word that she uses here is not window but *casement*, an old English word for window. This is not only a reflection of the westernization of her vocabulary and consciousness but

NOTES

also reflective of the liberating glance that a casement offers from the confining spaces of a medieval castle. Sometimes, mostly during winter, she sees a baboon, which is a large-nosed African monkey sitting like a statue right on the top of the tree. The baboon watches the sun rising from the crest of the tree, even as its young ones leap and play on the branches or at the bottom of the tree.

From far and near, that is from the tree as well as from beyond it, one can hear the *koels* singing as if to greet the new day. The poet's focus has shifted from the tree to the morning and she can perceive sound coming from the tree as well as beyond it. Beyond the trees are the grassy fields where cows are grazing lazily which make the poet think as if they are sleepy. The *koel* is the stepping stone on which the poet's consciousness transcends the tree and latches on to the cows. With the cows, however, the poet has moved out of the tree to its surroundings until the shade of the tree catches her attention again in the next line. So, although the poet tries to describe everything she sees as a part of the morning scene, the tree with its dominating presence centres in her description. In fact, so dominating is the tree's presence that she cannot escape it for long and must return to it sooner than later.

What you should feel in this stanza is Dutt's perception of the landscape around her house and the central position that the Casuarina tree occupies in it. You should also feel the multimedia nature of her recollection: sight, sound, smell and touch combine to bring alive the scene as a pulsating reality for the reader.

Stanza 3

Having described the majestic appearance of the tree and its beautiful surroundings, the poet now goes on to say that the tree which is so dear to her, is the centre of her consciousness because of the memories associated with it. As a child, she had played with her childhood friends under the tree and, therefore, the tree reminds her of all those friends and the myriad events that happened under it. So intense has been her love for these friends that she cannot forget them or the tree that remains linked to them in her memory. The tree, thus, becomes a symbol of her past life, a kind of a trigger that brings back to her mind the years that she spent around it. Though many years have passed by, yet in memory of those friends and events, the tree will always remain dear to her. So intense is the passion evoked in the recollection of past events and people that hot tears brim into her eyes. Therefore, the tree will stay dear to her for the sake of those friends and that past.

The tree stands blend with images of her friend and, therefore, it has become a physical reminder of her friendships and the friends. What the poet is trying to convey is the fact that the only way in which she can remember some of her friends is in association with this tree. To understand the worth of this observation ask yourself the question: what other ways do we remember people by? Names, faces, attributes, actions, and so on, may appear to be the rational answer. But if you think further, these names, faces, actions and attributes must

be tagged to a concrete physical environment. Suppose you met a man or woman again and again on a railway station. The memory of that man or woman would always return to you tagged with a railway station. In the poet's case, that physical location is the tree. It appears as if she has spent a significant amount of time with her friends under the tree; that is why the tree is permanently tagged to the memory of these friends.

The tree's gentle swaying in the wind creates a sound reminiscent of the sea waves breaking on a beach full of pebbles. The poet compares this sound to a funeral song sung in a low murmuring tone or a strange dialect as if the tree was lamenting. So vivid is the memory of that sound in her mind that she can hear the sound even in foreign lands.

This part of the stanza is focused on sound. The sound of the trees is suggested in terms of the sound of the waves, a funeral song or a strange dialect. What she hears in the tree's speech is lamentation; of what she does not clarify. Is this the autumn wind that she is remembering? Is the tree lamenting for the falling leaves? Or is it that the tree is trying to express something that remains fundamentally unintelligible to the poet? But what it most closely resembles is human lamentation. In the next stanza, the poet will qualify the nature of this wailing but that still does not explain why it should be a lament. The poet should have no access to and, therefore, no memory of what the tree did after her growing up or departure.

Stanza 4

The lament of the tree may seem unfamiliar to many but it is not so to her. That is because she has the 'eye of faith'. This is figurative speech and the figure of speech the poet uses here involves a kind of transference of attributes. Faith is understood as residing in the poet's sight. An attribute of the mind or heart is transferred to the eye.

What does this 'eye of faith' help her hear? The same song of lamentation at other places, in other contexts. Why is faith required to hear this song? Perhaps because this faith fosters a particular sensitivity which cuts across cultures, and can hear a common song of longing and lamentation across all cultures. This is a longing or lamentation that is common to the human situation.

The poet, therefore, claims to have heard that wail far away in distant lands by sheltered bays where a water-wraith slumbered in his cave. A wraith is a ghost or apparition and a water wraith would be a ghost that lives in a cave around the bay. In associating the lamenting song with a ghost, cave and sheltered bay with waves gently kissing the shore, Dutt is evoking a mystic secluded space where songs of this kind are likely to be heard.

That this shore could be along the long coast lines of France or Italy suggests that these are the foreign lands where the poet has spent considerable time on the shore—hearing, seeing and feeling shore life in the context of her past memories. The next line adds yet another dimension to the context of the

NOTES

NOTES

song and that is a moonlit night. The beach under these conditions lay asleep in a dreamless faint or dead sleep in the night under the moon.

It was then that whenever she heard the sound of sea waves on an Italian or French shore, the majestic form of the tree came back into her mind. The tree appeared in her imagination as she had seen it in her best years as a child when she was living in her own beloved country. It is clear once again that the tree dominates her consciousness in a profound way. It becomes the master symbol of her life so that anything that she sees or hears across the world remotely resembling any attribute of the tree brings back the tree to her mind.

Stanza 5

Because of these fond memories and associations with the tree, the poet feels that she would gladly dedicate a song or hymn in honour of the tree. Two ideas are clear in this desire: the need to honour the tree and poetry as a mode or agency of honouring someone as it immortalizes the person. She later wishes explicitly that the tree joins the list of immortal trees. Notice the self-reflexive desire in these lines. The poem voices a desire to honour the tree, but in the act of voicing the desire, the poet also honours it and immortalizes it. Nothing more needs to be done. The voicing of the desire is also the fulfilment of it.

The tree was loved by many who are now resting in the sleep of death. This is not only an indication of the poet's age because most of her friends who played around it are dead but also a reflection on the age of the tree. Many generations of people who have lived around the tree loved it and have now died. She misses them deeply and yearns for them in her loneliness, for they were dearer to her than her own life.

She wishes that after her death, the Casuarina tree, which is linked to so many important and pleasurable events and people in her past, would become immortal. Here she refers to Borrowdale, a particularly fertile valley in England where the trees are supposed to be immortal. Immortality lives in and around these trees and under the trees, the fear of death, passage of time and hope for the future lose significance.

What you must have guessed by now is the poet's intention to not only immortalize the tree but also the memories linked to it and the associations with it. For as long as the tree lives either physically or notionally in poems like these, those memories and associations can never be put to rest. Notice how the poem immortalizes the tree and her memories and associations. Readers like us continue to read, see and perhaps feel the tree in this poem.

Finally, aware of her limitations as a poet, she acknowledges that the verses with which she is trying to recreate the beauty of the tree are weak and, therefore, incapable of conveying its beauty and majesty in their full grandeur. Yet she prays that the memory of its beauty and grace would remain intact in the minds of the readers every time they visited the poem in their readings. She has the faith that the deep love of those who have lived and played around it will protect the tree from the curse of being forgotten and will immortalize it.

Think about the tree as a metaphor and one of the ideas that will come into your mind is that every life sustaining and pleasure giving institutions like the tree is immortal because it continues to live in the heart, work and memories of those who love her because they had once derived sustenance and pleasure from it.

2.2.3 A Brief Note on the Title

The Casuarina belongs to the she-oak or beefwood type of trees which is noted for its strong and robust trunk and branches as well as its dense canopy and foliage. Because of its expanse and density, it can support a wide variety of life including birds and bees, besides sheltering a host of flowers and animals in its vicinity and shade. It is mainly found in the southern parts of India and Australia, although samples of the tree can be found sprinkled across the country. Its leaves resemble the plumage of a cassowary bird from which it derives its name. Because of its thick and robust trunk, it also hosts creepers. The red scarf in the poem has to be visualized literally as the profuse flowering on its surface would indeed appear majestic. Visualize the giant green tree with flashes of red in between and you will probably be able understand why the poet is so mesmerized with its physical magnificence. Put it together with the people, memories and associations with the tree and you can probably begin to figure out why she chose to organize her poem around it. No wonder it also forms the title of the poem.

The name of the tree positioned in the title helps the reader to identify at the beginning which tree is being spoken of, for the poet will formally identify the tree only in Line 24. The use of the word 'Our' in the title also deserves attention. The tree has been a favourite play space for not only the poet but also her friends and relatives. It is for their sake that the tree remains 'precious' to her. So, Dutt implies that her feelings for the tree are not unique to her but are shared by the entire community of children who have shared a past under the tree. That is why the tree is not only 'hers' but 'theirs'. The poem, in this sense, records the feelings and emotions of her childhood feelings as well.

2.2.4 Critical Reception of Toru Dutt's Works

Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan, by which Toru Dutt's poetic achievements are now mainly judged, was not published by London's Kegan Paul & Co. till 1882. Apart from nine ballads and legends, this volume also contains a number of sonnets and, in a separate section called *The Miscellaneous Poems*, a few personal verses, including her masterpiece, *Our Casuarina Tree*, which has been acclaimed by a discerning English critic as 'the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner'. Literary historian and English translator Mr Edmund Gosse in his famous introduction to this volume expressed the opinion that this collection of poems 'will be ultimately found to constitute Toru's chief legacy to posterity'.

Literary critic Meera Jagannathan summarizes the ambivalence of the European reception of her work, thus:

NOTES

NOTES

Critics and reviewers writing in British and French nineteenth-century journals like *La Revue des Deux Indes*, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, *The Literary Examiner* and *The Friend of India*, to name only a few, reacted with marked ambivalence to the works of Toru Dutt, a little known young writer from Calcutta, British India. Even when the critical reception was gracious, it often inveighed against the writer's overwrought style that was said to irritate Western sensibilities. . . . At the same time, it is worthwhile to note that at least a few European critics were drawn to her work, which crystallized for them a marvelous synthesis of the East and the West. Edmond Gosse in England and James Darmesteter and André Theuriet in France were impressed by the lyrical quality of her work and her precocious knowledge of French and English literature.

The Nationalism of the Poem

The poem reflects the poet's deeply felt admiration for her homeland which is linked in her mind to the tree. While she was abroad, Dutt longed for her native land, and the central collective symbol of all those memories and longings is the tree.

The tree does not represent the Indian nation in any political sense but only in a metaphoric or symbolic sense. For the poet, India, her motherland, comes back in the form of a series of memories of her childhood and at the centre of those memories stands the tall and majestic Casuarina tree. Just as the nation nurtures a large variety of peoples and cultures in its fold, the tree nurtures not only a variety of life forms in and around it but also memories and associations that people use to give meaning to their lives.

The poem when read carefully unveils an elaborate set of literal and symbolic correspondences between the tree and India as a nation. The giant stature of the tree suggests the majestic nature of the motherland as it exists in the minds and hearts of its citizens, especially those who are far away from it. It is indented with scars that has been inflicted by the past trials and tribulations. The 'rugged trunk' hints at the antiquity of the culture. The tree reaches for the stars and represents the aspirations of millions. The python-like creeper stands for the cultural invasion that the country has faced. It gallantly wears that cultural assault with dignity; in fact, nurtures the parasite that may kill it one day. But at the moment, it grows strong. It accepts the invasion of the creeper and utilizes it as an embellishment (scarf) that enhances its appearance. The 'gathered bird and bee' emblemize the hectic communal activity in India, as it is a conglomeration of various cultures and religions.

Through the image of the creeper, the poet suggests that no other country could have absorbed these foreign elements and yet maintained its own identity. The symbol of the scarf may also refer to the concept of modesty in Indian culture where the femininity of a woman is synonymous with modesty. Lines like 'With one sweet song that seems to have no close' underline the rich cultural tradition that has emerged out of the syncretic reality of India, which fails to die away. It exists even while men rest. Though men expire, the rich cultural heritage represented by music lives on. The Casuarina Tree, an insignia of the Indian

culture, is significant to the speaker not only owing to its magnificence; it is dear to her soul. The Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi said: 'A nation's culture resides in the hearts of the people.' It is in the poet's soul that the memories of the tree lives and by that token, the tree becomes a potent symbol of Indian culture.

Past and Present

On the surface, the poem feels as if it is all about the casuarina tree, but actually, the tree is just a medium to link the poet's past with the present. The poet remembers the tree because of the many happy memories of childhood days that are linked to it which are a source of comfort and consolation to her in another country. The poem, therefore, underlines the importance of memories in human life. If we think critically about what the memory of the tree does to the poet, we discover the crucial role memory plays in the formation, retention and assessment of our selves. The tree brings to her mind the memories of time when she used to play under it in the company of her brother and sister, both of whom are already dead. She was very close to her dead brother and sister named Abju and Aru who loved the Casuarina tree very greatly. So she loves the tree greatly. But lost in the memories of her siblings who are now dead, she is looking forward to death as an acceptable thing. The memories of her brother and sister brings tears into her eyes. She hopes that the tree will be remembered for ever as the yew trees of Borrowdale immortalized by Wordsworth are still remembered. She immortalizes the tree for the sake of her loved ones by writing a poem for it. In the process, what she achieves is an immortalization of herself because she is formed so much in terms of the tree that to remember the tree is in one sense to remember her and others associated with it.

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Name the novels that Toru Dutt left behind at the time of her death.
2. What type of tree does the poet refer to in the poem?
3. How is the poet's past with the present represented in the poem?

2.3 SAROJINI NAIDU: *IF YOU CALL ME*

*If you call me I will come
Swifter, O my Love,
Than a trembling
forest deer
Or a panting dove,
Swifter than a
snake that flies*

NOTES

To the charmer's
thrall...
If you call me I will
come
Fearless what
befall.
If you call me, I will
come
Swifter than the
lightning's feet
Shod with plumes
of fire.
Life's dark tides
may roll between,
Or Death's deep
chasms divide-
If you call me I will
come
Fearless what
betide.

2.3.1 Analysis of the Poem

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) is an eminent Indo-Anglican poet and was also associated deeply with the cause of Indian Independence. Her writings offer an insight into her multi-dimensional temperament. She appears as a delicate woman who emerges from all turbulences of life smiling. Her spirit remains indomitable and undefeated in her poetic works.

She was conferred the 'Kaisar-i-Hind' gold medal in poetry. She was also a member of the Royal Society of Literature and was granted an honorary degree by the University of Allahabad. She became a popular poet after the release of *The Golden Threshold*. Her poems such as *The Soul's Prayer*, *To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus* and *In Salutation to the Eternal Peace* were given an honorary place in the Oxford history of English literature and were a part of the Oxford Book of Mystic English Verse.

Naidu's poetic style is rhythmic and flowing. The play of words heightens the ecstasies and at times the melancholic mood of the poem.

Cover mine eyes, O my love!

*Mine eyes that are weary of bliss
As of light that is poignant and strong,
O silence my lips with a kiss,
My lips that are weary of song.*

NOTES

The poem which is rich in its rhyme scheme is a style which can be traced across other poems of Sarojini Naidu as well. The felicity of expression and the romantic fervour dominate the tone of the poems. Naidu conveys the intensity of feeling with romantic sensuousness and modern sensibilities. The poetry seems to sing on its own and is best enjoyed when recited aloud.

Mostly Naidu covers four broad themes in all her poetic works. These four themes are of patriotism, love, nature and longing. She belongs to the Elizabethan school of lyric poetry.

2.3.2 Sarojini Naidu as a Romantic Poet

Perhaps the most significant contribution of Naidu towards English poetry was her translation of Sanskrit classics based on that of William Wordsworth and John Keats.

Her romanticism is more decadent than her predecessors because of her infatuation with the music and the tonality of words in the poems. Aesthetically she remains centred around the sublime aspects of Indian life and nature. She is neither too fantastical like Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* nor deeply philosophical like Wordsworth's *Ode to Immortality*.

Spring is the mode to externalize the feeling of longing and loneliness by Sarojini Naidu. Spring becomes irresistible for the senses to indulge because it brings its tidings of love, nostalgia and sweet aromas. It signifies rebirth and rejuvenation in her poems. The coming of spring with the process of creation is the marker of the continuity of life despite all hardships and emotional ups and downs.

*The earth is ashine like a humming-bird's
And the sky like a kingfisher's feather,
O come, let us go and play with the spring,
Like glad-hearted children together.*

The above stanza which is taken from Naidu's poem *The Call of the Spring* describes the environment in all its splendours with the onset of the season of spring. The carnivalesque atmosphere in the Shakespearean plays is mirrored when the poet-narrator calls her beloved to play with nature like innocent children once again. Naidu's poems on spring are the space where she could find her answer to the question of existence and mortality. Like neo-modernist poets such as Dylan Thomas, Naidu came to terms with the subject of death, separation and loss by understanding the continuity of life reflected in the regeneration brought about by spring in nature. Naidu, like Thomas, professed the idea that all life despite being atomic and fragmented is actually one. Naidu's account

NOTES

of nature is not just descriptive but deeply symbolic and meditative in nature as well. The interplay between the excitement caused by the gentle sounds and scents of spring and the melancholia caused by the longing for one's beloved is a recurring theme in all of Naidu's romantic poetry.

Love in the poems of Sarojini Naidu

Naidu writes about love in her poems in a way which is subtle yet intense at once. She draws her imagery from personal experiences and weaves together her existence, her love and her love for the natural world in her verses. Her poem *The Temple* which is composed in the form of twenty four lyric is a comprehensive attempt of all her poetry to define the tensions between love and longing for one's beloved.

The first eight lyrics describe the poet's ecstatic attainment of love. This is a phase when the entire world erupts in a multitude of colours and fragrances. The moon shines brighter and the sun warms the skin gently. The second session of eight lyric revolves around the estrangement of this long cherished beloved from the poet's life. What follows is a time of mental and emotional derangement owing to an acute pain of longing and an aching sense of loss. Naidu is exploring the psychological makeup of a lover with utmost honesty and brave directness when she writes the lines in her poem *The Sorrow of Love*:

*Why did you turn your face away? Was it for grief or fear,
Your strength would fail or your pride grow weak,
If you touched my hand, if you heard me speak,
After a life-long year?*

Naidu was greatly influenced by the Persian mystical poetry which revolved around the idea of 'the beloved'. She was an ardent admirer of poets such as Rumi, Hafiz and Khayyam. She wrote poems reflecting the desire to give away all to the beloved. The beloved is seen as the supreme centre around which the life of the poet revolves. Every emotion experienced by the poet, be it of joy, sorrow, grief, ecstasy, sadness or melancholy seem to arise from the beloved. The poet derives the ultimate satisfaction from the innocent and spiritual affection/devotion felt towards the beloved. The following verses appear in her poem titles:

*To Love
O love! of all the treasures that I own,
What gift have I withheld before thy throne?*

If You Call Me is the fifth poem in a collection of eight poems titled *Gates of delight* composed by Sarojini Naidu. All eight poems talk about the condition of the poet as a lover and the glory of the beloved. The poetess professes absolute submission to the devotion of the beloved. She draws all her life strength from the happiness of her beloved and seems to strive towards gifting away her life to him. There are moments of uncertainties and dejections as well when the lover

suffers bouts of separation and rejection by the beloved. The pain of having to move away from the life source of all universes proves to be too painful for the lover. There are times of mental breakdowns where the lover seeks forgiveness for his folly of encroaching upon the life of the beloved who is described as too glorious to consider the lover.

The lover often chides himself for having believed that he could find atonement with his beloved and the fate conspired to become the burning pyre of the lover. Even in such times of ignominy and emotional duress, the lover never forgets the face of his beloved and every star shining in the night sky reminds him of his beloved. Every spring reminds him of the beauties and wondrous joys of the sublime universe he had experienced when he had been with his beloved. The lover is rational at times and knows that his beloved is no immortal conception but a person made of blood and bones who is affected by fate just as much as he is yet somewhere deep in his heart he believes that his innocent and pious love for his beloved would transcend the calamities of fate and the eventuality of age.

Naidu is not a mystic poet and neither is mysticism a dominant theme of her poetry. Her poems are lyrically crafted and abound with images with a mystical fervour to complement her writing style.

Naidu's longing in her poems is for some mystic platonic lover and not for a human being. Even if her love was for a human beloved, it was a symbol of the transcendental divine. This is evident in her devotional tone in the lines:

*I care not since you make most audible
The subtle murmurs of eternity
And tho' you are, like men of mortal race,
That Death may mar and destiny efface ..
I care not ... since unto my heart you bring
The very vision of God's dwelling place*

A similar approach towards the beloved can be seen in the poem *If You Call Me* by the poet who is ready to rush to her lover at his first call. She is eagerly awaiting his hint and is in a state of frenzied nervousness. She trembles like a deer and is spell bound in the love like a serpent to the charmer's thrall. The poem is written in two stanzas and both the stanzas end with the lines Fearless what betide/Fearless what befall. The poet is ready to face all the consequences of her transgression to attain her beloved. Love has made the lover fearless and he is desperately waiting for the moment of his union with the beloved. The lover shall not be let down in his endeavour to reach his beloved even if they are separated by the cruelties of fate and the chasms of death. Every risk looks inconsequential in the wake of meeting the beloved such is the emotion felt by the poet narrator in the poem.

NOTES

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. What is Naidu's poetic style?
5. What dominates the tone of Naidu's poems?
6. What are the four broad themes prevalent in Naidu's poetic works?

2.4 RABINDRANATH TAGORE: *HEAVEN OF FREEDOM (FROM GITANJALI)*

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.*

Rabindranath Tagore, despite his strong criticism of nationalism and colonialism for a major part of his literary career—which lasted right until his death, remains deeply Indian in spirit and very delicate in his sensibilities as an author and as a poet. His poem *Where The Mind Is Without Fear* presents his patriotic aspect as a poet. The poem can be described as a rendition of the utopia which Tagore aspired and the poet can be found addressing the dogmas which must be addressed in order to gain freedom in its truest essence. His writings inherit all cultures and cuts through the stringent class prevailing in the Indian society. Tagore in his address can be said to be similar to Premchand. Both Premchand and Tagore are socialists in their literary style. People of all casts and social order find a voice in their writings. The concerns expressed by Tagore in this poem revolve around breaking the conditioning of the human mind which prevents it from regaining its natural order and space in the general life world.

Tagore is suggestive in choosing the title of the poem to be *Heaven of Freedom*. By freedom, Tagore does not mean uninhibited hedonism in the material world but a sublime state of being where there is absolute freedom of expression of the universal soul. Tagore reflects Keatsian Romantic philosophy not just in his nature poems but also in his poems which deal with the human

condition. This 'Heaven of Freedom' as envisaged by Tagore is reminiscent of the tradition adopted by earlier romantic poets such as William Blake and William Shakespeare. Freedom is approached by Tagore in this poem not as a means of utility or enjoyment but rather as a creative process. Tagore wants to create this freedom of heaven rather than use it. The process of such a creation is gratifying enough for the poet.

2.4.1 *Heaven of Freedom: Analysis*

The poem begins with the mind being sans fear. Fear is a product of deceit. It lowers the head in shame. The description is of a state where knowledge is free and not bounded by the constraints of class and social stature. The utopia shall be achieved. Tagore wrote in a time where education was strictly class based. The monopolization of science by the upper and the middle class which happened in the western nations before the socialists stepped in the power machinery also happened in a colonial Indian nation. The resources and capital was exclusively reserved for the upper sections of the society and was used as a means of oppression of the lower plebeian class in India. The problem becomes more complex when one realizes that in India the social position of an individual depends not just upon his financial resources but a plethora of other credentials like caste, class, family profession etc. This complexity made it more difficult to spread the benefit of a modern education uniformly across the masses in a state which had not yet found independence and was in a process to do so.

This sense of fragmented identity is reflected in the next line of the poem which says that the envisaged utopia shall not be fragmentary by domestic walls. The domestic walls which demarcate the nation are the social conditioning of men from which they could not break free. In order for the nation to attain true freedom, it becomes very necessary to break apart from the different dogmas of caste, class and creed. Modern education is required to strengthen the foundation of the country ad prevent one man from getting oppressed by another.

The fifth and the sixth line of the poem talk about the state where man shall strive tirelessly towards perfection because there shall be no existence of falsities and lies. The Utopia can be actualized economically because the output shall be maximum at all times. This is a state where there shall be no trace of corruption. Each word spoken by man shall be coming from the depth of truth. This is the ultimate freedom of expression of the soul where one does not have to hide behind the façade of falsely created material identities. The resources shall be fairly distributed amongst all. This is a state where man is full of contentment.

The next two lines of the poem also talk about the human mind. Tagore believes that in the oceanic state about which he is talking shall be driven by reason and logic. This is typically the enlightenment philosophy where reason bears the strongest power and debate resolves conflict instead of violence or jingoism. The poet believes that in present world reason has been lost to habit. By habit he is indicative of the orthodox conditioning which prevents India from becoming a developed nation. The habit results in stagnation of human

NOTES

NOTES

condition and is a retarding force in the forward march to realize Tagore's great Indian dream. The ninth verse of the poem directly addresses a second person as 'thee'. He says that this unnamed entity would enable the minds of the men to march forward and attain the freedom of heaven. The final line of the poem reveals this second person addressee to be 'Father'. This 'Father' is imagined as the father of Tagore's utopian state. The poet invokes this transcendental life force and requests him to let his country awake in such a state of perfection and heavenly state of being.

Structure and Composition

The poem is in free verse and in eleven lines. The poem is written in a single linear running stanza without any regular rhyme scheme or rhythm. The poem is direct in its approach and is very simple to follow. There is a sweet alliteration present in the poem. For example:

'Where the mind is without fear'
'And the Head is held high'

In total the poet uses the word 'where' for eleven times in the poem which reflects the concreteness of the utopian state in the poet's mind. The poet chooses to end the poem with a sign of exclamation indicating how wondrous and awe-inspiring his ideal utopia would be if 'god' ever lets man achieve that state.

2.4.2 Overview

Rabindranath's poems come across as deeply religious and are imbued with an undying love for both nature and his homeland. The poem *Where The Mind Is Without Fear* was part of a volume called *Naibedya*, which got later translated in English language as *Gitanjali*. The poem is a prayer addressed to the universal father figure, presumably the poet's conception of a God who is invoked to lift the country from its appalled state of ignominy and turbulences. The poem defines freedom as a sovereign state of mind which is not restricted by the chains of corruption, fear, lies, ignominy and the barriers of class, caste, creed and social standings. Freedom is portrayed as the ultimate freedom of expression of the soul where there is no mask or a façade. The freedom ensures total cooperation between the different members of the society in a way that results in optimal production and forward motion of the civilization.

Tagore and the issue of Indian Independence

Tagore believed that the attainment of freedom was the most arduous yet a crucial task for a colonial Indian state. A free India would mean that all the resources and knowledge get evenly distributed amongst the countrymen. This is being prevented because of the fragmentation of the nation state into mutually exclusive closed compartments of religion, sex, caste, creed and social status. Tagore wants the mind of every individual to free itself from the prejudices and narrow superstition which prevent the state of universality with one's countrymen and nature.

The prerequisite which the poet states is possession of a fearless mind. Tagore believes that unless our minds are free from the fear, we cannot be truly free. We must have our heads held high in pride of our authenticity. This also brings in self-esteem and makes the individual strong and confident of expressing his voice in the society.

Tagore is a very sharp reader of the colonial India's sociology. He predicts accurately that unless the Indians achieve a sense of self-esteem and confidence, they can never attain true independence. The fragmentation which the poet is so wary of eventually resulted in the massacre after the Indian state achieved independence and underwent partition. The bloodshed which took place in the name of land and religion had unprecedented repercussions. Tagore foresaw this and had argued against nationalism, jingoism and demarcations made in the name of religion in his writings. Tagore preaches that the mental build of every individual should be free from the narrow prejudices and superstition and should accept reason and rationality with a broad outlook.

Rabindranath Tagore professed a dialogically interactive world which had a deep sense of sympathy and mutual generosity. In such a world view individuals and nations would not be parochial and guided by self-aggrandisement. He envisaged a commonwealth in which no one would deprive the other of its rightful place in what seemed to be the carnival of life.

Nationalism

Nationalism is a phenomenon which appeared in the post-religious laboratories of industrial capitalist state order. In simple words, nationalism is considered an organisation of political and commercial interest by the modern state. In Tagore's words nationalism only brings in 'carnival of materialism' and harvests wealth. This happens through the process of invoking the baser qualities of man such as greed, lie, deceit and corruption. Ideally life should be a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social individual. In such a world the relationship between men and between man and nature will be naturally regulated in a way where existence happens cohesively and complements one another. Nationalism is instead a commercial and political union of a group of people who congregate to maximise their profit exclusively. Nationalism was identified as a threat to humanity by the poet and the visionary. Nationalism proliferated war, riots and wonton bloodshed. Tagore raises many eyebrows when he wrote his controversial novels *Ghore Baire* translated as *The Home and the World*. Tagore's alter ego Nikhilesh in the novel is a devout patriot but is not swayed in the jingoistic fervour which is possessed by his friend and foil Sandip. Sandip is a charismatic but unconscionable nationalist. He justifies his every action in the name of service to the nation. This becomes a problem when he begins to confuse between his baser nature and his philosophical nature. His actions begin to grow violent and his chants of nationalism grow louder. Nikhilesh in the novel reflects the author's personal viewpoint upon the matter. He says:

"I am willing to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than country. To worship my country as a god is to bring curse upon it" (29).

NOTES

NOTES

This reflects both the patriotic sentiment of the character as well as a modern and a rational outlook which has embraced the secular world order. Nikhilesh's mind-set is free of dogmas and superstition. He berates Sandip's nature of justifying immorality in the name of nationalism and considers it to bring a curse upon their homeland. Sandip's conception of the symbol of 'nation' is set above the notions of truth, justice and rationality. It then becomes a recipe of disaster. Sandip tended to apotheosize the nation. This breeds exclusivism and dogmatism amongst the individuals. Thus every nation and every man at a more micro level becomes narcissist and considers the other as a threat to one's existence.

The Nation, with all its paraphernalia of power and prosperity, its flags and pious hymns, its blasphemous prayers in the churches, and the literary mock thunders of its patriotic bragging, cannot hide the fact that the Nation is the greatest evil for the Nation, that all its precautions are against it, and any new birth of its fellow in the world is always followed in its mind by the dread of a new peril (Nationalism 17-18).

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

7. Briefly describe Rabindranath Tagore's poem *Heaven of Freedom* (*Where The Mind Is without Fear*).
8. How is the concept of freedom approached by Tagore?

2.5 NISSIM EZEKIEL: A BRIEF SKETCH

Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004) is considered to be one of the most well-known names among Indian poets writing in English. His Jewish Parsi background that allowed him to emerge as a personality could not be subjected to simple analysis. His poetry reflects a kind of deep rumination of predicaments that are central to an Indian sensibility.

Ezekiel can be compared to the likes of Ramanujan and Parthasarathy. On a professional level he served as a Professor of English in Bombay University and proved himself to be a man of great intellect. He was a philosopher as well as a poet. Given his Jewish-Parsi upbringing and cultural roots, his affinity for writing in English as an Indian, was truly remarkable. His association with Indian beliefs and worldview paved the way for him to express his complex notion regarding the predicaments of those writing in a foreign language. Ezekiel had his initial schooling in Bombay and after that he joined Wilson College (Bombay). But after his college he flew to Birkbeck College (London) to pursue higher education. His sojourn to England was undertaken so that he could study philosophy under the guidance of C.E.M. Joad. But once there, Ezekiel displayed equal interest in other creative fields such as visual arts, theatre and poetry. While studying he had taken up the position of a clerk at the high commissioner's office in London. But his professional life had not marred his interest either for his intellectual pursuits or for his creative acumen.

Ezekiel being a man of versatile talent, held many significant positions besides being a professor in Bombay. Ezekiel was appointed as the editor of *Quest, Imprint* as well as the poetry section of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. He was also a visiting professor to several universities (in India as well as in the US and Australia). Ezekiel also worked as director of a theatre unit in Bombay. The synthesis of poetic aesthetics with philosophical inclinations can be seen clearly in Ezekiel's poetry.

Nissim Ezekiel received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for his work, *Latter-Day Psalms*. The book is a collection of his poetical works. His poetry compilation includes *Time to Change* (1952), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Discovery of India* (1956), *The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Snakeskin and Other Poems* (translations of the Marathi poet Indira Sant, 1974), *Hymns in Darkness* (1976), *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982) and *Collected Poems 1952-88* (1989). His plays are collected in the book *The Three Plays* (1969). Some of Ezekiel's popular poems include *Night of the Scorpion*, *Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher*, *The Railway Clerk*, *Latter-day Psalms*, *In the Theatre*, *Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.*, and *The Professor*. His compositions concentrated on issues such as love, death, parting, sex, solitude and prayer to identify a few. These works highlight the fact that Ezekiel was constantly engrossed with the complexities of life.

The poems confirmed his belief in the religion of the 'self'. He highlights the efficacy of prayer and makes repeated attempts to connect with his own being. Parthasarathy comments on Ezekiel as a poet whose 'poetry is both the instrument and the outcome of his attempt as a man to come to terms with himself. One finds in his poems the imprint of a keen, analytical mind trying to explore and communicate on a personal level, feelings of loss and deprivation'.

Short Bibliography

Poetry

1952: *Time to Change*

1953: *Sixty Poems*

1956: *The Discovery of India*

1959: *The Third*

1960: *The Unfinished Man*

1965: *The Exact Name*

1974: *Snakeskin and Other Poems, translations of the Marathi poet Indira Sant*

1976: *Hymns in Darkness*

1982: *Latter-Day Psalms*

1989: *Collected Poems 1952-88*

NOTES

Plays

1969: *The Three Plays*

Editor

1965: *An Emerson Reader*

1969: *A Joseph King Reader*

1990: *Another India, Anthology of Fiction and Poetry*

Poems

Night of the Scorpion

The Doctor

Case Study

Poster Prayers

The Traitor

Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher

Latter-day Psalms

The Railway Clerk

Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.

Enterprise

In India

In the Theatre

The Couple

A Time to Change

Island

For Elkana

The Professor

Urban

If we consider Nissim Ezekiel as a poet of the tradition of Indian English writing, we would realize he has made significant contribution to this body of work. One of the notable features of his poetry is the 'Indianness'. The Indian flavour is reminiscent of Ezekiel's engagement with his country and its countrymen. He used fun and wit to bring about the fallacies of local folks; and sincerely expected to bring about improvement in the situation of the country and his fellow compatriots through his creativity. Ezekiel used his poetry as a vehicle to highlight the deplorable condition that people of India lived in. In the world literature, W. B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot are representatives of the Irish sensibility and the modern ways of life. Ezekiel's poetry reflects his quintessentially Indian qualities. Ezekiel has beautifully used Indian experiences as expressions of what

NOTES

we call Indianness. Ezekiel hailed from an immigrant Jewish family though he himself was born and brought up in Mumbai. Besides undertaking trips to various foreign countries, he has lived, worked and earned his livelihood in Mumbai.

As a man of deep knowledge and a poet with gifted observational skills, Ezekiel understood the Indian way of life from close quarters. He has used his creativity to represent the long history of quintessential Indian identity through the socio-cultural representation expressed in a variety of ways.

In Indian writing in English, usually the term 'Indianness', refers to the collage of cultural patterns that reflect Indian society and other socio-political dimensions of Indian life. Ezekiel interweaves most of these elements of Indian life and culture into his poetical works. As a poet who preferred realism, Ezekiel displays an inclination towards seeing his country adopting better living conditions. His works reiterates his love for the nation that eventually became his home. Ezekiel's poems reflect various elements of Indian identity. The concept of Indianness occupies a vital place in Ezekiel's mind which is expressed through his symbolism and imagery. The theme of Indianness is of primary significance to Ezekiel and his poetry that is both: intense and personal. His thoughts and feelings surface through the ambience that is created in the poem and the characters who appear in the poems. The poems of Ezekiel undoubtedly are soaked in Indian flavour as they invariably follow the Indian way of life.

Some Major Works by Ezekiel

One of the most famous poems of Ezekiel is *Night of the Scorpion*. In this poem Ezekiel tells readers about an incident that took place in an Indian village where a woman was stung by a scorpion on a rainy night. The speaker of poem is the lady's son. Ezekiel, through his beautiful composition foregrounds the superstitions prevalent in the village and the love and sympathy that a mother nurtures for her child. Through that unnamed village of India, the poet sheds light on the gullible nature of the rural folk who say that:

*May he sit still, they said
May the sins of your previous birth
be burned away tonight, they said.
May the poison purify your flesh
of desire and your spirit of ambition.*

But the most amazing response comes from the mother. She sighs with relief and says:

*Thank God the scorpion picked on me
and spared my children.*

The lines highlight the quintessential Indian mother figure who is constantly worried about the welfare and safety of her children. The general folks of the village keep repeating the name of God so as to ward off the ill effects of the bite. Soaked in superstition they believe that recalling God was the only

NOTES

NOTES

means to find a solution. The victim's husband is shown as a representative of the educated class who are enslaved by reason and scepticism. Ezekiel through this poem conveys the general mentality of the Indian rural population who are still untouched by modern learning.

Another mother figure who is engrossed with her family even in the worst moment of crisis appears in *The Truth about the Floods*. We see the speaker pleading:

*I have not eaten for three days
My husband has been washed away
My parents have abandoned me
My son is dying
I cannot find my daughter.*

The bonds of family and at large the bonds of humanity find a voice in Ezekiel's works. He appears to be in charge of representing the woes of humanity in general.

Nissim Ezekiel dealt with the interiors of the home, i.e. the domestic space in order to explore different relationships and bonds. In an interesting poem revolving around the age old rivalry of the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, *Edinburgh Interlude-lightly* Ezekiel depicts the perils of a newlywed bride. In a matter of fact way the mother-in-law tells her new daughter-in-law:

*Don't worry, dear,
I need no help in the kitchen.
Leave it to me, please.*

The daughter-in-law, not sensing anything harmful, innocently leaves the hearth and the kitchen to her mother-in-law. But soon afterwards the father-in-law tells the new bride in the family:

*You must try to understand
your mother-in-law.
She's a very kind woman, you know.
There aren't many who do
all the work in the kitchen.*

Much to the daughter-in-law's distress even her husband informs her,

*If you quarrel with my mother,
you quarrel with me.*

Ezekiel's alarming familiarity with the concerns of the domestic as well as the public sphere makes him a popular poet and a poet of the masses.

Despite being a land of plentitude, poverty was and to some extent remains synonymous with India. In *The Railway Clerk*, Nissim Ezekiel focuses on urban India. He speaks about the poverty and ugliness that shrouds the big cities. As

the title suggests *The Railway Clerk* is about a poor railway clerk. He struggles to survive in a wretched condition. Hailing from the middle class he says

*It isn't my fault
I do what I'm told
but still I am blamed.
This year, my leave application
was twice refused.*

His being obedient does not earn him any laurels. In fact, he is criticized severely for trivial issues. But this is not his only complaint; he mentions how his leave application had already been rejected twice in the same the year. To make matters worse, he says

*My wife is always asking for more money.
Money, Money where to get Money?*

This tug of war between desire and dissatisfaction leads to corruption, which is one of the major troubles in India. The clerk reflects upon his state and laments his lack of a proper education which is why perhaps he is not getting any recognition.

*I am living far off in Borivali,
My children are neglecting studies,
How long this can go on?*

The railway clerk was seen an emblem of poverty and strife that continue to be two integral parts of Indian politics and its challenges. The clerk is the symbolic rendition of the disillusioned youth who has lost faith in life. The insistence of the clerk's wife on arranging extra money to meet basic household expenses is not unjustified but even the clerk finds himself at a loss trying to figure out how to arrange additional income. Moreover, he is presented as one who does not accept bribes. Ezekiel tidily incorporates the problem of corruption that haunts government offices in India. Ezekiel's poems are marked with an extraordinary sense of realism which indeed was different from the idealism and romanticism that his literary predecessors had.

Ezekiel's works reflect India in all its varied reflection. Having dealt with rural, urban, private and public lives; he next focused on linguistic peculiarities of India, especially the way English language is used. In his poem *A Very Indian Poem in Indian English*, Ezekiel incorporates the progressive tense, to reproduce a variety that is popular in Indian English:

*I am standing for peace and non-violence.
Why world is fighting fighting
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding.*

NOTES

Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct.

I should say even 200% correct.

NOTES

There is a glaring difference between the content and the words. While the content without any doubt highlights the significance of Gandhian ethos in political consciousness and intellect, the language that is used to engage in this invokes humour and parody, especially if we take into account the English words and odd syntactical constructions that are typical of Indian English. Ezekiel was poet of India who portrayed India in its multifarious vivacity with zest, humour and concern.

2.5.1 Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion*: Text and Summary

*I remember the night my mother
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.*

*Parting with his poison - flash
of diabolic tail in the dark room -
he risked the rain again.*

*The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times
to paralyse the Evil One.*

*With candles and with lanterns
throwing giant scorpion shadows
on the mud-baked walls*

they searched for him: he was not found.

They clicked their tongues.

*With every movement that the scorpion made his poison moved in Mother's
blood, they said.*

May he sit still, they said

May the sins of your previous birth

be burned away tonight, they said.

May your suffering decrease

the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.

May the sum of all evil

balanced in this unreal world

against the sum of good

*become diminished by your pain.
 May the poison purify your flesh
 of desire, and your spirit of ambition,
 they said, and they sat around
 on the floor with my mother in the centre,
 the peace of understanding on each face.
 More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours,
 more insects, and the endless rain.
 My mother twisted through and through,
 groaning on a mat.
 My father, sceptic, rationalist,
 trying every curse and blessing,
 powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.
 He even poured a little paraffin
 upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.
 I watched the flame feeding on my mother:
 I watched the holy man perform his rites to tame the poison with an
 incantation.
 After twenty hours
 it lost its sting.
 My mother only said
 Thank God the scorpion picked on me
 And spared my children.*

NOTES

Summary

Ezekiel's best known poem, *Night of the Scorpion*, deals with an accident where a scorpion has stung a woman and the public gathered takes remedial measures to save the victim. The narrator in this monologue is the son of the woman.

The poem originates from the speaker's emotions, recollected at leisure in a tranquil state of mind. He recalls that unfortunate incident that took place one night. His mother was stung by a scorpion that had hidden beneath a sack of rice on a rainy night.

As the news of the scorpion bite spread, villagers started assembling in the speaker's house, chanting the name of God; their chanting sounded like the buzzing of bees. People searched for the scorpion in every corner of the house, but in vain. They believed that as the scorpion moved its poison spread in the woman's body. The villagers wished that the lady's sins of her former lives be burnt away by the poisonous venom. They believed she must have committed

NOTES

some sin in her previous life for which she had to pay in this life. The villagers also believed that the punishment will reduce the misfortune of her next life. (She will have to suffer less in her next birth as she had undergone some part of the punishment already.) They said that the poison of the scorpion sting would purify her flesh and diminish her desires and ambitions for material things. The implication is that joy and sorrow come to man as a consequences of the virtuous and evil deeds committed during this life or in former lives.

The peasants seated on the floor did not seem too worried or concerned. Each and every face there gave an impression that it was fully aware of the metaphysical facts. The speaker's mother cried, twisting and writhing in pain.

The speaker's father was known to be a skeptic and a rationalist. He did not believe in the villagers' words but he was trying every curse and blessing and every therapeutic measure he was aware of. He applied powder mixed with herbs. He even poured a little paraffin oil on the toe of his wife where the scorpion had stung and lit a match to it. A holy man was also summoned to rid the lady of the misery. She finally got relief in about twenty hours.

Despite the twenty-hour long ordeal, the victim was relieved that her children were safe and that the scorpion had chosen her and not them. This indicates that she would have suffered a lot more if any of her children had been the victim. It also signifies the lady's selfless nature and that she cared for the well-being of her children more than for her own.

The poet in this incident records four kinds of responses—the religious mystical response of the villagers; the rational response of the speaker's father; the ritualistic response of the holy man and; the self-sacrificial response of the mother.

The buzz is '*the name of God a hundred times/to paralyze the Evil One.*'

This approach is based on the metaphysics that there exist in the universe two kinds of forces—the force of goodness headed by God and the force of evil headed by Satan. In order to counter the forces of evil we need the help of God and His goodness. The peasants' wishing that the lady's sins of the previous life be burnt away, that her present suffering may decrease her suffering of the next life, that the sum of evil may be diminished by her pain, and the poison may purify her flesh of desire, signifies that according to them the lady had been punished for some misdeed in the present life or in some former life. The father trying various remedies signifies his faith in allopathy. The holy incantation and performance of rites is a ritualistic approach in which one resorts to praying to God to realize the desired end. The mother thanking God for the scorpion picking her and sparing her children is an instinctive self-sacrificial approach as for her it is the welfare of her children that is more important than her own welfare.

This episode proves that all actions, whether taken by religious minded people or by the rationalist father or by the holy man, were exercises in vain as it takes twenty hours for the pain to subside. Twenty hours is a long time for the body to counterbalance the poison injected into it by the scorpion. If any of the measures had been effective, the pain would not have taken such a long

time to subside. The persona ridicules even the rationalists, as the father, who is a sceptic and a rationalist, as the poet describes him, tries ‘every curse and blessing’. If he is a rationalist, he should not believe that blessings and curses can bring any relief to a patient stung by a scorpion.

He also laughs at the superstitious belief that the poison spreads in the victim’s blood with every movement of the scorpion:

*With every movement that the scorpion made
his poison moved in Mother’s blood, they said.
May he sit still, they said.*

The mocking tone in the poem has rightly been resented by T.V. Reddy who says in his article ‘Nissim Ezekiel: Dissociation of Sensibility’:

The situation is cleverly presented, but at the same time more intelligently the writer has levelled his pungent attack on the illiterate rural folk. The attack is all the more vicious because it is at once contemptuous and brutal without any remote suggestion of sympathy or empathy to the unlettered poor folk. The ignorant ideas and superstitious speculations of the villagers are cleverly but callously transformed into mathematical equations. While the sting of the scorpion loses its power after twenty hours, the sting of the poet’s vitriolic pen gains its savage power.

(T.R. Sharma (ed.), *Essays on Nissim Ezekiel*, Meerut:
Shalabh, 1994, pp.143-44)

The poet does not find anything positive in any of the approaches as far as the problem of scorpion-sting is concerned. This may suggest that the poet rejects every alternative explored in the poem without giving his own preference.

The poem has been written in free verse and the lines do not rhyme. However, a large number of lines are octosyllabic interspersed with hexasyllabic lines. For instance, the lines, ‘was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours . . .’ and ‘to crawl beneath a sack of rice’ are octosyllabic, while the lines ‘he risked the rain again. And ‘may the sum of evil . . .’ are hexasyllabic.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

9. What are the four views that have been explored in the poem?
10. What is the significance of the poem’s closing lines?

2.6 SUMMARY

- Toru Dutt (4 March 1856–30 August 1877) was an Indian born poet who wrote in English and French.
- Toru Dutt was proficient in four languages: Bengali, English, French and, later on, Sanskrit. All these languages contributed uniquely in the creation of her uniquely syncretic style in which the emotional and sentimental

NOTES

NOTES

sway characteristic of the Indic cultures can be represented with a degree of precision that is characteristic of the European language.

- *Our Casuarina Tree* is an intensely personal poem.
- Laced with memories of her childhood and foreign trips, the poem was perhaps composed as a tribute to the garden home where Toru, her sister and her brother grew up as children along with other children of the family and the neighbourhood.
- The fondness and nostalgia with which she speaks of the tree clearly reflect a desire to use the tree as a central figure around which to organize the various memories of her short but intense life.
- Two ideas are clear in this desire: the need to honour the tree and poetry as a mode or agency of honouring someone as it immortalizes the person.
- The Casuarina belongs to the she-oak or beefwood type of trees which is noted for its strong and robust trunk and branches as well as its dense canopy and foliage.
- The tree does not represent the Indian nation in any political sense but only in a metaphoric or symbolic sense.
- The poem when read carefully unveils an elaborate set of literal and symbolic correspondences between the tree and India as a nation.
- The giant stature of the tree suggests the majestic nature of the motherland as it exists in the minds and hearts of its citizens, especially those who are far away from it.
- Sarojini Naidu is an eminent Indo Anglican poet and was also associated deeply with the cause of Indian Independence.
- Her writings offer an insight into her multi-dimensional temperament. She was conferred the 'Kaisar-i-Hind' gold medal in poetry.
- Naidu's poetic style is rhythmic and flowing. The play of words heightens the ecstasies and at times melancholic mood of the poem.
- The felicity of expression and the romantic fervour dominate the tone of the poems. Naidu conveys the intensity of feeling with romantic sensuousness and modern sensibilities.
- Her romanticism is more decadent than her predecessors because of her infatuation with the music and the tonality of words in the poems.
- *If You Call Me* is the fifth poem in a collection of eight poems titled *Gates of delight* composed by Sarojini Naidu. All eight poems talk about the condition of the poet as a lover and the glory of the beloved.
- The poem is written in two stanzas and both the stanzas end with the lines Fearless what betide/Fearless what befall.
- The poet is ready to face all the consequences of her transgression to attain her beloved.

- Every risk looks inconsequential in the wake of meeting the beloved such is the emotion felt by the poet narrator in the poem.
- Rabindranath Tagore, despite his strong criticism of nationalism and colonialism for a major part of his literary career—which lasted right until his death, remains deeply Indian in spirit and very delicate in his sensibilities as an author and as a poet.
- His poem *Where The Mind Is Without Fear* presents his patriotic aspect as a poet.
- The poem can be described as a rendition of the utopia which Tagore aspired and the poet can be found addressing the dogmas which must be addressed in order to gain freedom in its truest essence.
- The concerns expressed by Tagore in this poem revolve around breaking the conditioning of the human mind which prevents it from regaining its natural order and space in the general life world.
- The poem begins with the mind being sans fear. Fear is a product of deceit. It lowers the head in shame. The description is of a state where knowledge is free and not bounded by the constraints of class and social stature.
- The poem is in free verse and in eleven lines. The poem is written in a single linear running stanza without any regular rhyme scheme or rhythm.
- The poem *Where The Mind Is Without Fear* was part of a volume called *Naibedya*, which got later translated in English language as *Gitanjali*.
- Tagore believed that the attainment of freedom was the most arduous yet a crucial task for a colonial Indian state.
- In Tagore’s words nationalism only brings in ‘carnival of materialism’ and harvests wealth. This happens through the process of invoking the baser qualities of man such as greed, lie, deceit and corruption.
- Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004) is considered to be one of most well-known names among Indian poets writing in English.
- Ezekiel was appointed as the editor of *Quest, Imprint* as well as the poetry section of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*.
- Nissim Ezekiel received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for his work, *Latter-Day Psalms*.
- One of the notable features of his poetry is the ‘Indianness’. The Indian flavour is reminiscent of Ezekiel’s engagement with his country and its countrymen.
- One of the most famous poems of Ezekiel is *Night of the Scorpion*. In this poem Ezekiel tells readers about an incident that took place in an Indian village where a woman was stung by a scorpion on a rainy night.
- The poem highlights the quintessential Indian mother figure who is constantly worried about the welfare and safety of her children.

NOTES

- The poem originates from the speaker's emotions, recollected at leisure in a tranquil state of mind.

NOTES

2.7 KEY TERMS

- **Casuarina tree:** It is a tree with slender, jointed, drooping twigs which resemble horsetails and bear tiny scale-like leaves, native to Australia and SE Asia.
- **Jingoistic:** It means characterized by extreme patriotism, especially in the form of aggressive or warlike foreign policy.
- **Mysticism:** It refers to the belief that union with or absorption into the Deity or the absolute, or the spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect that may be attained through contemplation and self-surrender.

2.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. At the time of her death, Toru Dutt left behind two novels, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*, the first novel in French by an Indian writer, and *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden*, (thought to be the first novel in English by an Indian woman writer) in addition to an unfinished volume of original poems in English, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*.
2. The poet refers to the Casuarina tree in the poem. Casuarina belongs to the she-oak or beefwood type of trees which is noted for its strong and robust trunk and branches as well as its dense canopy and foliage.
3. On the surface, the poem appears as if it is all about the Casuarina tree, but actually, the tree is just a medium to link the poet's past with the present. The poet remembers the tree because of the many happy memories of childhood days that are linked to it which are a source of comfort and consolation to her in another country. The poem, therefore, underlines the importance of memories in human life.
4. Naidu's poetic style is rhythmic and flowing. The play of words heightens the ecstasies and at times melancholic mood of the poem.
5. The felicity of expression and the romantic fervour dominate the tone of Naidu's poems.
6. Naidu covers four broad themes in all her poetic works. These four themes are of patriotism, love, nature and longing.
7. Tagore's poem *Heaven of Freedom (Where The Mind Is without Fear)* can be described as a rendition of the utopia which Tagore aspired and the poet can be found addressing the dogmas which must be addressed in order to gain freedom in its truest essence.
8. Freedom is approached by Tagore in this poem not as a means of utility or enjoyment but rather as a creative process. Tagore wants to create this

freedom of heaven rather than use it. The process of such a creation is gratifying enough for the poet.

9. The poet, in this incident, records four kinds of responses—the religious mystical response of the villagers; the rational response of the speaker’s father; the ritualistic response of the holy man and; the self-sacrificial response of the mother.
10. The closing lines where the mother thanks God that the scorpion had picked her instead of her children stresses the innate Indianness of the poem where the mother is considered to be the central figure of selflessness and sacrifice.

NOTES

2.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Give a brief account of Toru Dutt’s life and works.
2. Outline the content of Toru Dutt’s poem *Our Casuarina Tree*.
3. State the central theme of the poem *Our Casuarina Tree*.
4. In what way does Toru Dutt represent the poem as a touching recollection in a pleasant lyric of an object of Nature?
5. What role does nationalism play in Rabindranath Tagore’s writings?
6. Write a note on the works of Nissim Ezekiel.
7. Give a summary of the poem *Night of the Scorpion*.
8. What are the structural differences in Ezekiel’s poems?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Toru Dutt’s poem *Our Casuarina Tree* is an elaborate set of literal and symbolic correspondences between the tree and India as a nation. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Critically examine Toru Dutt’s poem *Our Casuarina Tree*. Discuss the title, tone, setting and symbolism in the poem.
3. Discuss how Sarojini Naidu employs the theme of ‘love’ in her poems.
4. Critically analyse Naidu’s poem *If You Call Me*.
5. Examine Rabindranath Tagore’s poem *Heaven of Freedom*.
6. Write an explanatory note on the ending lines of the poem *Night of the Scorpion*.
7. Comment on the four voices that have been given in the poem *Night of the Scorpion*.

2.10 FURTHER READING

NOTES

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

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

Paul, S. K. 2006. *The Complete Poems of Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali: Texts and Critical Evaluation*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.

Surendran, K. V. 2000. *Indian Writing: Critical Perspectives*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.

George, K. M. 1992. *Modern Indian Literature: An Anthology: Surveys and Poems*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.

Prasad, Amar Nath and Kanupriya. 2006. *Indian Writing in English: Tradition and Modernity*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.

Souza, Eunice De. 1997. *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

UNIT 3 SHORT STORIES FROM INDIAN ENGLISH

NOTES

Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Unit Objectives
- 3.2 *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*: An Analysis
- 3.3 *Love Across the Salt Desert*: An Analysis
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 Key Terms
- 3.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 3.7 Questions and Exercises
- 3.8 Further Reading

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Short story has been a prominent form of writing amongst the Indian writings in the English language. The various short story writers come from different parts of the country bringing in a rich cultural background into their writings. The use of English as a medium unites these short stories which are of varied cultural and social backgrounds.

In this unit, you will study the important elements of Jhumpa Lahiri's *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* and Keki N Daruwalla's *Love Across the Salt Desert*.

3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Critically analyse Jhumpa Lahiri's *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*
- Discuss the use of diaspora in Lahiri's works
- Describe the major themes of Keki Daruwalla's *Love Across the Salt Desert*
- Evaluate the authors' style and themes of the short stories

3.2 *WHEN MR. PIRZADA CAME TO DINE*: AN ANALYSIS

From '*Interpreter of Maladies*' by Jhumpa Lahiri

Mr. Pirzada had come to America from Dacca to pursue his study on the subject matter of 'Foliage of New England' leaving behind his family which consisted of a wife and seven daughters back in his homeland. Mr. Pirzada was a Bengali-Muslim who was in the United States on a grant from the government of Pakistan. The grant was not much when converted into US dollars and he led an austere life in the university. He had lodged in a small dormitory and took his dinner with the narrator's family. The familial connection of a homeland far

NOTES

away in the east made the subalterns jell together. Just like Mr. Pirzada, Lilia's family had come to the United States of America leaving behind their homeland in India in hopes of leading a better and more secure life away from the political turmoil and religious strife in the Indian sub-continent. The post-colonial nations had been left ransacked and destitute by the burden of achieving independence and from the severing blow of partition.

Lilia, the ten-year-old narrator is unaware of these political developments in a country which is far away from her home in America. One night she asks her father for a glass for the 'Indian man' who came to dine with them every night. Her father remarks that Mr. Pirzada is no longer an Indian man but a Pakistani owing to the partition of the nation which took place in 1947. This confuses the little girl who does not understand the meaning of Mr. Pirzada being not an Indian unlike her and her parents but a Pakistani instead for she can discern no physical or temperamental difference in Mr. Pirzada. She could not understand how someone who shared the same cultural space as her family could be a foreigner. Pirzada spoke the same language, ate similar food, laughed at same jokes and even followed same musicians as Lilia's parents. She is troubled by her father's insistence of Pirzada being an 'other' in a country which is not hers.

Lilia's interest in her background and cultural roots begin to develop following the realization of its existence in a far-away land. When asked to make a report in her school she flit away to read up on the history of Pakistan in the school library. Lilia gets hold of a geography book and manages to locate Dacca upon it. She had just begun to read up on the country when she gets interrupted by her teacher Mrs. Kenyon. She is reprimanded for not sticking to the research required for her class project.

The family watches the news of the political turmoil in the east every night after the dinner. They were looking at nations being carved out of their homelands while they were far away in a safe enclave of a foreign land. Mr. Pirzada who otherwise always remained jovial and composed seems to break apart emotionally upon hearing the news of an eminent war in his hometown of Dacca. Lilia understood that Mr. Pirzada was worried about his family as thousands of people fled their homes to become refugees in the Indian nation. His face would become grim and the usual smile would vanish from his face whenever the issue of Dacca came up on the news. His anxiousness was highlighted on the night when he was assigned the task of carving out the Halloween pumpkin for Lilia. He was careful and precise right until he was carving out the mouth of the monster with his knife. Just then the news of war between India and Pakistan came up on the television and the news shook Mr. Pirzada's composure for he had realized that the consequences of this war would be devastating. His hand slips and he makes a hole the size of a lemon in the mouth of the pumpkin monster head.

Lilia begins to worry about the safety of Mr. Pirzada's wife and children as she slowly begins to understand the developments taking place in the east. She ceremoniously prays for their wellbeing in a time of war and violence by keeping the sugar candy given to her by Mr. Pirzada every night on her tongue

until it would melt on its own. She would not even properly brush her teeth later so as not to wash away the charm of her secret innocent prayer.

Lilia does not realize when Mr. Pirzada returns back to Dacca. Her father went to drop him off at the airport while she was in school and they hear no news from him for over six months. Mr. Pirzada's letter arrives finally announcing his safe reunion with his family. They had taken refuge in the hills of Shillong while political and religious tensions were going on. It is at this moment that Lilia realizes the passing away of Mr. Pirzada from her life forever. She knew that he would never return back here and that he had no work or business in America having been reunited with his family. She decides to throw away the remaining sweets given to her by Mr. Pirzada deciding that there would no longer be any need for her prayers at night. Lilia realized the absence of Mr. Pirzada when he stopped coming over for his daily dinners and his ritual of bringing in sweet meat for the little narrator stopped. Lilia then realized what it felt to miss someone who was hundreds of miles away never to return. This is an emotion which the narrator realizes was shared by Mr. Pirzada as well. The sense of loss and longing which Lilia felt for Mr Pirzada once he went back to Dacca was also shared by Mr. Pirzada for his wife and family when he was away from them living in America. The pocket watch which Mr. Pirzada kept on the dinner table every night before starting his meals was set to a different time zone of Dacca. This shows the extent of longing for the family and homeland felt by Mr. Pirzada.

NOTES

Jhumpa Lahiri and the Indian Diaspora

Jhumpa Lahiri in her short stories addresses the sensitive dilemmas in the lives of Indian immigrants concerning their issues of identity, matrimony and disconnection with the foreign world as well as their homeland. The short story *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* was a part of a collection of nine short stories titled *Interpreter of Maladies*. The collection of short stories deal with the topic of the feeling of cultural rootlessness and the disjunction with the new alien nation as experienced by Indian immigrants in the west. The alienation from one's homeland is an inevitable outcome of any migration. In a world which is fragmented by political borders, migration is a permanent or at least a long term measure. Many children are born in a nation which does not belong to them. They experience a complete cultural disjoint between their homes and the world outside.

The short stories try to anthologise the difficulties posited in a diaspora culture on the central characters who find it difficult to flow effortlessly between their home and the world. They adjust to culture in a unique manner assimilating the qualities and characteristics of both the culture of their homelands and the west. This makes it difficult for the immigrants to fit in either of the two worlds resulting in an acute sense of identity crisis. The characters in the short stories undergo a feeling of loss, longing, depression and alienation resulting in frustration. They endlessly try to relocate their identities beyond their familial homes. Nostalgia for the cultural roots does not help in the process of this reallocation of identity and often clashes with the immigrant's newfound foreign

NOTES

culture. The Indian immigrants in the west left their homes under the duress of war, political turmoil, economic instability and religious strife in order to look for a better future in distant country. V.S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Ved Mehta, Hanif Kureishi are some other writers who write about the diaspora and its social implications apart from Jhumpa Lahiri.

Diaspora in Literature deals with the migration of people from their homelands to a foreign nation. It comes from the Greek words 'dia' meaning 'across' and 'sperien' meaning 'to scatter seeds'. In modern times, diaspora is a result of migration, immigration and exile. It consists of a society which is deterritorialized and is considered 'transnational'.

Lahiri herself an expatriate writer was born in London on 11 July 1967. She was the daughter of a Bengali-Indian immigrant family and grew up in Rhodes Island. Her family had relocated to the United States when Jhumpa Lahiri had been two years of age. Daughter of a Calcutta family, born in London and raised in the United States, Lahiri considers herself American. Lahiri in her writings delineates the immigrant's relationship with their cultural homeland as well as their response to immigration and assimilation with the new society. Jhumpa Lahiri says 'I wasn't born here, but I might as well have been.'

Interpreter of Maladies is the debut short story collection by the author and was published in 1999, receiving the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2000. The collection also won the O. Henry Award for best American short stories and the PEN Hemmingway Award to name a few. These stories come a few years prior to the release of Lahiri's famous debut novel on the subject of Diaspora called *The Namesake*. Lahiri continued to address the issue of identity crisis faced by Indian immigrants in the west in her later novels as well. Her latest book titled *The Lowlands* deals with the subject of immigrant identity crisis juxtaposing it with the communist movement in east India. *The Lowland* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and long listed in the National Book Award for Fiction.

Lahiri having grown up away from Bengal portrays the complexities of an immigrant life accurately and realistically in her fiction. The alienation and rootlessness which is experienced by the characters in her fiction mirrors the author's personal experience growing up trying to locate her place in a global world. Her stories are a recording of her trans-continental journeys in the sense that they contain different elements of the Indian culture scattered in between a western setup. The writer had accustomed herself well with the cultures of both the west as well as the east owing to her regular trips to India every summer. The stories are full of names of traditional Indian foods, festivals, places, culture, etc. The theme of separation is a recurring one in most of her stories where one finds the characters bearing the burden of separation from their loved ones and their familial spaces.

Lahiri grew up not knowing which place she belonged to, chose to embrace a hyphenated identity. Having grown up and come to terms with both the cultures of the East and the West, the hyphenated identity no longer confuses Jhumpa

Lahiri. It is this hyphenated identity of being an American-Indian which defines her stories and novels such as *The Namesake*, *The Lowlands* and *Interpreter of Maladies*. Lahiri writes so she can merge the two worlds which she occupied in one page making her work autobiographical in nature. She embraces her Indian-American identity through her stories which capture the feeling of longing for India amongst the first generation of immigrants and a dislocation of identity in the second generation children. Lilia's parents and Mr. Pirzada always seem to long for their country living as migrants in a foreign nation. They listen to cassettes of Kishore Kumar, eat Indian food, discuss news about the nation with utmost interest and indulge in frequent bouts of nostalgia. The second generation of immigrants in the United States had a different problem to deal with. Lilia could not place herself in a world where she was born. Neither could she identify herself as Indian because of which she feels alienated from the western society.

Jhumpa Lahiri's writings are spatial rather than being sequential. Her narrative shuttles between the west and the east. The reader finds himself transported to an altogether different cultural world when the characters in the story move between home and the world. This spatial movement intensifies when one realizes that it is not just in physical terms that the characters are visiting the two poles of the world but also in their memories and thoughts. Thus the interaction between the two sides of the world is a characteristic feature of Lahiri's stories where the characters are constantly grappling with the two extremes of this space. Her protagonists appear as if living in an exile. Food becomes a pleasant indulgence for the exiles and also is a recurring motif in her stories. Food posits as a provider of control and power to the exiles in the constant search of identity and assimilation. Food is a cultural signifier uniting the immigrants in a foreign and a desperate land. They bond between themselves through food, music and other cultural totems of their homeland in the East. This is their way to resist the cultural dominance exercised over them by the Western other. Food also is a get-away into nostalgia for the distant home. This makes it also a means of resistance from the assimilation with the west in the sense that it prevents the immigrants from becoming truly Americans and they remain a shadow of their distant homeland. Thus it defines the identity of the immigrant in a complicated manner.

Lahiri's stories are not always set up in India and the stories also seldom feature Indian-American characters yet the Indianness is never over emphasized in her stories to render the story as exotic or ethnic. The characters do not act as native informants and are seen to find a unique space of their own merging best of both the worlds they inhabited. *Interpreter of Maladies* is a mixture of the first and the second generation of the Indian diaspora living in the United States. Some of these characters break rules prescribed to them and often transgress different social and cultural frontiers to discover their identity. Lilia in *Interpreter of Maladies*, Ila in Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* are examples of such transgressed characters of the second generation Indian diaspora living in the west.

NOTES

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Who was Mr. Pirzada?
2. Name the collection from which the short story *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* is taken.
3. Who is the narrator of the story *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine*?

3.3 LOVE ACROSS THE SALT DESERT: AN ANALYSIS

Keki N. Daruwalla writes his stories with the charm of a master cartographer. His short stories map out the mountains of Garhwal and the salt desert of Gujarat with astounding clarity. Daruwalla studies the culture and the conditioning of the Indian population while writing fiction. The characters in his stories are diverse in their cultural background coming from the different nooks of the vast Indian sub-continent.

Analysis of the text

Love Across the Salt Desert is a short story which appears in collection of the same title. The story is set in the Rann of Kutch, near the newly formed Indo-Pakistan border, somewhere in Gujarat or Rajasthan. The story is narrated by an omniscient narrator who begins by highlighting the immensity of the salt desert which the protagonist crosses in the course of the story. The desert is described as a vast and lonely abyss of sand almost impossible to cross in solitude and without adequate resources. Camels were said to have died from exhaustion while crossing the Rann of Kutch. The narrator then introduces the protagonist of the story Najab Hussain and tells us that he crossed the desert and for a very special reason. The story narrates how Najab managed to cross the desert and what had motivated a shy and introvert young man to undertake such a dangerous task.

The story begins by the narrator explaining the situation in the Kutch where it had not rained for two consecutive years. The land was parched and the village people were severely affected by the draught which they did not remember having lasted so long before. The clouds passed by often driven away by wind. It never spilled one drop all that while. Daruwalla describes the land as a metaphorical person affected by sickness and plague. The Kutch is said to have developed scabs and sores and the ground appeared like chapped blister skins. It lay useless like a paralysed patient.

This draught took a harder hit upon the cattle that started growing weak and several of them even died. The condition of the villagers in Kutch had become deplorable with all economy and resources dried up. Eventually all the cattle of that region succumbed to death and only the camels survived. The camel fed upon camel thorn which grew even in extremely dry conditions.

The first paragraph ends by the reversal of this deplorable state when the narrator announces that the draught ended one night when clouds rolled over the

Kutch and burst with water over the parched land. This is the same night when Fatima entered the village. Now the narrator gives away the name of a second character that gets instantly associated with coming of rains in a parched and draught hit Kutch.

Daruwalla shapes up the cultural set up of his stories very delicately and the instance where Najab's secret ceremony of giving food to the jackals at the shrine of the 'Panchmai Pir', makes the reader connect to the story and its characters at a deeper and more intimate level. The instance highlights the extent of Najab's love for his beloved Fatima who was the spice seller's daughter and his innocent ritual in an enclosed private space reveals the cultural makeup of the region.

The basalt capped black hill was the highest point in the Kutch. Atop the 'Kala Doongar' Najab pays homage to 'Panchmai Pir'. Leaving some food behind he beats on a metal 'thali'. When jackals appear to eat the food, Najab knows that his ceremony would bless him in kind. There is also a short parable narrated here which explains the background of 'Panchmai Pir' and the jackals. This makes the storytelling well rounded and complete. The direct approach of narration and a crisp telling of the details make the story multi-dimensional in a span of few pages. Najab's pilgrimage of love begins from this point as he decides to cross the great Rann of Kutch to seek his beloved. The description of this moment is very poignant and provides the gravity to the initiation of the journey. The journey sought to eliminate distances and end separation. The journey was meant to achieve unification of love. The emotion of leaving behind of one's familial space to undertake a journey of dangers and uncertainty is conveyed through the lines in which Najab remembers the shape of the round bottomed mud houses which mark civilisation and shelter after crossing the last village called Kuran on his way to his cross border quest. A seemingly endless expanse of harsh terrain awaited Najab as he steeled his resolve and went on. It was a common knowledge that no one had dared to cross the desert alone and that too in a span of one day and one night. But the thought of meeting his beloved Fatima drove Najab on in his journey.

The story goes on to describe the background of the protagonist which provides a useful insight in understanding the circumstances under which he chose to undertake the arduous and risky journey through the Rann of Kutch. Despite being known as a diffident and a shy boy amongst his friends, Najab was no novice. He had crossed the treacherous desert on four occasions earlier but all these trips had been made along with either his father or the veteran village smuggler Zaman. His father berated him by saying that his son would throw away all that he and his ancestors had gained. He was considered too soft at heart and not having enough courage required for carrying out a profitable trade. He used to smuggle tendu leaves which is used to roll tobacco into a *biri* for smoking purposes and bring in spices like cloves and cinnamon in exchange. This was a risky business which involved crossing the desert, trespassing international borders and returning back after paying and bribing the officials on the check

NOTES

NOTES

posts. After all the expenses there was just a paltry sum left for the family to pull off their livelihood.

It is during one such trip that Najab and his father visit a spice merchant Kaley Shah. Kaley Shah was a tall and a quick mouthed merchant. He was menacing but his daughter Fatima charms Najab and he falls in love with her. Fatima during this time had been put under pressure to marry an ill-tempered village baboon with a speech impediment. The attraction for the shy eyed Najab was eminent. What follows is a play of eyes where the heroine dares the protagonist to take the next step. Najab returns back to his home after promising Fatima that he would return to get her soon. Ever since then the thought of crossing the desert had run circles in Najab's mind until he finally decided to undertake the secret journey. The first part of the story ends here with tension delicately poised at the secret love affair about to reach its conception.

The second part of the story begins with the revelation of the disappearance of the young lad from his home. The tension is maintained when it is the mean smuggler Zaman who raises the cover while Najab's father is sleeping in ignominy. They realize that the boy is missing along with his camel for more than a day and this could only mean that he has gone over to Pakistan by crossing the desert alone. On discovering that he did not take the tendu leaves along with him, his father cannot fathom what made him go to the other side if not trade. On confronting his mother, it is revealed that he took her only gold bangle bracelet along with himself. Now the family could only pray that he returned safely and profitably.

The narration shifts focus from the village to the journey of Najab along with his trusted camel Allahrakha across the salt desert. Allahrakha serves a faithful companion to Najab in his quest to claim his love and crosses the desert at a brisk pace. The journey during night is pleasant and the stars shining above drive the travellers forward along with a sweet cold wind. They decided to rest after having crossed the international boundary about twenty miles from the shrine of Panchmai Pir.

Najab ate his first meal and drank water from his canteen after the sun broke open the next morning and he got ready along with Allahrakha to complete his journey. This was where the lover has to bear turbulences and hardships to reach his beloved because travelling under the heat of the sun in a desert can be really difficult. The harsh sun takes its toll on both the camel and Najab. Fearing Allahrakha's death out of exhaustion, Najab decides to walk beside him so as to ease the burden of the beast. They make it to the village of Kaley Shah just in time with blistering feet which seem to have been charred in live coal. They had also narrowly escaped the bullets of Pakistani rangers who had been outraged at discovering a smuggler crossing borders without paying hush money. Love triumphs all hardships. He reached his destination in a trance like state where the will to meet his beloved kept his feet moving. After crossing a desert and evading the bullets, an even more arduous task lay in front of Najab. By a stroke of luck he gets saved from the military officers who come looking for him to Kaley Shah's house. Kaley Shah yet unaware of Najab's presence sends them

away. When Najab shows himself to Kaley Shah, he receives hostility from his side but he sends Allahrakha away to feed with the village cattle so as not to arouse any suspicion. Then on finding that Najab had not brought along any tendu leaves with him from across the border, Kaley Shah was flabbergasted and asked Najab to explain himself. Najab takes out his mother's golden bangle and tells that he has come to deal in gold. Next we find the spice merchant running around frantically all around the village buying all the cardamoms and cloves which he can. In the meanwhile our protagonist decides to elope along with his beloved back across the border. Love does not fail and Fatima agrees to go with the shy lad who had withstood the test of coming back from across the border to proclaim his love for her and they head back to India with Fatima seated atop Allahrakha and Najab driving them on foot.

Aftab, Najab's father opened the door thrice that night thinking that someone had been knocking but it was only winds. When he left his bed for the fourth time to open the door the banging had been persistent enough to not be caused by the wind. On opening the door Aftab finds his son crouching in darkness. He asks him whether he brought anything back. And at this point Fatima makes her appearance along with rain which ends a two year draught in the Kutch.

Keki N. Daruwalla writes his stories which have the perfect Aristotelian beginning, middle and end. When Fatima arrives in the Kutch along with Najab, the land is blessed with rain ending a two year old long draught. The coming of age of Najab along with the rain is a symbolic ending to a story which began with Najab as a shy and introvert lad who was considered too weak and shy by his father. Daruwalla addresses the voice of the female characters in his narrative with a sensitive delicacy. Najab's mother although holds not enough courage to stand up to Aftab, she secretly becomes an aide to Najab's lofty ambition of crossing the desert to get back the woman he loved. She trusts in him and in his love and gives away her bangle which serves an important function in the scheme of Najab and Fatima's elopement. The other female character in the story, Fatima is described from the view point of the charmed lover Najab. She is described as the 'hoor' and her eyes are said to shine all over the world. It is easily understandable that Najab is totally in love with Fatima when he proclaims that there is no extent to which he would not go to get the love of his life. He could do anything for her. The narrator attributes the coming of rain with the coming of Fatima to Kutch after crossing the salt desert although indirectly.

What the message is put across by the short stories written by Keki N. Daruwalla is that although people are miniscule in front of the heft of the history but people stay central.

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. How are the characters shown in Daruwalla's stories?
5. Where was 'Panchmai Pir' located?
6. Who was Kaley Shah?

NOTES

3.4 SUMMARY

- Mr. Pirzada was a Bengali-Muslim who was in the United States on a grant from the government of Pakistan.
- Just like Mr. Pirzada, Lilia's family had come to the United States of America leaving behind their homeland in India in hopes of leading a better and more secure life away from the political turmoil and religious strife in the Indian sub-continent.
- Lilia is troubled by her father's insistence of Pirzada being an 'other' in a country which is not hers.
- The family watches the news of the political turmoil in the east every night after the dinner.
- Lilia begins to worry about the safety of Mr. Pirzada's wife and children as she slowly begins to understand the developments taking place in the east.
- Lilia does not realize when Mr. Pirzada returns back to Dacca. Her father went to drop him off at the airport while she was in school and they hear no news from him for over six months.
- The sense of loss and longing which Lilia felt for Mr Pirzada once he went back to Dacca was also shared by Mr. Pirzada for his wife and family when he was away from them living in America.
- Jhumpa Lahiri in her short stories addresses the sensitive dilemmas in the lives of Indian immigrants concerning their issues of identity, matrimony and disconnection with the foreign world as well as their homeland.
- The short stories try to anthologise the difficulties posited in a diaspora culture on the central characters who find it difficult to flow effortlessly between their home and the world.
- V.S. Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Ved Mehta, Hanif Kureishi are some other writers who write about the diaspora and its social implications apart from Jhumpa Lahiri.
- *Interpreter of Maladies* is the debut short story collection by the author and was published in 1999, receiving the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2000. The collection also won the O. Henry Award for best American short stories and the PEN Hemmingway Award to name a few.
- Keki N. Daruwalla writes his stories with the charm of a master cartographer.
- Daruwalla studies the culture and the conditioning of the Indian population while writing fiction. The characters in his stories are diverse in their cultural background coming from the different nooks of the vast Indian sub-continent.
- *Love Across the Salt Desert* is a short story which appears in collection of the same title. The story is set in the Rann of Kutch, near the newly formed Indo-Pakistan border, somewhere in Gujarat or Rajasthan.

- The narrator then introduces the protagonist of the story Najab Hussain and tells us that he crossed the desert and for a very special reason.
- Daruwalla shapes up the cultural set up of his stories very delicately and the instance where Najab's secret ceremony of giving food to the jackals at the shrine of the 'Panchmai Pir', makes the reader connect to the story and its characters at a deeper and more intimate level.
- The instance highlights the extent of Najab's love for his beloved Fatima who was the spice seller's daughter and his innocent ritual in an enclosed private space reveals the cultural makeup of the region.
- It was a common knowledge that no one had dared to cross the desert alone and that too in a span of one day and one night. But the thought of meeting his beloved Fatima drove Najab on in his journey.
- Keki N. Daruwalla writes his stories which have the perfect Aristotelian beginning, middle and end.
- When Fatima, Najab's beloved arrives in the Kutch along with Najab, the land is blessed with rain ending a two year old long draught.
- What the message is put across by the short stories written by Keki N. Daruwalla is that although people are miniscule in front of the heft of the history but people stay central.

NOTES

3.5 KEY TERMS

- **Exile:** The state of being barred from one's native country, typically for political or punitive reasons
- **Deterretorialized:** Refers broadly, to the fluid, dissipated and schizophrenic nature of human subjectivity in contemporary capitalist cultures
- **Transnational:** Extending or operating across national boundaries
- **Juxtaposing:** Place or deal with close together for contrasting effect
- **Omniscient:** Knowing everything

3.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Mr. Pirzada was a Bengali Muslim who was in the United States on a grant from the government of Pakistan.
2. The short story *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* was a part of a collection of nine short stories titled *Interpreter of Maladies*.
3. Lilia, a ten-year-old girl is the narrator of the story.
4. The characters in Daruwalla's stories are diverse in their cultural background coming from the different nooks of the vast Indian sub-continent.
5. 'Panchmai Pir' was located atop the 'Kala Doongar' at the basalt capped black hill.

6. Kaley Shah was a spice merchant and father of Fatima, the heroine of the story.

NOTES

3.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Why was Mr. Pirzada in America?
2. How did Lilia's interest in her cultural background begin to develop?
3. What did Lilia use to pray for every night?
4. What went wrong during the carving of Halloween pumpkin?
5. How is Kutch described by the author in the beginning of the story?
6. Write a short note on the character of Fatima.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically analyse *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* by Jhumpa Lahiri.
2. How is the Indian diaspora shown in Lahiri's work? Discuss.
3. 'Food becomes a pleasant indulgence for the exiles and also is a recurring motif in her stories.' Explain with reference to *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* by Jhumpa Lahiri.
4. Critically analyse the text of the story *Love Across the Salt Desert* by Keki Daruwalla.
5. Explain the importance of the 'Panchmai Pir' shrine in the story *Love Across the Salt Desert*.
6. Discuss how Najab completes the painstaking journey through the salt desert to win his love.

3.8 FURTHER READING

- Daruwalla, Keki N. 2011. *Love Across the Salt Desert: Selected Short Stories*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India.
- Sareen, S. K. 1992. *English Reading Texts: A Socio-Cultural Study*. New Delhi: Intellectual Pub. House.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. 1999. *Interpreter of Maladies: Stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Sharma, Raja. 2015. *Ready Reference Treatise: Interpreter of Maladies*. North Carolina: Lulu Press Inc.

UNIT 4 NORTH EASTERN POETRY AND SHORT STORIES IN ENGLISH

NOTES

Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Unit Objectives
- 4.2 *The Journey* (In Translation): Indira Goswami
 - 4.2.1 Analysis of the Text
 - 4.2.2 Different forms of Violence and their Interaction with each other in *Jatra*
- 4.3 *A Poem for Mother*: Robin S. Ngangom
 - 4.3.1 Interaction with the Outside World
- 4.4 *I Shall Go To You*: Nanda Kumar Debbarma
 - 4.4.1 Analysis of the Poem
 - 4.4.2 Departure from the Material World in North-Eastern Poetry
- 4.5 *Dawn at Hokutwisa*: Sachlang Tripura
- 4.6 *The Jungle Major*: Temsula Ao
- 4.7 Summary
- 4.8 Key Terms
- 4.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 4.10 Questions and Exercises
- 4.11 Further Reading

4.0 INTRODUCTION

North-East India is comprised of eight states namely Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Sikkim. These states are geographically placed in between mainland India and the South Eastern Asian continent. These eight states are not just culturally different from mainland India but are so diverse that they form many sub social groups within themselves. The cultural diversity of the north-east is interesting because of the presence of more than hundreds of strong tribal and native cultural traditions. For an instance there are many complex sub divisions between the different tribes living in Meghalaya despite the state being very small in land size. Each tribe has its own language which is distinct from the other. The tribal customs also differ from one another giving rise to a varied and colourful literature originating from there. This holds true for almost all the eight states which comprise the North Eastern India. The one common link which joins these eight states is the ignominy which they have suffered from the mainland India in the recent past. These societies were self-sufficient in the past and were living sustainably without any outside interference. In recent times the natural resources of the North East has been tapped upon by the mainland nation in the name of state and the social and economic disparity prevailing there has been largely ignored.

NOTES

In the post-modern capitalist world, time is gauged as something speedy or something which is contingent. The average attention span of the MTV generation has fallen to a measly five minutes. With our quickly eroding attention span, we must direct it towards the slow erosion of environmental justice.

India's literature from the north east region is highly representative of this slow violence towards the environment. The relationship between nature and human has always remained a focal point of interest in the works of Assamese writers such as Yeshe Dorjee Rhongchi, Mousumi Kandali and Rasna Barua among others in the canon of north eastern writings.

North East Indian poetry is marked by the kind of tension that generates all great poetry; it may be at one level the poetry of violence, of torpidity and fear but it is also the poetry of searching, soul searching for peace.

4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Evaluate the story *The Journey* by Indira Goswami
- Analyse Robin S. Ngangom's *A Poem for Mother*
- Explain the poem *I Shall Go To You* by Nanda Kumar Debbarma
- Discuss the major themes of Sachlang Tripura's *Dawn at Hokutwisa*
- Evaluate the summary and critical analysis of Temsula Ao's *The Jungle Major*

4.2 THE JOURNEY (IN TRANSLATION): INDIRA GOSWAMI

Translated from Assamese by the author M. Asaduddin

Indira Goswami lovingly referred as Mamoni Raisom Goswami in Assam was born and raised in Guwahati in a family which was religiously associated with the Sattria life of the Ekasarana Dharma. She did her intermediate in arts from Handique Girl's college and majored in Assamese Literature from Cotton College acquiring a master's degree in the same field. Indira died on 29th November 2011 after suffering a long ailment in Guwahati Medical College.

4.2.1 Analysis of the Text

Violence is not just a contest over space and body but just as well overtime. *Jaatra* is Indira Goswami's well-known short story which is set against the backdrop of militant tensions and uprisings in the interiors of the volatile state. It is primarily a story about the mother's love and insecurities over her missing son who has unfortunately for the family chosen the life of a militant. The son has left behind his family and society to avenge Assam from the military forces which had taken control of the state after the government of India declared a full frontal attack on the militancy uprisings in the tribal belts of the state. The son

is a boy who is representative of a ruthless world, who has been forced to live the life on the edge owing to unforeseen circumstances and the difficulties of the modern times. This ruthless mentality has no space for values such as 'love' and 'maternal affection' or any other such old world order. The harsh reality has rendered it impossible for any sort of love to seep into the life which has entered a state of constant and ever-waging war which could end only with death. But the story is not just about a strained mother-child relationship set in the violence of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts (AFSPA) in the north east. The story explores the different temporal modalities of violence arrange themselves almost casually top of each other leaving man and nature both scarred to the point of destruction in the long run.

NOTES

4.2.2 Different forms of Violence and their Interaction with each other in *Jaatra*

Goswami has been careful not to romanticize one form of violence over the other in the short story *Jaatra*. Goswami has shown the delicate nature and the complex intricacies of the different forms of violence which have perpetuated the Assamese life in her story. The story initially delves upon the destruction caused by the Brahmaputra floods. The Borbua family had lost everything to the ruthless flood water and had been cast out to the life of poverty and ignominy. Their tea shop was a haunted carcass of what once was a prosperous and influential household. The old man was still proud of his past glories since he had nothing else to draw happiness from in a reality which was filled solely with miseries. The silver beetle nut box is reflective of the violence caused by nature upon the family. The wife is cynical of her husband who rejoices in the glories of bygone days and instead wants him to take some definitive actions in rescuing what they are left with. The time was dire to be singing songs on the dotara and entertaining irregular customers with tales of past. The family was not in a correct shape to be functioning normally.

The daughter of the old couple had suffered tortures and beatings from the villagers on account of her love affair with an Indian Military officer. The relationship between the military and the village locals is not well for such an event to unfold without causing a scandal. The Army has been held responsible for hundreds of innocent deaths of village tribals who were killed on account of terrorist suspicion. The Armed Forces Special Protection Act enables the military to carry their wanton activities without the fear of trial or judgement. The Tribal villagers of the region have been made scape goats in the ensuing tensions between the militant guerrillas and the Indian military. This becomes a complex violence when one realizes that the actions taken by either side is not moving anywhere close to resolving this tension. With every innocent villager killed by the Armed Forces several more innocent villagers take up arms. In fact, the militant organizations run entire propaganda camps where the victims and the families of the victims of military press down of the tribal villagers are coerced to join the anti-state movement. Konbap is the result of the tension between the two sides on the matter of dominance. He did not fancy the life

NOTES

of a militant which came along with a state of permanent threat to the life and well-being. He was a product of the circumstances. His poverty, the indifference shown by the state towards the victims and the tyrannical and oppressive rule of the unaccounted military in their homes were some triggers which sent Konbap to the other side.

Konbap's sister Nirmali gets her legs broken by the village people as a reaction against her affection for the military officer. This violence is stemming from the local hatred against an oppressive organization which exercises ruthless measures in containing the militant infestation of the north-east India. The Indian soldier is branded as 'the enemy'. Nirmali not only bears the torture both physical and mental from just the villagers outside but is also subjected to violence inside her home. She is berated by her parents who consider her love brought nothing but shame disgrace and abuses from the society. Her brother Konbap kicks her brutally in her stomach in order to murder her yet unborn child. This is an act which exemplifies the violent nature of the victims of desperate circumstances.

In just a few pages of text, Indira Goswami manages to capture the utter havoc and destruction which the coalescence of these different forms of violence wrecks upon the life of innocent and simple village people of her homeland. Terrorist violence manifests itself in all its contingency and eventfulness when Konbap makes a sudden entry towards the end of the story. His presence also marks the tone of a gendered violence. The brother's face is mirroring his sister's womb and legs and his parent's past. All of them are scarred to the point of certain death.

The certainty of death is also reflected in Aatoi's song which he sings on his dotara.

*'This world is futile
Like drops of water
on a lotus leaf
Fate will make us
a heap of ashes...
This life, this youth
is all a fleeting dream...'*

In the translation by M. Asaduddin (2008), Manavmurti is rendered as a 'scrawny figure' while the translation by Bezboruah describes Aatoi as a 'human figure'. Manavmurti appears to be a character from an ancient past. He is not in sync with the narrator's temporal present. He is described in a fashion where it is difficult to typecast him unlike his wife who can be seen as a direct victim of poverty. Her blouse is full of patches and she complains about the meagre grocery supplies of the shanty. In the conversation which follows the entrance of Manavmurti's wife, both the husband and wife assume two distinct roles. The wife is a scared victim of both poverty and the militant tension ensuing in the village. We get to know that their son Konbap turned a militant when she insists Aatoi to go and search for him near the railway tracks. Her insistence

had fear writ stark naked upon it. She was worried that her son could have been injured in the crossfire between the two sides and could be lying wounded on the rail tracks. She could not fathom how his father, Manavmurti could so casually entertain customers in his rundown shop playing his dotara while their son could be taking his final breath somewhere along the rail tracks. Manavmurti's assertion of his rich and prosperous past only triggered his wife's anxiety and anger further because she saw them doing nothing to improve their condition in the present time.

Indira Goswami predominantly adopts a realist tone while narrating her short story. The story opens with an unnamed female narrator and a man named professor Mirajkar who seem to be returning to Guwahati after a visit to the Kaziranga National Park. The narrative is mimetic. The unnamed female narrator and professor Mirajkar are colleagues at The Delhi University's Department of Modern Language and Literary Studies and had come to Kaziranga to attend a conference which had been organized by the students of Assam. The narrative adopts a tone of urgency right from the start when we come to know that Professor Mirajkar is anxious in the car trip. Mirajkar is apprehensive of the militant activity in the interiors of the state of Assam. He had already suffered a loss of a close friend in the insurgency violence in Punjab. The car in which they are travelling becomes an enclosed space of safety for Mirajkar. The narrative which describes the picturesque scenery and landscape of the forest clad hills of Assam functions not to convey a sense of peace and rest but rather functions to heightens the sense of tension and fear lurking behind the serene landscape. The speeding car provides a feeling of control and a safe distance from the insurgency violence in the jungles for the travellers. The interior of the speeding car can be compared to the safe 'enclave' from where Mirajkar and the narrator are returning. Mirajkar is not apprehensive of the wild animals because the speeding vehicle can easily outsmart animals but not the terrorist's bullet. The gunfire is what scares Mirajkar for he knows that the car can provide no safety from a militant attack.

It becomes a scene of temporal non-synchronicity when suddenly their car breaks down in the way. This increases their chance of encountering terrorists as their 'safe enclave' is rendered redundant. It is at this point that Manavmurti appears and provides the narrator and Professor Mirajkar with shelter in his tea shop. The tea shop then becomes the 'safe enclave' for the travellers who could only wait for their car to get fixed. Manavmurti's stories and songs in the meantime provide reassurances to the travellers. This 'safe enclave' is soon encroached upon the by the militant presence when Konbap makes a sudden entry towards the end of the story.

The interplay of violence intensifies in Mirajkar's new 'safe enclave' when the devastation wrecked by the floods upon Manavmurti's livelihood becomes a recurring theme in the conversation. It is important to remember that the reason for the present circumstance cannot be attributed to the destruction caused by the floods or the militant insurgency going on in the jungles. Each violent incident

NOTES

NOTES

imbricated on top of one another had brought Manavmurti's family and the likes to the state of utter ignominy in which they found themselves today.

There is a passage which describes the rehabilitation of the tigers and the rhinos in the National Park. The passage is narrated with a distant tourist gaze directed towards a closely managed enclosed area. This gaze is subtly critiqued by an underplay of a more melancholic awareness of the gradual fading away of the human inhabitations of these areas because of the violence wrecked by a variety of factors such as natural calamities, animal attacks, militant activity, military crackdowns to name a few. The government has taken extensive measures and had successfully restored the wildlife and the jungles of the region but had no respite for the human life forms affected by the violence inflicted upon them by the passage of time. Things had fallen apart for the people living in the country side and they saw no sunshine coming their way.

The action unfolds quickly once Manavmurti is done singing his old *Vaishnav* songs and narrating the stories of his past splendours. The narrator and Professor Mirajkar offer the couple some money before leaving the shop. Manavmurti is appalled at the sum which he was being given. Being a man of principles he did not want his customers to take him for a beggar. His music was an art to him and he did not want to accept so much money in charity. It is at this point that a slowly limping girl makes an entry in the room. She is the old couple's daughter Nirmali. She had an affair with an officer in the Indian Military. The strong antipathy of the local villagers towards the state run mercenaries took a violent form when Nirmali was tortured and physically abused by some people. She had been living a life of a social outcaste ever since. Both her legs had been broken adding to the vows of being berated by her parents. Nirmali's silence marks the torturous acceptance of the abuses which she had been subjected to. Her parents could do nothing about it and had resigned themselves to manage to survive each day choosing to remain silent about the violence. The briefest instance of her mention is immediately speeded up when the errant sin makes a hurricane entry in the house. The attention of the parent was primarily directed towards the fate of the militant turned Konbap. It is as if the violence upon Nirmali's body has been accepted as the 'natural order of things' by the family. It is no surprise that the violence which Konbap further subjects Nirmali to is not criticised by either of his parent. There is no effort made to even restrain him.

Konbap is no villain either. It is easy to empathise with him when we know that he has suffered terrible gunshots to his face, lips and eyelids. There is pus oozing all over and the wounds have been infected. The young lad's face has been scarred for his life. His life is as uncertain as the fate of rest of the family. The violence which he directs towards his sister can be understood as his reaction towards the people who have inflicted such pain upon his body. It is not just Konbap's body or his personal fight but the entire history of violence which innocent villagers have been subjected to by the infestation of the Indian Military and the Guerrilla militants in their homelands.

Konbap kicks his sister in her stomach wanting to kill the bastard child of the Indian army officer. He calls her a slut and someone who had no right to live

any longer. He then grabs the money which the narrator and Professor Mirajkar had offered Manavmurti. The wife pleads with Konbap to not return to the war but everyone knows already that it is too late for Konbap to stop now. He is knee deep in the battle already. He declares that he will use the money to buy two U.S. Carbines from poachers who were involved in the animal trade to continue his bloody war against the Indian Military. The time speeds up in this final part of the story and the almost laidback narration of the earlier part is replaced by lot of events happening all at once. The historical narrative of Manavmurti set the tone for the urgency reflected in Konbap's situation in the present. We get to see at least three different kinds of violence imbricating upon one another in Konbap's beating of Nirmali, His proclamation of buying weapons to aid his war against the Indian state and the poachers who are carrying their illegal animal trade as strongly as before.

At the time when the mother is pleading to her son Konbap to return to the family and give up his life of a militant, a ghostly smile appears on the father's face. He knows the futility of the request and is smiling perhaps cathartically at the fate of his life and the state at which his family has come to owing to the slow violence of time. At this instance the narrator can clearly see the emotional violence which Aatoi is going through. His ghostly smile would haunt the narrator for rest of her days, more so because she was just as helpless as the victim in making the conditions any better. She knew that giving some money could hardly make things change. More over all the money was taken by Konbap to fund his war instead of providing for the improvised family. Medical examination of Nirmali was a question which was thrown out of the window. The narrator and Professor Mirajkar could only return Guwahati with the awareness of the condition which they had experienced for a fleeting while but people like Manavmurti were subjected to for their entire life. It was no better than a life of total condemnation.

Indira Goswami's story is seemingly non-linear and mimetic but manages to exhaustively explore the different forms in which time combines to inflict slow violence upon a specific life world.

The story deals with the complex relationship between time and violence exploring the many ways in which they overlap and interact with each other. The story is cathartic in nature when we find the old man who is respectfully addressed as Aatoi by the unnamed narrator of the story looking down upon his entire life slowly falling into ruins and ignominy while he can do nothing to prevent it from becoming worse each day. The narration flows with the developments which take place in the story. When the old couple narrate the loss of their livelihood when the cruel flood waters gobbled their home up, the narration is slow paced and seems to be coming directly from history. The pace is laid back and relaxed along with a couple of *Vaishnav* songs sung in the middle by the old shop owner. When we come to the present, the urgency of the situation is revealed when the violence starts taking place one after another towards the end of the story. The ruthless and unstoppable nature of the insurgency movement in the north east is

NOTES

NOTES

mirrored in Konbap's unexpected and loud entry in the story. Gendered violence follows next with utmost intensity. The proclamation of purchasing guns to fight the military berates the tonality of the tensed circumstances prevailing in the world of the Manavmurti family.

Perhaps the author is trying to put across the fact that there is no one problem and neither one solution for the problems affecting the people of her homeland. The situation is very complex and cannot be rescued if comprehensive response is not given by the state. Blatant military crackdown is not the solution and only made things worse in the region. Each character's helplessness is highlighted in the course of the short story. The two middle class characters from Delhi who were on a visit to the tense area of the Assam get a peep into the life of the local people who have become victims to the slow violence of time over their lives. They step out of the enclosed space for a moment in time to experience for real what the turbulent life of the village people have become. The shop owner's songs, the wife's tales of miseries, Konbap's horrific entry and the treatment of Nirmali by the family all add up to a comprehensive insight in the lives of the people living in tensed areas. The constant threat of getting attacked or abducted by militants concretizes this entire experience and makes it much more real for the outsiders.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the function of the picturesque scenery as described in the narrative?
2. Through which factors is the wreck of violence shown?

4.3 A POEM FOR MOTHER: ROBIN S. NGANGOM

Robin Ngangom was born in 1959 in Imphal, Manipur. He studied literature at St. Edmund's College and later at the North Eastern Hill University in Shillong. He is a lecturer in the department of English at the North eastern Hill University. He has published three collections of poems in his name which are titled *Time's Crossroads* (1994), *The Desert of Roots* (2006) and his debut poetry collection *Words and Silences* which was published in 1988. He has also contributed an essay titled 'Poetry in A Time of Terror' which appeared in the *Anthology of Writings on Terrorism in South East Asia*. Ngangom had been lauded with many honours like the Katha Award for translation in 1999 and the Uday Bharti Award for Poetry in 1994. He was also an invitee at the U.K. Year of Literature and Writing for the year 1995. The Katha awards were introduced in the year 1990 for creative writing, translation and editing. This award was introduced to promote readership for the best writings published in regional and indigenous literature.

4.3.1 Interaction with the Outside World

Thingam Kishan Singh discusses the three major cultural encounters witnessed by the *Meetei* community of Manipur in his essay 'Encounters and Literary

Engagements: A Critique of History and Literature in Manipur'. Thingam Kishan Singh describes the first cultural exposure experienced by the *Meeteii* tribe of Manipur was to be in the contact with Hinduism during the reign of King Charairongba in the seventeenth century. The alien Hindu faith was imposed with the military ruthlessness upon the *Meeteii* living in Manipur during that time they were coerced to embrace a religion which was not theirs. The clash between the indigenous *Meeteii* faith and an alien Hindu doctrine was Manipur's first encounter with the 'modern'.

The conquest of Manipur by the British was the second interaction of the native with the modern. The state witnessed exposure to modern cultural system with the introduction of modern English reforms and ideals such as equality, liberty, fraternity and justice. The state experienced a flux during the Second World War and was swept by a wave of decolonizing process which had swept the likes of Africa, Asia and Latin America. This was a prolonged process because of the fact that the state remained independent for a couple of years before it became a part of the Indian nation in 1949 after getting free from British control in 1947.

Manipur's Integration with the Indian nation happened on 15 October 1949 marking a third phase of cultural encounter of the *Meeteii* with an alien world order. The North East had not experienced a centralized administration before to 1949 and greeted it with a general feeling of distrust and suspicion. The creation of east Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh deepened the distrust felt by the natives towards their allegiance for the new Indian Nation.

The Sixth schedule Autonomous Council implemented by the Indian Parliament in 1952 and the Armed forces special Protection act enforced in majority of the North eastern India had a serious cultural and social impact upon a land group which shares just one per cent of its boundary with India. To manage internal conflicts the Indian Military forces were deployed in the villages of Manipur on 18 August 1958. AFSPA is the exemplar in epitomizing government insensitivity towards resolving the internal conflict of a state which found it difficult to owe their allegiance to India. The use of unprecedented violence upon the innocent villagers only worsened the problem making it take a much more violent form in a short course of time. By transferring its political responsibility upon a coercive and violent organization such as the Army, the Indian government de-humanized both the agency and the North Eastern subjects of the state. The providence allowed via the special protection act makes it an emblem of state's despotic power over native population.

The Armed Forces Special Protection Act of 1958 had received severe criticism from social activists such as Irom Sharmila who went on an indefinite hunger strike to end the despotic measure employed by the Indian government to resolve internal conflict of Manipur. Along with the Iron Lady of Manipur the literature of this region has also expressed its contempt for the military violence caused in the state since its integration with the Indian nation. Modern literature coming from the state of Manipur highlights the general disregard which they

NOTES

NOTES

receive from the mainland India and lament the loss of the glorious days of the native culture.

The clash of alien Hinduism with the native culture of Manipur which happened in the seventeenth century made the use of native script illegal under the autocratic rule of King Pamheiba. This resulted in changing the entire course of literature being produced in that time. Bengali script replaced the indigenous script of the *Meetei* shrouding the literary production of this age by anonymity. Foreign art forms such as the '*Natya Sanskritan*' and the adoption of Indo Aryan languages such as Sanskrit were systematic attempts made to destroy the native culture of the region. The call for revival of the indigenous culture and language in Manipur began with the decolonializing mission. The conflict with Burma and the Anglo-Manipuri war opened gateways for literature to appear in native languages. Writers like Khwairakpam Chaoba and Hijam Angahal experimented with different forms of literature like short story, poetry and drama invoking the rich cultural heritage of Manipur in their works.

The poems composed by poets like Robin S. Ngangom, Desmond Leslie Kharmawphlang and Kynphum S. Nongkynrih adopt the narratives of pain and suffering while at the same time offers resistance to the encroachment of the foreign upon their native culture. The writer from north east differs from the mainland poets since he cannot merely delve into verbal wizardry while living under the constant threat of guns and bullets pointing in his face. The gravity of the situation makes the tone of the poems more urgent and anxious.

Ngangom's poetry is deeply rooted in what one may call 'extreme realism' as the imageries employed in his verses are often of death, bullets, guns and blood. All this violence is set in the serene backdrop of the pristine geography and ecology of Manipur. The contrast arises from the juxtaposition of extreme images of death and violence with the innocence of nature and the native culture. Through the reference to the scenic beauty of the Manipuri hills and rivers, Ngangom invokes the glorious past of his homeland as well as ascribes his painful departure from his native roots. Ngangom's poetry marks the play between the personal and the public, the past and the present, the scenic and the bloody, sentimental and the reactionary thus highlighting the fragmented existence of people living in the state of Manipur. Nature is not an object of aesthetic appeal in the poem by Robin S. Ngangom but rather becomes a site where socio-political histories exercise their power over the lives of the human societies inhabiting that space. It then becomes a mnemonic device used to record the violence of present even though it is composed of a scenic canvas painted with glories of past. The sense of catharsis is evident here.

A Poem for Mother is a very intimate poem written by Ngangom. The poet draws from his own inspirations and experiences while writing the poem. The poem is a tribute to Ngangom's own mother who is referred as 'Palem Apokpi' by the poet narrator. The poem does not stop here and broadens his conception of mother to a 'mythic mother figure' seen in the roles of a housekeeper, homemaker and provider of sustenance and food like all mothers do.

The poem documents the poet's childhood in his native homeland and the pain of having to move away leaving all of it behind. The identity crisis faced by the poet when he no longer finds the homeland of his childhood is expressed in the poem. Migration is a universal phenomenon in Manipur and the poet highlights his experience of having to migrate to Shillong from Manipur owing to the political strife going on in his homeland. The poem looks at the gradual progression of society through the characters of the mother, the son and the daughter-in law. The mother is symbolic of the traditional and arcane values of the homeland. She is a mute spectator who silently witnesses the play of fate with her life and family. Conditions and circumstances change with time and she can only see generations come and go leaving their roots to fade into non-existence. Even at a time when her sons are leaving her and their homes behind to find vocation in a foreign world, the mother stands unshaken like a rock managing to withstand public, political and social turmoil. The sons and daughter in laws can be associated with the coming on of modern values in a private and native culture. The second generation of Indian Manipuri's experience a moving away from their roots owing to the influence of western culture as well as a turbulent and often violent state order. The invocation of the female motherly figure is in sync with the matrilineal culture of the *Meetei* society. The feminine is often represented as a figure of strength and endurance in the writings of this region.

The son represents a figure who abandons his motherland and cultural lineage prompted by political and economic pressure. He compromises by migrating to an alien land where he hopes to lead a more secure life as compared to his own home. The final stanza of the poem explores the feeling of absolute horror felt by the son who cannot find satisfaction and security in the foreign land after abandoning his home. The crisis of identity is expressed in the anguish present in Ngangom's poem.

Ngangom presents a shocking picture of his childhood which reiterates the complexity of being born in a land which has found itself constantly under the violence inflicted upon it by militants and state powers in his poem titled *Childhood*.

*'Childhood took place
free from manly fears,
When I had only my mother's love
to protect me from knives,
from fire, and death by water
...
Childhood took place
before your friend worshipped a gun
To become a widowmaker.'*

NOTES

In *A Poem for Mother*, Ngangom adopts a self-deprecatory tone and is at times apologetic. This is evident from the repeated use of the word 'small' which symbolises the vagrant son's existence outside his homeland:

NOTES

'I'm sorry Palem...

I only turned out to be a small man,

With small dreams and living a small life.'

Ngangom seamlessly flits in between the images of mother-motherland-mother earth and- mythic mother in his poem. The cycle of nature is used to describe the ageing of the poet's mother. The motherland is also seen as a parallel to nature that is denied the natural process of rejuvenation by the political and social turmoil infesting the pristine land.

The poem laments the loss of domestic values in the name of consumerism and modernism. This triggers feelings of guilt and failure in the poet who feels responsible for the abject degeneration of his culture.

The poet finds that his lover just like his mother and his homeland has already been ravished and consumed in the tide of strife and violence. All this happened while he was away in a foreign land seeking a better life away from his roots. The personal and emotional crisis faced by the poet is a result of him undergoing a paradigm shift.

This crisis is further accentuated by the language barrier between the native and the mainland. This confusion is expressed in the lines:

'...patriotism is honouring martyrs

Who died in confusion...

Patriotism is playing the music of the guns

To the child in the wombs.'

AFSPA was enforced in the state of Manipur to check a growing socio-political turmoil however it got enforced to the extent that it ended up destroying the natural living habitat of the indigenous people living in this area. In the face of ruthless oppression carried out by the state and a deep personal crisis going on, Ngangom's poetry becomes his resistance, his survival, his witnessing and his reaction.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

3. What is the motherland also seen as in the poem *A Poem for Mother*?
4. What is the core theme of *A Poem for Mother*?

4.4 I SHALL GO TO YOU: NANDA KUMAR DEBBARMA

North Eastern Poetry and
Short Stories in English

*'I shall go to you in the early evening,
When the way to the coalmine shall be lonely,
When the day's last bird shall vanish
From the land of poetry,
I shall go to you.*

*The stilled tongue shall salivate like the moon.
All bodily beauties along with grains of sweat
Shall go down.
Old age shall go down too.
Since I shall be going to you,
I have kept my very own sense of sin
In some secret corner.'*

NOTES

4.4.1 Analysis of the Poem

The poem is written in twelve lines and is divided into two stanzas. The poem was originally written in the Kokborok language of Tripura and was translated by Dr. Aresh Gupta. The poem does not follow any rhyme scheme or a fixed meter and is composed in free verse. It is important to remember that any text loses much of its ingenuity after going through what some may call a violent process of translation. Many words which are used by the poet in his native language add a definitive musical ring to the poetry. These words cannot be duplicated in another language and that too one so far off as English.

Nanda Kumar Debbarma serves as a visiting teacher in the Tripura University. He also writes Kokborok Drama and plays the grand piano. The poet's penchant for music, art and literature finds perfect synthesis in his poetry which is rich in their imagery and symbolisms. The poems of Nanda Kumar Debbarma contain many indigenous imageries of his native Tripura. One can find him referring to centuries old folktales in many of his plays and poems. Nanda Kumar Debbarma has become an important name in the canon of Kokborok literature and literature coming from the North-East India.

Kokborok

Kokborok is the language spoken by the people living in the north-east Indian state of Tripura and in some parts of Assam. The language belonging to the Borok people is a part of a larger Tibeto-Burmese group consisting of over two hundred and fifty languages. The Kokborok language also uses many Bengali words and over time the Bengali words have got into the usage by people of the southern region of north-east India. Kokborok is also often written in the Bangla script.

NOTES

Kokborok language has a rich future thanks to the recent revival of the language through the efforts taken by writers such as Sachlaang Tripura, Nanda Debbarma and Bijoy Debbarma. There have been anthologies compiled of the poetry of the north east by eminent laureates such as Robin S. Ngangom. The translations and the criticism provided in the translation of the Kokborok literature provide a useful insight into the poetry of Nanda Debbarma for any reader who is not familiar with the Kokborok language. The profanity of the language lies in its user's fearlessness to adapt newer words into their language. This gives the arcane language a newer appeal and makes it more comfortable to be spoken and written in the modern times. The real strength of any language lies in its users. If people stop speaking a language, it loses its existence. In recent times writers and poets of the post-colonial North East India have argued vehemently for the use of the native indigenous languages in writing literature. The importance of conservation of one's other tongue can only be elucidated by producing more and more literature in that language, not just to document the language and the culture but also to motivate younger writers to adopt their mother tongue and not shy away from their traditional culture.

Kokborok language has a strong comprehensive grammar, a rich vocabulary which borrows heavily from their native culture and folk tradition. The history of the culture is an old one which makes the language sustainable in modern times. The linguistic resource of the language lies in the rural country side which reminds the bourgeoisie of towns that a rich culture resides in the village and the audacity of their lineage.

4.4.2 Departure from the Material World in North-Eastern Poetry

The poetry of the eastern region of India has been characteristically marked with a unique presence of nature in form of a simplistic backdrop and more often in form of spirit and souls. Nature acts as an active organic agent in the creative and artistic endeavour of the poet. We find the poems written by the poets of Kokborok, Garo and Khasi literature to focus their attention away from the commercial settlements of the modern nation and observe nature and the rural country with a keen interest. If the institutes of modernity feature in any poem they are often criticized or berated. The call is for the wild, the natural. The poets call for a reinstallation of the glorious cultural tradition of the natives in a space which does not deny them any modern benefit. Before the roots of Christianity and Buddhism were established in the North-East, Nature worship and Animalism were popular tradition among the people of this region. The poetry is rich in documenting the different aspects of eco system of the region which is rich in natural resources. The tone is carnivalesque and celebrates the natural and the cultural bounties of the region. The study of our eco system has become more important in recent times owing to the violence on the ecology caused by modernization. Nature had always played a very important part in the literature of this region from ancient times. Rama was exiled to the jungle where the trees acted as protector, preserver and at times destroyer. The modern north eastern poetry laments the loss of the pristine eco system and the oppressive

undermining of the native voice.

Literature has developed a new approach in the modern times called eco-criticism. 'oikos' in Greek means home and critic comes from 'krites' which means to judge. Thus the study of Eco criticism deals with the study of literature which delineates the relation between nature and man or the effect of man's actions upon the nature.

According to Thomas, Dean of the University of Iowa, Eco criticism is the study of the culture and the cultural products which is connected with the human relationship with the natural world. Ecocriticism deconstructs the relation between culture of a region and the nature of that region. In a world which is undergoing serious ecological crisis, it has become really important to study the interplay of a culture and a natural eco system which had been pristine and rich in the past but are under a threat of ignominy today. The crisis faced by both the culture and the nature of the north-east is at best reflected in the poem of Mamang Dai titles *An Obscure Place*.

'The History of our race begins with the place of stories

We do not know if the language we speak

Belongs to a written past

Nothing is certain

There are Mountains, Oh! There are Mountains

We climbed every slope, we slept by the river

But do not speak of victory yet.'

(Misra 2011:5)

For the poet the mountains are not just any landscape from which aesthetic pleasure can be derived. Instead the mountains of her homeland represent a sphere of history for the poet through which she can seek the ancestral cord leading back to her traditional roots. The poet further goes on to lament the loss of the vision seen by their ancestors in Arunachal Pradesh to the material conceptions of the modern capitalist world order. In her quest to trace her roots, the poet employs the imageries of 'mystic mountains' and rivers and forests. The voice of nature dominates the poems of the north-east and nature is seen as a means to reclaim the traditional identity which has been lost in the wake of westernisation. Another major poet Temsula Ao from the state of Nagaland uses nature to identify her people. In her poem titles *Blood of Others* she writes:

'We believed that our God lived

In the various forms of nature

whom we worshiped

with unquestioning faith.

This faith was shaken up when the outsiders came.

NOTES

*Armed with only a book and
promises of a land called heaven'*

NOTES

The book is bible and the people who came and displaced the Naga people from their traditional culture of nature worship were the Christian Missionaries. The poem laments this loss of indigenous culture to the western world view and calls for a reinstatement of the old traditions.

The violence inflicted upon the culture and nature is presented in the following lines with acute frankness.

*'Alas for the forest
which now lies silent
stunned and stumped
with the evidence
of her rape
as on her breast
the elephants trample
the lorries rumble'*

The poem starts with the poet narrator directly addressing an unnamed second person. The narrator tells the second person that he shall go when the coalmines shall be desolate. He shall go when the day's last bird would have vanished from the land of poetry. The vanishing of the last bird from the land of poetry marks an end of the poet's creative production. This creative death shall make him go to the unnamed entity.

We do not know what or who the 'you' is. The first stanza of the poem addresses 'you' directly in the first and the last lines. This shows how important or decisive it is for the poet narrator to go. The creative death is shown through a beautiful nature imagery in which the bird vanishes from the land of poetry. When the poet shall have no creative impulses left in him to produce more literature, then he shall make his move.

The second stanza begins with a subtle alliteration in 'stilled tongue shall salivate'. The stillness of the tongue symbolizes the breakdown of all dialogue and language. When the moment of the poet narrator's departure would come, he would not have any-thing left to either say or write. All the conception of speech and sound shall disintegrate into nothingness and the tongue would only salivate with the anticipation of the meeting with the unknown entity. The meeting would result in all the material bodily attributes melting down with grains of sweat. There shall be no mask or façade left for the poet narrator to shy away. The moment shall be of truth. Old age shall also go away in this moment. The ninth line indicates that this unnamed 'you' could perhaps be death personified. For such a moment of naked confrontation can come only in a moment of death. Things like wealth, material possession, and physical attributes shall be rendered meaningless at such a time.

The final two lines of the poem reveal another facet of the poet narrator when we realize that even in such a moment of direct confrontation the poet has a hidden stash of sin kept in a secret corner deep inside his mind. The ‘sense of sin’ is the confession which the poet narrator is not ready to make even in the wake of death.

NOTES

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. Where is the Kokborok language spoken?
6. How is the creative death shown in the poem?

4.5 DAWN AT HOKUTWISA: SACHLANG TRIPURA

Sachlang Tripura expresses his nostalgic yearning for the village of his birth situated on the foothills of Longtarai in North Tripura:

*I have not met the dawn at Hokutwisa for a long time.
Everyday when the sun climbs up one bamboo, I wake up.
Somewhere near the cliffy bank of Hokutwisa,
a poor man cries all alone.
The dazzling crystals of his tearfall,
mingle with the flowing Hokutwisa.
Playing with pebbles and stones,
the stream flows in quest of the ocean.*

*Walking in the thick mist
along the bank of Hokutwisa
in search of my poem,
I have a rendezvous.*

*Then I see the birds of the jungle
leaving their nest and pecking on the food grains.
And men and women, poor and destitute.
moving out in search of a living.*

Analysis of the poem

In his 16-line long poem *Dawn at Hokutwisa*, Sachlang Tripura expresses a deep yearning for the village of his birth. This village, situated at the foothills of Longtarai in the region of North Tripura, its certain parts—the woods, the ‘cliffy bank’, the food grains, even something as small as the ‘pebbles and stones’—is pictured and articulated by the poet with a tone that contains a hint of nostalgia.

NOTES

The landscape of the village is deeply rooted in its ethos, with the geographic reality reflecting a social memory. Nature, in Sachlang Tripura's poetry, becomes a part of the human existence, showering blessings and curses according to the 'human' treatment it is subjected to.

Using the first-person 'I' in his poem, Sachlang Tripura begins his poem with a negation—'I have not met the dawn at *Hokutwisa*'—and immediately sets the psyche of the readers to a lost and long-gone time and landscape. There is a sense of an unfortunate 'amnesia' in the land of refugees who have been disowned by the 'motherland' owing to political pressure and riot-stricken cultural context. The shared heritage (and inheritance) of loss and its realization in the act of narration and writing provides a perspectival difference, in which a desperate clinging to the 'lost land' acts to restrict an assimilation with it.

Nature is entangled and essentially bound to the ordinary human existence—the dazzling crystals of his tearfall, / mingle with the flowing *Hokutwisa*—and, associated with the grandeur of nature, human reality and pain achieves a certain 'dazzling' characteristic, almost automatically. This is, however, not immediately associated with identification, the intensity and power of nature is retained and merged with the subtle ordinariness of the 'pebbles and stones'. Sachlang shows a sense of solitariness haunting the tribal and the non-tribal people alike, within nature and outside of it. Society and the everyday operations cease to offer an internal refuge and rest in the world Sachlang portrays in his poem.

The reality of nature exists and moves parallel with the reality of human existence for the poet—as the birds leave the nest for food grains, men and women move about in search for a living. Motion, in Sachlang's poem, is linked with the idea of a search—the poet walks in the thick mist' in search for a poem, men and women move to search for living. The anxiety and restlessness of 'waking up' that is articulated in the second line of the poem returns in the final lines; as man detaches from the calmness and harmony of nature (present in the line 'stream flows in quest of the ocean), he joins the functions of society.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

7. What is the tone of the poem *Dawn at Hokutwisa*?
8. How is nature shown to be entangled with the ordinary human life in the poem *Dawn at Hokutwisa*?

4.6 THE JUNGLE MAJOR: TEMSULA AO

Temsula Ao, one of the major literary figures of Northeast India, was born in October, 1945 in Jorhat, Assam. She passed her matriculation from Ridgeway Girl's High School located in Golaghat, Assam. She received distinction in B.A. program which she passed from Fazl Ali College located in Mokokchung, Nagaland. Temsula pursued M.A. in English from Gauhati University, Assam.

She also did Post Graduate Diploma in the Teaching of English from Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (presently English and Foreign Languages University,) Hyderabad and PhD from NEHU. She also served as Director, North East Zone Cultural Centre, Dimapur on Deputation from NEHU from 1992-97, and was Fulbright Fellow to University of Minnesota from 1985–86.

She received the honorary Padma Shri Award in 2007. She also received the Governor’s Gold Medal in 2009 from the government of Meghalaya. She is widely respected as one of the major literary voices in English to emerge from Northeast India along with Mitra Phukan and Mamang Dai. Her works have been translated into German, French, Assamese, Bengali and Hindi.

Being a significant activist, writer, and commentator on the issues in north-eastern India, Ao speaks touchingly and affectively of home, country, nation, nationality, and identity. A touching—and at times disturbing—insight to this lesser-known conflict zone in India’s northeast, *These Hills Called Home* burns with urgency and leaves its reader deeply changed.

Contents of the collection are as follow:

1. *The Jungle Major*
2. *Soaba*
3. *The Last Song*
4. *The Curfew Man*
5. *The Night*
6. *The Pot Maker*
7. *Shadows*
8. *An Old Man Remembers*
9. *The Journey*
10. *A New Chapter*

Analysis of the story

The stories of this collection are set on the Naga people of the troubled north-eastern region of India. They have endured sufferings of more than a century of bloodshed in their struggle for an independent Nagaland and national identity. Ao in her work has explored how ordinary people cope with violence, negotiate powerful officials, and seek safe havens amid terror. the stories of Temsula Ao detail a way of life under attack by the forces of modernization and war where no one—not the ordinary housewife, nor the willing accomplice, nor the young woman who sings even as she is being raped—can escape the violence. Their stories spring from the internal fault lines of the Indian nation-state.

In the story titled *The Jungle Major*, Ao describes the home of Punaba and Khatila as one beset with so many problems when the former joins the

NOTES

NOTES

underground outfit. Punaba's motif of joining the outfit is shown to get their homeland liberated from the foreign rule. They take over the Central and State government as foreigners doing very little good for the common public. The writer says: 'The subject of independence became public talk; young people spoke of the exploits of their peers in encounters with government forces and were eager to join the new band of 'patriotic' warriors to liberate their homeland from 'foreign' rule.'

The authority does not sit idle too. It keeps deploying forces that create havoc in the name of combating anti-nationalist elements. They become so brutal that they ransack the houses of the poor villagers, burn their grain in barns, they practise grouping of the villages including that of Punaba and Khatila. Furthermore, molestation of women have been regular occurrences paralyzing common people in every walk of life. Violation of rights is a familiar feature widespread in the society. This strategy of the authority, making one's living problematic apart, accentuates the rage of the common masses and makes them choose the life of militant outfits instead of coming for the help of the security forces to eradicate anti nationalist and disquieting elements.

Technically in her literature, Temsula has played with humour and language. She is writing in English, which is not her native language. She lets the army officials speak in Hindi in the story *The Jungle Major* while the village woman, Khatila sends off her husband, Punaba in disguise as a servant who is a militant and who is being searched for. The couple of lines in Hindi creates a sense of humour, the linguistic awareness and difference, captures the sexual connotation and threat. Violence, oppression and harassment that are feasibly legitimised by the power endowed upon them by the Centre in the name of so called 'security'. Temsula uses Hindi or any other regional dialect very rare. So her use of Hindi suggests at all these.

People have been helplessly living their lives in between such military tension. Is there any safe space? Is there an in-between space that is safe? If we define the in-between space as the space occupied by the common people, then one has to define who the common man is.

Both space and identity have become much unsolidified. The possibility of an in-between space has been so much infiltrated and interrupted from both sides of the Government force and the underground militants force. This space is always in danger and it is very unsafe. The identity of the so called common people is very fluid because often people are related to one of the sides of the force or militant or even both. How does one define and deal with a family in which a government force and an underground militant is dwelling under the same roof?

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

9. Name the main characters of the story *The Jungle Major*.
10. In whose guise does Khatila send her husband off to save him from the army?

4.7 SUMMARY

- India's literature from the north east region is highly representative of this slow violence towards the environment.
- *Jaatra* or *The Journey* is Indira Goswami's well-known short story which is set against the backdrop of militant tensions and uprisings in the interiors of the volatile state.
- The story explores the different temporal modalities of violence arrange themselves almost casually on top of each other leaving man and nature both scarred to the point of destruction in the long run.
- Goswami has shown the delicate nature and the complex intricacies of the different forms of violence which have perpetuated the Assamese life in her story.
- Indira Goswami predominantly adopts a realist tone while narrating her short story.
- Ngangom's poetry is deeply rooted in what one may call 'extreme realism' as the imageries employed in his verses are often of death, bullets, guns and blood.
- All this violence is set in the serene backdrop of the pristine geography and ecology of Manipur.
- Through the reference to the scenic beauty of the Manipuri hills and rivers, Ngangom invokes the glorious past of his homeland as well as ascribes his painful departure from his native roots.
- *A Poem for Mother* is a very intimate poem written by Ngangom. The poet draws from his own inspirations and experiences while writing the poem. The poem is a tribute to Ngangom's own mother who is referred as 'Palem Apokpi' by the poet narrator.
- The poem documents the poet's childhood in his native homeland and the pain of having to move away leaving all of it behind.
- The poem *I Shall Go to You* is written in twelve lines and is divided into two stanzas. The poem was originally written in the Kokborok language of Tripura and was translated by Dr. Aresh Gupta. The poem does not follow any rhyme scheme or a fixed meter and is composed in free verse.
- Many words which are used by the poet Nanda Kumar Debbarma in his native language add a definitive musical ring to the poetry.
- Nanda Kumar Debbarma has become an important name in the canon of Kokborok literature and literature coming from the North-East India.
- Kokborok is the language spoken by the people living in the north-east Indian state of Tripura and in some parts of Assam.
- We find the poems written by the poets of Kokborok, Garo and Khasi literature to focus their attention away from the commercial settlements

NOTES

NOTES

of the modern nation and observe nature and the rural country with a keen interest.

- The tone is carnivalesque and celebrates the natural and the cultural bounties of the region.
- For the poet the mountains are not just any landscape from which aesthetic pleasure can be derived. Instead the mountains of her homeland represent a sphere of history for the poet through which she can seek the ancestral cord leading back to her traditional roots.
- In her quest to trace her roots, the poet employs the imageries of ‘mystic mountains’ and rivers and forests.
- The poem laments this loss of indigenous culture to the western world view and calls for a reinstatement of the old traditions.
- Sachlang Tripura in his poem *Dawn at Hokutwisa* expresses his nostalgic yearning for the village of his birth situated on the foothills of Longtarai in North Tripura.
- The landscape of the village is deeply rooted in its ethos, with the geographic reality reflecting a social memory.
- Nature is entangled and essentially bound to the ordinary human existence—‘the dazzling crystals of his tearfall, / mingle with the flowing *Hokutwisa*’—and, associated with the grandeur of nature, human reality and pain achieves a certain ‘dazzling’ characteristic, almost automatically.
- Sachlang shows a sense of solitariness haunting the tribal and the non-tribal people alike, within nature and outside of it. Society and the everyday operations cease to offer an internal refuge and rest in the world Sachlang portrays in his poem.
- Temsula Ao’s *These Hills Called Home* burns with urgency and leaves its reader deeply changed.
- The stories of this collection are set on the Naga people of the troubled north-eastern region of India.
- Ao in her work has explored how ordinary people cope with violence, negotiate powerful officials, and seek safe havens amid terror.
- In the story named *The Jungle Major*, Ao describes the home of Punaba and Khatila as one beset with so many problems when the former joins the underground outfit.
- Technically in her literature, Temsula has played with humour and language.
- North East Indian poetry is marked by the kind of tension that generates all great poetry; it may be at one level the poetry of violence, of torpidity and fear but it is also the poetry of searching, soul searching for peace.

4.8 KEY TERMS

- **Dotara:** It is a two or four or sometimes five stringed musical instrument resembling more to mandolin than a guitar. It has metal strings, which give it a brighter tone than other instruments played in the area.
- **Cathartic:** Providing psychological relief through the open expression of strong emotions; causing catharsis.
- **Meitei:** The *Meitei* people are the majority ethnic group of Manipur, state of India, and because of this they are sometimes referred to as Manipuris. Generally speaking, *Meitei* is an endonym and *Manipuri* is an exonym.

NOTES

4.9 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’

1. The narrative which describes the picturesque scenery and landscape of the forest clad hills of Assam functions not to convey a sense of peace and rest but rather functions to heightens the sense of tension and fear lurking behind the serene landscape.
2. Violence is wrecked by a variety of factors such as natural calamities, animal attacks, militant activity, military crackdowns to name a few.
3. The motherland is also seen as a parallel to nature that is denied the natural process of rejuvenation by the political and social turmoil infesting the pristine land.
4. The theme of the poem is that it laments the loss of domestic values in the name of consumerism and modernism. This triggers feelings of guilt and failure in the poet who feels responsible for the abject degeneration of his culture.
5. Kokborok is the language spoken by the people living in the north-east Indian state of Tripura and in some parts of Assam.
6. The creative death is shown through a beautiful nature imagery in which the bird vanishes from the land of poetry.
7. The poem *Dawn at Hokutwisa* has a tone of nostalgia.
8. Nature is entangled and essentially bound to the ordinary human existence—‘the dazzling crystals of his tearfall, / mingle with the flowing *Hokutwisa*’—and, associated with the grandeur of nature, human reality and pain achieves a certain ‘dazzling’ characteristic, almost automatically.
9. Punaba and his wife Khatila are the two main characters of the story *The Jungle Major*.
10. In the guise of a servant to fetch water, Khatila sends her husband to save him from the army.

4.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

NOTES

Short-Answer Questions

1. State how *The Journey* by Indira Goswami is set against the backdrop of militant tensions.
2. State the major themes of *A Poem for Mother* by Indira Goswami.
3. Give an introduction of Kokborok language.
4. What does the poet refer to through creative death in the poem *I Shall Go to You* by Nanda Kumar Debbarma.
5. Draw a character sketch of Khatila from the story *The Jungle Major*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically analyse *The Journey* by Indira Goswami with reference to the context.
2. Explain the imagery in the poem *A Poem for Mother* by Indira Goswami.
3. Evaluate the role of nature in the poem *I Shall Go to You* by Nanda Kumar Debbarma.
4. Critically analyse *Dawn at Hokutwisa* by Sachlang Tripura.
5. Explain the plight of the people of the north-east as shown in *The Jungle Major*.
6. How has the poet portrayed the mother and motherland in the poem *A Poem for Mother*?

4.11 FURTHER READING

- Chandra, N. D. R., Nigamananda Das. 2007. *Ecology, Myth, and Mystery: Contemporary Poetry in English from Northeast India*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.
- Ngangom, Robin S., Kynpham Singh Nongkynrih. 2009. *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North-East India*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India.
- Sahitya Akademi. 2008. *Indian Literature, Issues 246-248*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- Temsula, Ao. 2006. *These Hills called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. New Delhi: Zubaan and Penguin Books.